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The Origins of Skin Tone Perceptions Within the African American Community

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Alabama A&M University, 2010

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The distinction, categorizing, and hierarchical ranking of African Americans can be traced back to the enslavement of Africa Americans in the United States. There has been limited exploration on the origins of color consciousness among African Americans. Further, there is limited exploration on the in-group interactions of African Americans, perceptions of self-esteem, and experiences with psychological distress with skin tone as a mediating factor. Inquiry concerning the origins of color consciousness can lead to more effective cultural competence among mental health professionals and also treatment modalities equipped to address the unique experiences that African Americans face. The Black Racial Identity Model was used to examine the racial identity development of African Americans as they come to accept or reject their culture and skin tone, evaluate the influence of Western society on racial identity development, and address the internal conflicts associated with racial identity development. Through the usage of semi-structured interviews of 3 male and 7 female African Americans of various skin tones, this phenomenological research study's focus explored the origins of skin tone perceptions among African Americans, in-group interactions, perceptions of self-esteem, and experiences with psychological distress. Participant responses were centered around the participant being forced to focus on who they were and how society would view them within the context of their skin tone. These findings contribute to social change by improving cultural competence among professionals who work with African Americans, treatment outcomes of African Americans, and introducing platforms to change the narrative regarding colorism within the African American community.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving husband Daniel L. Tibbs, my son Caydon E. Tibbs, and my parents Mr.& Mrs. Ezell & Shirley Rich. I truly appreciate your continued support throughout my educational endeavors. I appreciate the many sacrifices that you made in order to assist me in turning my dreams into reality. I thank God for blessing me with such an amazing support system. This dissertation is also dedicated to all of the boys, girls, women, and men who have struggled with their racial identity, particularly, those who have the harsh reality of having to exist within society while being Black. Your voices are not left unheard and one day I hope that the beauty that is you-unapologetically you, will be appreciated. I encouraged you all to use your God-given talents to spread awareness and love to those who willingly promote the opposite.

I certainly would not be where I am today without God's amazing grace. Despite the educational achievement this simple quote has always held dear to my heart "You can go to college, you can go to school but if you aint got Jesus you're just an educated fool". Thank you God for keeping me. I really appreciate it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Although a more authentic standard of beauty is now being widely accepted in America, the presence of color consciousness is still predominant among African Americans (Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks, & Araiza, 2016); so much so that there is a strong association between skin tone and social status suggesting that higher incomes are reflective of lighter or fair skin tones which increases social dominance (Swami, Furnham, & Joshi, 2008). Congruent with Swami, Furnhm, & Joshi (2008), Brown (2014) presented that skin tone can determine social status, can introduce an array of stressors, and can also impede on the psychological wellbeing of African Americans. Maddox & Chase (2004) presented skin tone as the most salient phenotypical feature used in social perception, thus explaining how skin tone serves as a viable cue in activating embedded prejudices (Hoffman, 2016). Brown (2014) further stated that skin one has been found to be related to mental health in African Americans. A preoccupation or fear of how others will perceive oneself based on skin tone can produce heightened psychological and physical responses to stress (Brown, 2015). Stress can be a result of fear of discriminatory behavior based on skin tone and a heightened consciousness of how one's skin tone will impact social mobility (Monk, 2015). Monk (2015) asserted that skin tone discrimination can shape health outcomes such as depression, psychological distress, anxiety, and hypertension in African Americans.

Falconer and Neville (2000) argued that the media does portray Black standards of beauty but it is often overshadowed by the White standard of beauty. Hunter (1998)

posited that hair texture, education, and income are prominent factors used to categorize African Americans as socially dominant or inferior both within and outside of the African American community. These factors have been found to have a correlation to skin tone. In today's society wearing one's hair in its natural form has now become a norm among the African American community; however, African Americans who wear their hair natural have been found to be viewed as "militant" or "angry" (Sue et al., 2008). Ellis-Hervey et al. (2016) noted that African American women with natural hair find it difficult to fit in with the European standard of beauty which typically consists of long flowing straight hair. Award, Norwood, Taylor, Martinez, McClain, Jones, & Chapman-Hilliard (2015) pointed out that Black women's beauty/bodies have been devalued in society which typically promotes a European (White) aesthetic causing African features to be viewed as ugly. In essence this has created a stable hierarchy within the African American community that may cause some African Americans to internalize racial orders and statuses that project Whites as enjoying higher statuses than non-Whites (Carter & Pérez, 2016). White beauty ideals may influence self-perception; often it is not about feeling beautiful but simply about looking White (Donaldson, 2012).

One possible explanation for skin tone disparities is that those with lighter skin are considered more attractive, and attractiveness itself is associated with superior economic outcomes (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Tibbs, 2010). Cunningham (1997) posited that lighter-skinned African Americans gain access to White society far more easily then darker-skinned African Americans which can create uncertainty in the sense of self. Ultimately, the heightened awareness of the benefits and access to privilege for

lighter-skinned individuals invites confusion and sometimes shame for one's skin tone (Cunningham, 1997). Essentially, lighter skin is viewed as "the standard of beauty" often causing the halo effect on lighter skinned African Americans (Thompson & Keith, 2001). The identities of many light-skinned individuals are often challenged by both Whites and Blacks; with White discrediting Black heritage and African Americans being heavily aware of the light complexion of their skin (Cunningham, 1997). The preprogramed ideations regarding skin tone has created colorist mindsets among some African Americans regarding their own self-worth and the self-worth of other African Americans. Colorism, a termed coined by Alice Walker in 1982, describes the "preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" (Webb, n.d). Thompson and Keith (2001) pointed out that colorism affects both men and women; however, self-esteem is most often altered in women.

Due to the societal standards that have been placed upon skin tone, a heightened awareness or consciousness of one's skin tone can be evidenced quite frequently among African Americans. While research does lend support to the existence of colorism and color consciousness within the African American community, researchers do not address the development of color consciousness among individuals within the African American community. Black family relationships may play a role in naturalizing racial hierarchies, for example, preferential treatment of children based on skin tone, and overall skin tone satisfaction of African American men and women (Landor et al., 2013; Maxwell et al., 2015; Wilder & Cain, 2011).

Problem Statement

"If you're White you're right, if you're yellow you're mellow, if you're brown stick around, if you're Black, get back" (Parrish, 1944). For African Americans this simple rhyme speaks to the colorist mindset that causes African Americans to become conscious of their skin tone and the negative connotations that can be associated with it. In fact, many researchers have suggested that these prejudicial connotations that are inherently projected upon African Americans have resulted in a greater emphasis and awareness of skin tone. Specifically Dixon and Telles (2017) eluded to the notion that light skin color preferences can be traced to European colonization, Western slavery, and White Supremacy. Although sometimes viewed on the same continuum by the oppressed group, colorism is a concept separate from racism in Western society; however, it has been instrumental in establishing and maintaining a color hierarchy favorable for light skin (Dixon & Telles, 2017).

Hill (2002) noted that colorism in the United States has its origins from the history of slavery and oppression of African Americans. Wilder and Cain (2011) asserted that the nature of modern day colorism still exists among African Americans despite the many advancements that African Americans have achieved. For example perceiving President Barack Obama's presidential victory (commonly referred to as the first African American president, although he is biracial) as racially significant can be impacted by perception of his racial identity when assessed by African Americans (Franco & Smith-Bynum, 2016). In essence, although African Americans are separated from the physical

act of slavery by many years, the psychological mindset still exists regarding personal perceptions of one's self and the implicit, racist value often based on skin tone.

Hoggard, Jones, and Sellers (2017) asserted that there has been racial progress within the United States as evidenced by the two-term election of President Barack Obama; however, the killings of Black people living in the United States (massacre of historical Black church in Charleston, SC, Trayvon Martin, and Mike Brown) demonstrate the continuous plague of racism. Social empowerment efforts for African Americans such as the civil rights and Black Power movements have been instrumental in the organization of African Americans as a racial group to minimize divisive skin tone differences (Dixon & Telles, 2017), however, Monk (2014) suggested that color preferences and stratifications have been persistent following these movements.

In review of American history, it is evident that it has been scarred by the Black-White anti-Black racism and as result, has many implications on subjectivity of the meaning of experience among African Americans when considering consciousness of skin tone and self (Brush, 2001: Sears, 2008). Despite the historical facts that reintroduce the agony and volatile behavior towards African Americans (as evidenced by slavery) accompanied by the continued oppressive experiences encountered by African Americans today. Liu (2017) asserted that White people still have a tendency to dismiss the importance of racism despite the existence of White Supremacy. White Supremacy, an ideology that aligns itself with White men (majority) possessing control over minority persons, has been an undeniable thorn for African Americans for years. It is almost incomprehensible to consider that Whites today would be dismissive or unaware of the

impact that discriminatory behavior has birthed onto the psyche of African Americans. The idea that skin tone imparts superiority, purity, and priority—a concept introduced by Whites—has had a longstanding presence in the enactment of racist behaviors. As we examine the intricate components of racism we can access that it stems from a quest of geographical control as well as economic inequality (Liu, 2017). These unjust quests for geographical control and economics were and are still means to justify controlling minorities even at the cost of enslavement and genocide (Liu, 2017).

Additionally, race socialization within the African American community strongly impacts coping styles; particularly, the manner that one copes with discrimination (Blackmon et al., 2016). McAdoo (2011) noted that child rearing within the African American community is still based on race socialization. It can be asserted that both internal and external environmental forces appear to perpetuate the importance, relevance, and emphasis of skin tone causing it to be an inescapable reality among African Americans (as well as other people of color). Blackmon et al. (2016) posited that African Americans tend to utilize *Africultural coping* techniques which often reflect the usage of distraction and avoidance, spiritual/religious activities, or connecting with others to assist with dealing with problems. Quite different from Africultural coping, John Henryism also described coping efforts as a result of social discrimination and oppressive conditions that African Americans utilize (Blackmon et al., 2016). Ultimately, culturally derived coping styles can serve as an important resource in healthy psychological wellbeing (Ajibade et al., 2016). Nonetheless African Americans experience chronic

stressors which has been found to be related to more symptomatology in both mental and physical wellness (Keith, Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the developmental awareness of color consciousness in self-reported African Americans, and others in the African diaspora, for example, dark skinned Dominicans, Haitians, Africans, and others. Exploration assisted in understanding how this awareness of skin tone and colorist ideology directly related to the mental health of African Americans. A secondary purpose was to increase our understanding of the interactions with others within the same ethnic group as well as the perceived self-esteem/self-worth of research participants in relation to their skin tone. Past research has acknowledged the presence of colorism and heightened color consciousness among African Americans and the impact that media contributes to the formation of stereotypes of self and others (Steele, 2016), however the literature still lacks an in-depth exploration of when African Americans become aware of colorism and the importance of skin tone. Landor et al. (2013) asserted that there is a need to understand skin tone given the unique influence that is has on African American's mental health and long-term functioning. Therefore, a phenomenological qualitative research design was implemented. Interviews were utilized to gain insight regarding the above mentioned purpose of the research study.

Research Questions

This research study was undertaken to address the following research question:

Research Question 1: How do African Americans describe their origins of awareness of skin tone and its importance to their overall quality of life?

Research Question 2: How do African Americans describe their interactions with other African Americans in consideration to their skin tone?

Research Question 3: How do African Americans describe their self-esteem in consideration to their skin tone?

Research Question 4: How do African Americans describe their experiences with psychological distress based on their skin tone?

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation used for this research study is the Black racial identity model proposed by Cross (1991). This model was used for the current research study as a means to better understand the emergence of color consciousness among African Americans, the assimilation to or away from Western society based on one's skin tone contingent upon the interactions with those within the same and different ethnic pool, and mental health considerations such as self-esteem and depression. Vandiver et al. (2001) asserted that Cross (1991) developed a four stage developmental model comprised of seven identity clusters. The four stages identified in the model include pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization (Vandiver et al., 2001). The seven identity clusters identified in the four stages include: assimilation, anti-Black, Afrocentricity, anti-White, Black nationalist, multiculturalist, and biculturalism. This theoretical framework characterizes Black identity as a process of development as one

relates to and reacts to social and environmental pressures and circumstances (Hocoy, 1999).

The pre-encounter stage is characterized by variations in race salience and is comprised of two identity clusters: assimilation and anti-Black (Vandiver et al., 2001). Vandiver et al. (2001) described that the Assimilation identity cluster entails a Black person's preference for socialization with European Americans while the anti-Black cluster entails rejection of Black identity through miseducation and self-hatred. The encounter stage is characterized by an encounter with racism/discrimination which then shifts one's perception of the world which then results in an identity change (Vandiver et al, 2001). The immersion-emersion stage is characterized by intense immersion into Black culture and romanticizing about everything Black (Vandiver et al., 2001). Identity clusters during this stage reflect an emergence of a strong emotional pro-Black view while everything White is rejected (Vandiver et al., 2001). The internalization stage reflects Black self-acceptance within the identity clusters (Vandivier et al., 2001). Specifically, identity clusters such as Afrocentrism, biculturalism, and multiculturalism emerge with Afrocentrism representing empowerment of the African American community. Biculturalism represents a focus on the African American community and other salient cultural communities, and multiculturalism represents a focus on the African American community and many other salient cultural communities (Vandiver et al., 2001).

This model's ability to map out Black identity as environmental and social situations are considered allowed me to consider the impact of Western society in one's

viewpoints concerning skin tone. Additionally, each identity cluster identified in the model allowed for considerations of the origin of skin tone perception. For instance, the assimilation identity cluster, characterized by a preference for Western socialization (Vandiver et al., 2001), was instrumental in better understanding where the importance of assimilation originally emerged. Regarding self-esteem and psychological distress, The Black racial identity model details the conflicts that African Americans may encounter at various stages of Black identity development which may cause internal conflict. For example, the anti-Black cluster details self-hatred and miseducation of one's Black identity (Vandiver et al., 2001) which was instrumental in better understanding how the acceptance of one culture and the rejection of another has influenced perceptions.

The researcher was able to match reported experiences of the participants to that of the stage and identity cluster described by Cross (1991). Each stage and identity cluster provided a detailed description either towards or away from identity acceptance which assisted the researcher in identifying the appropriate identity development cluster for each participant response. The terminology used to describe each identity cluster served as a guide to the researcher in matching reported experiences of participants. For example, if research participants described accounts of self-hatred and negative connotations towards Black identity, the researcher categorized that response into the assimilation identity cluster. Likewise, if a research participant described accounts of immersion into Black culture and loving everything about Black culture while rejecting everything White, the response was categorized into the immersion-emersion stage.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study was a phenomenological qualitative study. Phenomenological research studies allow for the investigator to abstain from making suppositions, however, allows for the construction of questions or problems to guide the study to derive further research and reflection (Moustakas, 1994). Exploratory in nature, the purpose of the research study was to explore the origins of awareness of color consciousness among African Americans, explore the impact that skin tone has on the interactions that African Americans have within and out of their ethnic pool, explore the impact of skin tone on perceptions of self-esteem, and to explore the impact that skin tone has on experiences with psychological distress. As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative research allows researchers to identify a phenomenon of interest, collect data from those who experienced the phenomenon, generate themes from the data collected, and develop descriptors of the phenomenon of interest based on the emerging themes. Following Creswell and Poth, the identifiable phenomenon of interest for the current research study surrounded itself with the lived experiences of African Americans and the impact of skin tone. Through the emergence of several research questions, the researcher was able to identify clusters of meanings of the self-reported data. The selected theoretical orientation for the proposed research study (BRIM), served as a guide in clustering the significant statements or themes that emerged from the research data. Similar to a study conducted by Hocoy (1999), participants were asked to reflect on their experiences which reflected their racial identity process.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this dissertation:

African American or *Black*: Both interchangeable, these terms describe an American of African descent who is non-Hispanic or Caucasian.

Dominican/Afro-Dominican: Individuals from the Dominican Republic who have a predominant African/Black ancestry.

Haitian: Individuals from the island of Haiti who have a predominant African/Black ancestry.

African: Individuals from the continent of Africa who have a predominant African/Black ancestry.

Colorism: The preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color (Webb, n.d).

Light-skinned: A description of skin tone coloration due to the production of less melanin in the skin (Zavitz, 2006).

Dark-skinned: A description of skin tone coloration due to the production of more melanin in the skin (Zavitz, 2006).

Skin tone/skin complexion: The natural color, texture, and appearance of the skin differentiated by move or less melanin (Zavitz, 2006).

Skin tone consciousness or color consciousness: The subjective experience or awareness or wakefulness of the mind as it pertains to a person's natural skin tone/skin complexion (Hunter, 2012).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions of the research study that were considered. The first assumption was that participants would answer the interview questions in a truthful manner. Additionally, because the questions rely upon self-report and recollection of experiences, it was assumed that participants would have a clear and confident recollection of experiences.

The second assumption of this research study was that participants would be interested in participating in the research study without any unstated motives. Such motives included monetary compensation or impressing the researcher. It is assumed that all research participants would be interested in sharing their experiences solely to contribute to the research literature.

The third assumption of the research study was that all participants would have a unique experience to share when considering their recollection of skin tone awareness. It is assumed that all African Americans participating in the study have been exposed to a certain degree of colorism. Depending upon the participant's background, worldview, and age, issues and awareness of colorism may or may not be present.

Scope of Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to explore the developmental awareness of color consciousness among African Americans, in-group interactions, self-esteem perceptions, and experiences with psychological distress. Participants were African Americans of varying self-reported hues/complexions categorized as light, medium, or dark. This focus was chosen to better understand the lived experience of African Americans of varying

self-reported hues/complexions as matters of color consciousness, perception, and self-acceptance are considered. The methodological procedure used for this research study was a qualitative exploratory approach. A quantitative approach was not used as it does not allow for exploration of lived experiences.

The focus of the present study was on African American who self-identify as light, medium or dark-skinned. The Fitzpatrick scale was used to guide skin tone categorization (See Appendix D). Participant inclusion in the study was based on age, gender, and self-identification as African American or Black. Female and male participants aged 18-75 years living in the southeastern part of the United States were eligible to participate in the study. Application of the results of the current study should not be applied outside of the current study's population.

The theoretical orientation used in this study was the Black racial identity model. In consideration of the influence of Western society on the identity development of African Americans, the applicability of the model assisted in better understanding how African Americans interact in the world. The White racial identity model was not used in this study due to the lack in parallel that exists among this model and the Black Racial Identity model. Many scholars have suggested that the White racial identity model is not representative of an oppressed body of individuals seeking to exist in the world around them. Ethnography would have been used only if there was a need to observe the lived experiences rather than understanding how African Americans experienced colorism.

Due to transferability issues, the research findings were limited and may only be relevant to the population used in the study. Views, perceptions, and experiences with

colorism may vary based on region, age, and exposure to coloristic experiences, hence, similar studies might produce different findings. Findings from this research study will be useful for future research aimed at evaluating colorism among African Americans.

Limitations

Due to the nature of qualitative research inquiries, reliance upon self-reported retrospective data were present in the current research study. Short et al. (2009) posits that self-reported data can be underestimated or overestimated by respondents. The current research relied upon self-report of one's skin tone which can prove to be inaccurate, thus causing desired skin tones to be exaggerated based on perceptions. Additionally, reliance upon self-reported data entailed taking information from interviews at "face value."

Speziale and Carpenter (2007) suggested that sample sizes of 10-15 provide rich descriptions of phenomenon, however, in consideration of saturation, the researcher must determine the continuation of interview questions and recruitment of participants as matters of sample size arise. Further, although the sample size for qualitative research is invariably small to allow for the collection of rich insight, the small purposive sampling does not allow for generalization of findings to larger populations (Saldana 2011; Staller, 2010; Sample Size, 2013).

The selected population of the study may not accurately represent the collective views of African Americans when considering the origins of awareness of color consciousness, interactions with others based on skin tone, and the impact of skin tone on self-esteem and experiences with psychological distress. Additionally bias by the

researcher regarding preconceived notions concerning skin tone and potential reported

experiences was a limitation. To address these issues, Jeanfreau and Jack (2010)

suggested the usage of bracketing to evoke conscious thoughts of the influence of

particular mindsets.

Further, Saldana (2011) asserted that ambiguity in the language can pose concerns

in properly understanding the context to which the respondent has answered the interview

question(s). Additionally, when using qualitative research there are limitations in the data

gathering procedure (Saldana, 2011). Qualitative research relies upon interviews, written

answers, and video-taped conversations (King, 2008). Further, qualitative research

involves a great amount of time and effort by both the participant and investigator, time

and effort that the research participant might be unwilling to embark upon whole-

heartedly (King, 2008).

Significance

This study filled a gap in the literature by exploring the individual development of

color consciousness among African Americans while contributing to the existing

literature regarding the role that skin tone plays in the in-group interactions of African

Americans and also the impact of skin tone on perceptions of self-esteem and experiences

with psychological distress. Unlike past studies that identified the presence of color

consciousness within the African American community, this study explored the earliest

recollection of awareness of color consciousness while also exploring in-group

interactions based on skin tone, perceptions of self-esteem based on skin tone, and

experiences with psychological distress based on skin tone. The results of this study

produced much-needed insight on how African Americans came into an awareness of skin tone in addition to the positive and negative messages that are associated with it. Exploration of the dynamics of the lived experience of African Americans can very well provide insight on the values, worldviews, standards to which African Americans aspire.

When considering the applicability and utility of the study for the field of psychology, this study has the potential to provide an exceptional contribution to the multicultural competency of clinical professionals providing services to African Americans. Particularly, bringing an awareness to the importance of skin tone among African Americans, Dominicans, Haitians, and so forth as we consider various presenting issues in a therapeutic setting. Vargas and Wilson (2012) made an excellent notation concerning the importance of self-awareness as it relates directly to building cross-cultural relationships and addressing personal biases that will impede providing adequate mental health services. Such bias of non-African American clinicians can be the dismissal, lack of awareness, or acceptance of the continued oppression of African Americans as matters of skin tone are explored. Cardemil and Butler (2003) noted that expectations of therapy can differ among the therapist and client which can have many implications related to ethnicity and racial identity. Expectations of therapy might conflict with the client's family and community standard, hence, it is important for the therapist to have a working knowledge of the client's values, family structure and moral principles to present as culturally sensitive (American Psychological Association, 2013). For the African American community behaviors perceived as unacceptable by the majority group are simply maladaptive behaviors generated as a means of survival given

the extensive oppression that African Americans have faced (American Psychological

Association, 2013).

In addition to strengthening clinical competence among mental health

professionals, adequate mental health services can be derived to properly treat the

multifaceted life experiences of African Americans. As previous research conducted by

Landor et al. (2013) pointed out, the daily experiences of African Americans are not

homogenous but rather are impacted by factors such as skin tone. The American

Psychological Association (2013) posited that when seeking treatment minorities feel

invalidated, abused, misunderstood and oppressed by their providers. As Atkinson et al.

(1996) previously noted, African Americans are still being misdiagnosed; interestingly,

European American psychologists rate mental disorders differently than African

American psychologist when diagnosing African American clients.

Additionally, this study has invited insight and evaluation of the manner in which

positive and negative messages regarding skin tone are communicated and transferred

among generations. In alignment with the implications of further research on skin tone

and family dynamics, Landor et al. (2013) stressed the importance of parent education

programs that highlight both the negative and positive consequences of skin tone bias

within families. By highlighting and exploring the lived experiences of African

Americans in the current research study, findings lend support to the reality of

continuation of color consciousness among African Americans and through collaborative

work with mental health professionals and families, the development of proper treatment

channels to combat this endless battle within the African American community.

Summary

Skin tone has a significant impact on racial identity and acceptance among the African American community. Issues regarding awareness and consciousness of skin tone dates back to slavery where slave masters often made a distinction in the treatment of slaves despite the overall oppressive actions that were demonstrated towards African Americans. Excessive color consciousness can have lasting physical and psychological effects on African Americans including depression, anxiety, and hypertension. Further, skin tone disparities have created a social hierarchy within the African American community insisting that lighter-skin is more attractive and attributes to social mobility.

Given the European (White) standard of beauty, lighter-skin is often the most favorable or desired skin tone among African Africans rather than darker-skin. While research has examined the existence of colorism among the African American community, little research has been conducted exploring the developmental origins of awareness of skin tone importance, in-group interactions, perceptions of self-esteem, and experiences with psychological distress. This study helped fill a gap in the literature by using interviews to explore the retrospective recollection of participant's first awareness of skin tone awareness and how it has shaped their perception.

Chapter 2 provides a review of existing research literature on color consciousness, skin tone disparities, hierarchical categorizations related to the mental health of African Americans.

Chapter 3 the research methodology is described. In Chapter 4 the results of the study are presented. In Chapter 5 the results of the study are discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The current research study explored the developmental awareness of color consciousness, the influence of skin tone on in-group interactions among African Americans, perceptions of self-esteem based on skin tone, and experiences with psychological distress as dictated by one's skin tone. Although African Americans are separated from the physical act of slavery by many years, the psychological mindset still exists regarding personal perceptions of one's self and the implicit, racist value often based on skin tone. Current research on color consciousness, colorism, psychological distress, and overall perception of self as it pertains to African Americans are provided in this literature review. This literature review is arranged by subject and begins with a discussion on the Black racial identity model. Next, information pertaining to colorism, color consciousness, and psychological distress among African Americans is presented.

Literature Search Strategy

The primary research database used for review of this literature was EBSCO Host with a focus on PsycINFO, Science Direct, Sage Journals, and SAGE Premier. The literature was gathered from peer-reviewed scholarly journals ranging from 1946-2018. Research published beyond the past 5 years were included in the review giving the historical significance of studies examining skin tone. Key search terms included, *colorism, skin tone, depression, color consciousness,* and *African American*. In reviewing the literature using the above mentioned research method I also came across other references within journals to which I reviewed and included as I encountered them.

Literature was also gathered using scholarly books using the EBSCO Host Search Thoreau.

In review of the literature I was able to find an exceptional amount of research on colorism, color consciousness, and the psychological implications that colorism has on African Americans. To serve as a foundation to understanding the lived experience of African Americans as it relates to colorism and color consciousness, the Black racial identity model was explored. The utility of this model was deemed appropriate due to ease of conceptualization. First, I describe the Black Racial Identity Model (BRIM) and the concept of racial identity and its importance to the African American community.

Black Racial Identity Model

The Black Racial Identity Model is the conceptual model used for the current research study. In 1971 Cross investigated Black identity as a means of understanding how Blacks interact in the world (Barnes, Williams, & Barnes, 2014). To fully understand the model and its importance, an understanding of racial identity must be explored.

Racial identity describes the significance and meaning that individuals ascribe to their race (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Essentially, it is the classification of people based on physical characteristics as either American Indian or Alaskan Native, White or Caucasian, Asian, Black or African American, or Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander; there is also an option to not declare a race. Bernard, Hoggard, and Neblett (2018, p. 59) stated that "racial identity is an important individual factor to take into account in understanding the relationship between discrimination and

psychological well-being among African American emerging adults." The manner in which African Americans perceive themselves and the world around them is strongly impacted by the affiliation and association with a racial identity. Further, racial identity provides an identifiable racial group for one to be associated with by both in-group members and out-group members.

Despite the usefulness of the term *race* to describe and categorize, Yee, Fairchild, Weizmann, and Wyatt (1993) argued that it also carries many diverse meanings, thus perpetuating the rival views of race and how it can affect concerns such as human rights and values. Further, Yee et al. (1993) stressed the importance of a scientific definition of race that will assist professionals in better understanding issues such as racism. Further, exploration of how the term can be used as a psychological concept could potentially fill the gap in understanding the psychological implications that race has for African Americans (Yee et al., 1993). The issue with the term "race" is that it encompasses many objective variables which limits research design and theory building (Yee et al., 1993). The term "race" does indeed serve as a function of how we identify ourselves and associate with others, however, it still carries with it the implications of slavery- a time when Whites used "race" to belittle and provide a hierarchical ranking to African Americans to socially signify inferiority. Further, Litchmore, Safdar, & O'Doherty (2016) note that racial identity extends far beyond physical features and encompasses internal features. These internal features are influenced by social interactions that ultimately affect psychological processes and external behavior (Litchmore, Safdar, & O'Doherty, 2016).

In consideration of racial identity within the implicit context and meaning that it serves for African Americans, The Black racial identity model provides a lens to fully understand why and how Blacks align themselves with Western society (Guadalupe & Lum, 2005). Traditionally, the alignment with Western society has been recycled among generations and is influential in racial development among Blacks (Barnes et al., 2014). The process of defining racial identity is twofold as represented by biological (physical features) and social (relational components) dimensions (Barnes, Williams, & Barnes, 2014; Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Worldviews, our own personal views about the world which direct values and assumptions, are influenced by social dimensions (Barnes et al., 2014). Further, Barnes et al. (2014) asserted that strong identity development assists in critical examinations of worldviews which can assist in determining if one's perspective is skewed. As stated by Barnes et al. (2014), "Due to the long-standing narration of subjugation, bigotry, in tolerance, and collective isolation from the dominant culture, Blacks face challenging obstacles in appreciating their racial identity" (p. 12).

Worrell, Andretta, & Woodland (2014) noted that the Black racial identity model proposed by Cross allowed for the emergence of the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS). The scale measures six racial identity attitudes described by Worrell et al. (2004):

The Pre-encounter attitudes reflect either low race salience (e.g., assimilation) or negative race salience (e.g., miseducation, self-hatred). Assimilation attitudes reflect a preference for a national identity label (e.g., American) rather than an ethnic label (e.g., African American). Miseducated attitudes assess acceptance of the negative stereotypes about African Americans, and self-hatred attitudes reflect

a negative view of the self because one is African American. The single attitude under the Immersion-Emersion theme—that is, anti-White—that the CRIS measures reflects a strong, negative emotional response to the dominant culture in the socio-historical context of the United States. Finally, the two Internalization attitudes reflect Black self-acceptance: Afrocentric attitudes assess the degree to which individuals believe that African Americans should live by Afrocentric principles, whereas multiculturalist inclusive attitudes assess Black self-acceptance alongside a willingness to engage with other cultural groups. (p. 570)

Past research has secured the utility of the scale for the generalization of Black racial identity (Worrell et al, 2014). Notably, the model's de-emphasis on developmental changes as predictable measures of members of certain groups (i.e. African Americans), further demonstrates how racial identity does not fit into the definition of development but is rather subject to one's own personal experience and interpretation (Sullivan, & Esmail, 2012). Hence, the personalization of experiences introduces new insight and value on what it means to be a dark-skinned African American and a light-skinned African American.

In contrast, Helms (1984) presented a six stage racial identity model that she proposed White Americans progress through (Tokar & Swanson, 1991). Stages in the model include becoming racially conscious: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, autonomy, and immersion/emersion (Tokar & Swanson, 1991). As described by Tokar & Swanson (1991) the contact stage is characterized by naiveté about racial differences and Blacks; the disintegration stage is characterized by a realization of

racism by Whites which ignites anxiety, guilt, and depression; the reintegration stage is

characterized by hostility and anger towards Blacks and a positive bias towards Whites;

the pseudo-independence stage is characterized by genuine curiosity about cross-racial

relations and an acceptance of Blacks (positive identification of one's Whiteness

emerges; the autonomy stage is characterized by a deeper appreciation and acceptance of

racial differences; the immersion/emersion stage is characterized by a search for "what is

means to be White" (Tokar & Swanson, 1991). Many scholars concur that this model

lacks the existence of an oppressive dominant society, thus sparking discussion on the

stages proposed (Tokar & Swanson, 1991). Specifically, the dialogue concerning this

model aligns itself with the nonexistence of an evolved response to common racial

discrimination among Whites that Cross (1971) is about to introduce concerning African

Americans (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Hence, no parallel exists among a White

Racial Identity Model and a Black Racial Identity Model. Further, Rowe, Bennett, &

Atkinson (1994) notice that Helm's (1984) is exempt of generalizability to other cultures-

that is to say that the model surrounds itself on racial development as it relates to one

out-group (African Americans) but does not consider development in relation to other

cultures.

Whether you align yourself with Cross (1971) or Helms (1984) the consensus is

overwhelming regarding the link among racial identity and psychosocial development.

Scholars and historians would agree that the White culture is the dominant culture and is

very influential in setting societal norms. Specifically, there has emerged a hierarchical

ranking in America's culture that allow members of higher ranking statuses to receive

positive advantages of this association while those of lower ranking status do not receive the same benefits (Carter & Perez, 2016). The dominant culture dictates how the non-dominant culture views the world as it relates to acceptance and social mobility. As a result of this race has now become a determining factor in the hierarchical ranking of human-beings in America.

In consideration of the intended research purpose- to explore developmental awareness of color consciousness, to explore the in-group interactions of African Americans based on skin tone, to explore perceptions of one's self-esteem based on skin tone, and to describe one's experiences with psychological distress based on skin tone- the BRIM model will assist the researcher in establishing emerging themes from research participant responses to provide clear alignment with the appropriate racial identity developmental stage that the response reflects. Moreover, origins of the influence of color consciousness as the participant reflects upon the influence of the White/European culture vs the African American culture as mapped out by the various stages of the BRIM (Guadalupe& Lum, 2005).

Further, this model provides detailed insight on the internal conflict that African Americans experience as they seek to abandon the majority culture (White/European) for the minority culture (African American). The current model can lend insight on how African Americans perceive their acceptance among other African Americans based on which racial identity cluster they align themselves with. For instance those in the pre-encounter stage may not feel readily received or accepted by other African Americans that they perceive to be in the internalization stage.

Summary

The BRIM was developed to explain how African Americans interact with the world and progress through various racial identity stages (Barnes et al., 2014). This theoretical model will be essential in understanding how African Americans align themselves with either Western society or with the African American community. Further, this model will provide insight in providing a navigational map regarding the factors that might influence mobility to and from various racial identity stages.

A brief discussion of Helm's White Racial Identity Model was presented to demonstrate how White Americans become racially conscious of minority groups. Inclusion of both racial models demonstrate the longstanding awareness and acknowledgement of racial identity development and color consciousness that both Whites and African Americans experience.

Color Consciousness

An understanding of the term color consciousness is needed in order to fully grasp the implications that it has for African Americans. The term is used to describe one's awareness of the natural hue or complexion that they possess. For African Americans this emphasis on complexion is reflected in perceptions regarding social value, social mobility, and also self-worth. Research conducted by Wilder (2011) revealed that color consciousness is often learned within Black families despite the many efforts that are taken to combat against external racism. Research has discovered that Black families can play an active role in naturalizing racial hierarchies as the treatment of the "light child" and "dark child" vary in both favorable and unfavorable manners (Cash, 1992; Wilder,

2011). This naturalization is often actualized via race socialization which provides awareness of the legacy of African slavery.

To fully understand the importance of skin tone within the African American community an understanding of the birth of skin tone disparities must be explored. Ideations regarding skin tone disparities within the African America community has its roots in our enslavement. The complexity of the origins of color consciousness and colorism is entangled in the rape, impregnation, and sexual exploitation by White men towards African American women (Cunningham, 1997). This exploitation was not only exclusive to the African American community, Indians also experienced miscegenation from Whites during colonialism (Cunningham, 1997).

Wilder (2010) note that light-skinned slaves may have carried more economic value given that many were products of white master rape whereas darker-skinned slaves were usually resigned to the field as labor intensive workers. As previously asserted by Tibbs (2010), White slave owners often favored lighter-skinned slaves who were typically given the house servant jobs rather than the field worker jobs (Neal & Wilson, 1989; Hall, 1992). It is essential to understand that both the house slave and field slaves existed on a brutal system of oppression that had both its pros and cons, nonetheless, the distinction between their tasks must be established. The distinction between job assignments were based solely on skin tone causing a conscious awareness of the implications that it would have on one's outcome. Additionally, regarding market value, lighter-skinned slaves were bought at a higher price and were also perceived to be more intelligent and skilled than their darker-skinned counterparts (Hughes & Hurtel, 1990;

Tibbs, 2010). Essentially skin tone bias is connected to racism within society and within the African American community is a result of the focus on physical features that was then used to categorize individuals (Maddox & Gray, 2001).

When considering skin tone, several distinctions and categories have been identified to categorize African Americans. For instance, Dixon (2017) describes that the term mulatto was used to describe light-skinned slaves that had one white parent and one black parent. Mulattos were often perceived to be more intelligent (Dixon, 2017). Although mulattos were perceived to be more intelligent and skilled than darker African Americans, mulattos were later viewed as problematic (Cunningham, 1997). For instance, in consideration of modern day influences on colorism and color consciousness, Cunningham (1997) point out that post-civil war laws were enacted to address "the mulatto problem". Interestingly, White slave-owners had no issues in laying with African American women, however, having one drop of Black blood was considered contamination therefore prompting anti-miscegenation laws (Cunningham, 1997). Although African Americans of a lighter complexion were initially deemed as desirable, fear that Whites would begin marrying Blacks evoked fear, hence the introduction of miscegenation laws (Cunningham, 1997).

Further, research dates back to Parris (1946) who identified names that black youth used to describe light, medium, and dark skin tones in addition to the stereotypes and personality traits identified with those descriptions. In a study conducted by Porter (1991), color preference was measured among school-aged children with several terms such as very brown, honey brown, medium yellow and light yellow were used to measure

complexion preferences (Tibbs, 2010). Results from this study indicated that African American children had a large vocabulary when describing skin tone and that very dark brown and dark brown were selected as the least preferred skin tone (Porter, 1991; Tibbs, 2010). Further, skin tones that ranged from brown to yellow were selected as the most preferred with respondents reporting that darker complexions were perceived to be sad but would be happier if they were a lighter complexion (Porter, 1991; Tibbs, 2010).

In 1969 a study conducted by Palmer & Masling (1969) validated the extensive vocabulary that young children possessed when describing skin color when compared to Whites. Nonetheless, Maddox & Gray (2001) found that both Blacks and Whites use skin tone as a categorizing agent (Tibbs, 2010). Both studies, although conducted thirty-nine years apart, demonstrate the color conscious nature of African Americans and even some Whites (Tibbs, 2010). Similarly, In 2005, Harvey et. al. found that skin tone importance was predominate at Black universities when compared to White universities (Tibbs, 2010). Specifically, Harvey et al. (2005, p. 250) assert that "the practical implications of this research point to the reality that skin tone does tend to lead to inclusion and exclusion among Black Americans within predominantly Black contexts". Ultimately, for African Americans, skin tone is a precursor for social status within the Black community itself. Research does support the notion that within Black contexts there lies the potential in the heightened importance and relevance of skin tone suggesting influence on the acceptance or rejection of friends/peers (Harvey et al., 2005). Maddox & Chase (2004) describe skin tone as the most salient phenotypical feature used in social perception, thus explaining how skin tone serves as a viable cue in activating embedded prejudices (Hoffman, 2016).

Research does lend support to the importance and emphasis on skin tone that African Americans place as it relates to social value, social mobility, and self-worth. For instance Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial (2005) point out that African Americans who do not possess "desirable" skin tones may have implications on self-worth. In essence, although African Americans are separated from the physical act of slavery by many years, the psychological mindset still exists regarding personal perceptions of one's self and the implicit, racist value often based on skin tone.

Summary

The existing literature provides a glimpse into past exploration of skin tone awareness within the African American community. As such, the constant awareness that skin tone enacts upon cultural implications such as one's value within society. Originating with the enslavement of our people, clear distinctions among slave assignments were determined by one's skin tone, thus, evoking a heightened awareness of what one's skin tone would project for one's outcome. As discussed, the vernacular used to distinguish among various shades within the African American community provides a detailed lens in viewing how inescapable skin tone importance is within this culture. Ultimately, in order to embrace the essence of the current research study, an understanding of the term color consciousness must be explored and detailed.

Colorism

Dark-skin vs light-skin? - the question that drives the battle of self-worth within the African American community, a community that perhaps desires unity among all members but is so easily distracted and disrupted by the idea of colorism. Colorism, a

termed coined by Alice Walker in 1982 describes the "preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" Webb (n.d., para. 2). Essentially, the pre-programed ideations regarding skin tone has created colorist mindsets among some African Americans regarding their own self-worth and the self-worth of other African Americans.

In 2018 the highly anticipated movie *Black Panther* was released which depicted a Black superhero. The release of the movie was both exciting and momentous for the African American community as evidenced by the box office numbers during the film's weekend premiere. Not to mention that African American now had their own superhero that promoted African Americans in a positive light; a positive light that was evidenced even in the selection of the cast for the movie. It important to note the cast, particularly the leading ladies, were dark-skinned African American and African actors. Weeks after the film's release, an actress, Amandla Stenbert, released a statement that she was in the running for a lead role in the movie, however, did not want to take the opportunity away from a dark-skinned actress. Amandla Stenbert is a light-skinned African American who identifies as biracial. She did not feel that it was right to play the role of a Nigerian given her skin complexion nor did she feel it to be fair to take the opportunity away from a dark-skinned actress who could play the role more accurately. So why was a biracial female considered to play the leading role of a Nigerian alongside other dark-skinned actors in the movie *Black Panther*?

Essentially, the pre-programed ideations regarding skin tone has created colorist mindsets among some African Americans regarding their own self-worth and the self-worth of other African Americans. As noted in an article by Hochschild & Weaver 2007:

Color preference is a cousin of racial prejudice, and like prejudice it is closely

linked with the urge to obtain and maintain power over others. Colorism differs

from prejudice mainly by making distinctions within a nominal racial group

instead of across groups. That is, for whatever reason, light-skinned - and

sometimes dark-skinned - people attribute higher status and grant more power and

wealth to one group; typically those designated as white, and believe that that is

the right thing to do. (p. 646)

Hill (2002) revealed that African American women of lighter complexions were

perceived to be more attractive (Tibbs, 2010). In 1998, Hunter conducted a study to

measure the discrepancies among African American women based on skin complexion.

Hunter's 4 hypotheses confirmed the assertion that skin color matters in the lives of

African American women and that it matters in such a way that lighter-skinned women

are systematically privileged over darker-skinned women, light-skinned African

American women typically obtained higher levels of education than darker-skinned

African Americans, and lighter-skinned women would be more likely to earn higher

annual personal incomes than darker-skinned women as an effect of the skin color

stratification process (Hunter, 1988).

This appears to correlate with the association of femininity to a lighter skin

complexion which is an idealization of white womanhood in American culture (Grier &

Cobbs, 1968; Hernton, 1965; Tibbs, 2010). It also speaks volumes to the great emphasis

our culture places on the Western style of beauty (Tibbs, 2010). Agreeable with Hill

(2002), Robinson & Ward (1995) reported that darker-skinned adolescents reported

significantly lower levels of self-esteem than both medium and light-skinned participants while Crivins (1999) reported that preferences for lighter skin tones were associated with increased self-esteem while ethnic identity was associated with preferences for medium skin tones. Ultimately, there appeared to be a trend for dark-skinned participants to show skin tone preference towards a medium skin tone (Crivins, 1999). The general consensus within this body of research is that Black Americans generally prefer a lighter-skinned mate and would occasionally prefer to be a lighter skin tone themselves (Bond & Cash, 1992; Tibbs, 2010).

Further, studies conducted by Clark & Clark (1947) and Williams & Davidson (2009) demonstrate the negative attitudes towards darker skin tones evident as early as elementary school. It is also interesting to consider media, for example, the popular animated series The Proud Family which depicts an African American family. Here, the main character Penny Proud is depicted as fair-skinned or light-skinned while her school bullies are depicted as dark-skin, unattractive African American girls. Children's cartoons have the potential to challenge societal norms but rarely do, instead, cartoons perpetuate the notion that White equates to beauty and Black equates to sinful and ugly (Steel, 2016).

Other media outlets also appear to perpetuate skin tone bias. BET (Black Entertainment Network) is a popular media outlet among African Americans which first aired in 1980. Over the years BET began to serve primarily as an entertainment outlet that many viewed as degrading and promoted African Americans in a negative manner. This notion mainly derived from the rap videos that did not represent the African

American community in a positive light but rather reinforced stereotypes. Breland (1998) notes that Black music videos are fair barometers of trends in popular culture, thus reflecting and promoting a standard of acceptance. Often in music videos fairs-skinned dancers with long flowing hair extensions are depicted while women of darker complexions are given lesser roles in the background if they appear at all (Breland, 1998;"Why Skin Color, 1992). Hence, the depiction of light/fair-skinned dancers with long flowing weave in popular music videos has become a frequent reinforcement for the standard of "pretty" and "beautiful" and is often associated with prestige and attractiveness (Breland, 1998; Keenan, 1996). It is interesting to consider the hosts of the show 106th and Park that aired the music videos on BET. The hosts were either medium-skinned African Americans or Latina. No dark-skinned African Americans were ever represented as hosts on the show.

Stephens & Few (2007) points out that in both boys' and girls' groups, lighter skin is viewed as more attractive which has attributed to receiving privileges that Whites receive. Further, Blake, Keith, Luo, & Salter (2017) note that African American girls of darker complexions were twice as likely to receive out-of-school suspensions as their White peers, thus perpetuating the prejudicial and stereotypical nature of colorism. In somewhat alignment with Blake, Keith, Luo, & Salter (2017), interestingly in a narrative account, Carmen Kynard, an African American female of an undisclosed skin tone, recalls her school-aged days and how although her and her friends excelled academically, were often overlooked for special trips or honors (Kynard, 2010). Kynard stated: "it is not simply that school did not match the cultural and social capital of our families,

communities, and peer stylings; it was that school actively disempowered what we brought to the table and left us materially under-rewarded in comparison to white peers" (Kynard, 2010). Moreover, Kynard (2010) describes:

> On a good day, we were ignored, like the problem that would eventually go away, and on a bad day, we were accused of violent tendencies, hyperaggression, self-segregation/self-ghettoization, and gang affiliation. And we were always marked because our dress, speech, volume, hair, and directness didn't match schooling's most sacred R: the right-white bourgeois etiquette. Mrs. N saw a whole lot of us and our "problems." (p. 32).

It is evident that scars from one's life experiences can be recalled so vividly, particularly, for African Americans as they recall experiences with racial profiling, bullying, and colorism.

Summary

The existing literature provides a detailed acknowledgement of the preferential or unfavorable treatment that African Americans encounter based on their skin tone. Moreover, the influence of mainstream media outlet such as movies and television shows that perpetuate what is deemed as socially acceptable, beautiful, and aspirational. The literature also provides insight regarding the negative attitudes towards darker-skinned individuals when compared to the positive attitudes towards lighter-skinned individuals. The discussion regarding colorism provides a glimpse into a universal mindset regarding what it means to be light-skin or dark-skin within the African American, thus imposing value to what is deemed attractive or non-attractive. The categorizing nature of colorism

explicitly invites a conscious awareness of one's value within society on the basis of skin tone which in return places value upon the manner in which an individual perceives themselves.

Psychological Distress

The psychological distress that African Americans experience as a result of racism, colorism, and discrimination is a nontrivial matter, so much so that in comparison to Whites, African Americans experience higher levels of mortality, disease, comorbidity and impairment (Monk, 2015; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). As cited by Molina & James (2016) "internalized racism has been argued to be harmful to a person of color's mental health, given the injury resulting from it includes reinforcing the superiority of Whites and maintaining a "self-perpetuating cycle of oppression," while leading to feelings of self-doubt, eroding self-esteem and -worth, and generating helplessness and hopelessness (C. P. Jones, 2000; Speight, 2007)."

In fact, racism can incite negative emotions among African Americans resulting in depression (Molina & James, 2016). The DSM-5 (2013) states that depressive disorders are characterized by the "presence of sad, empty, or irritable mood, accompanied by somatic and cognitive changes that significantly affect the individual's capacity to function." Essentially, the internalized racism that African Americans experience is a representation of the acceptance of stereotypes and negative attitudes that the dominant society has introduced as true about one's racial group (Molina & James, 2016).

The relationship between skin tone and status has sparked interest in physical health outcomes; specifically, the relationship that exists among skin tone and hypertension due to racism and the fear of unfair treatment from out-groups (Brown, 2004; Williams & Mohammad, 2009). This uneasiness has provoked a unique class of stressors which assist in understanding health disparities among African Americans (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). In many ways skin tone can introduce social inequality, causing the quality of life of many African Americans to hang in the balance of their skin tone (Monk, 2015). Hierarchical rankings within the African American community based on skin tone are prominent among males and females, however, it plays an essential role in the lives of African American women as culture and physical attractiveness are considered (Keith, Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2010). As cited in Breland 1998:

> Wheeler and Kim (1997) reported that people direct positive behavioral cues toward attractive others that indicate that they view them (attractive individuals) as being more competent than the general population. As a result of receiving these behavioral cues, attractive people actually tend to behave better socially. In other words, because attractive people are led to believe that they are more competent than others, they begin to believe it and become more adept at prospering in the social, educational, and financial arenas than their unattractive counterparts. Indeed, it is possible that African Americans have internalized the European American standard of attractiveness and hence perceive African Americans of lighter skin tones as being more competent. Many African Americans overtly and covertly believe that lighter skinned African Americans

are more competent and have more societal advantages regardless of their own skin tone (Porter, 1991; Wade, 1996).

Breland 1998 further notes that past research acknowledges the advantages that lighter-skinned African Americans might experience which include greater education, occupational prestige and personal income in comparison to darker-skinned peers. Brown (2004) does point out that discrepancies between perceived skin tone status and one's lifestyle can also introduce stressors. For instance, African Americans of with darker skin tones who display higher lifestyles have "five times the risk of hypertension than individuals with light skin tone evincing a lower lifestyle "(Dressier, 1991). In alignment with previous research, Keith, Lincoln, Taylor & Jackson (2010) note that being treated poorly or with less courtesy, insulted, and called names on a consistent basis is psychologically burdensome to African Americans.   Williams & Mohammed (2009) further note that "perceived racial or ethnic discrimination is one aspect of racism that is increasingly receiving empirical attention as a class of stressors that could have consequences for health and for understanding disparities in health" (p. 21).

For African American women, anxiety and fear regarding how one's skin tone equates to or negates what cultural values place as attractive can result in lowered self-esteem and lowered self-worth (Keith, Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2010). Cunningham (1997) postulates that for the light-skinned African American psychological distress if often manifested as a result of the sting of rejection from darker-skinned Africans Americans in addition to embarrassment of their "privilege". In examining the expression of emotionality to discrimination in African American women, Keith, Lincoln, Taylor &

Jackson (2010) assert that both discriminatory acts and depressive symptoms play a major role in the variations in emotional responsiveness. It is fair to state that skin tone serves as a s social marker that exposes both African American women and men to varying degrees of discrimination (Keith, Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2010). In consideration of psychological well-being in youth, Worrell (2012) postulates that the relationship that exists among racial identity and youth well-being is unclear, however, past research has racial identity can impact mental health outcomes and also academic achievement.

To further understand the relationship that exists among psychological distress and discriminatory behaviors, researchers have explored the appropriateness of the stress model (Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2010). Usage of the stress model can be used to better understand the impact of discrimination on mental health, particularly, the manner in which on-going problematic life circumstances impacts one's ability to cope with stress effectively (Aneshensel, 1992; Pearlin, 1999; Keith, Lincoln, Taylor & Jackson, 2010). As we consider various life stressors, a heightened awareness of one's skin tone can drastically impact an African American's ability to effectively cope.

Summary

Current research does acknowledge the physical and mental health outcomes that are a result of racism and color consciousness. Anxiety and fear regarding skin tone acceptance and perception can invite feelings of psychological distress and non-acceptance among those within the African American community deemed to have the unfavorable skin tone. Thus, skin tone can influence interactions among others, thus

provoking occurrences of psychological distress among African Americans. In review of

the literature, there appears to be an overarching consensus concerning the importance of

skin tone and the existence of color consciousness among African Americans.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the developmental awareness of color consciousness, the influence of skin tone on in-group interactions among African Americans, perceptions of self-esteem based on skin tone, and experiences with psychological distress as dictated by one's skin tone among African Americans. Self-identified African American research participants were included in the research study. The fact that African Americans come in varying shades allows for the inclusion of research participants in the research study, further, it allows for the emergence of varying, unique experiences. Understanding the lived experiences of African Americans, as factors such as skin tone, self-esteem, and experiences with psychological distress may assist mental health professionals in treating the varying life stressors that African Americans encounter. Further, strengthening cultural competence among mental health professionals may assist in the development of effective treatment modalities for African Americans who present in a therapeutic setting, thus, eliminating homogeneity in treating African Americans. Additionally, this study may assist in implementing family and community programs to address ideas related to colorism among the African American community.

In this chapter I present the research design and rationale. Also included in this chapter are the participant selection, instrumentation, and the procedure for data analysis. Ethical issues are presented in addition my role as the researcher.

Research Design & Rationale

A qualitative research design was selected for the research in order to fully

understand the impact of skin tone on the lived experiences of African Americans with

regards to the developmental awareness of color consciousness, in-group interactions,

self-esteem and experiences with psychological distress. A phenomenological

interviewing approach was employed in the study. Phenomenology seeks to find

understanding in the meaning of things and is idealistic when exploring lived experiences

(Saldana, 2011). Four research questions guided the study and were used as foundations

to better understand the phenomenon of interest. The research question were as follows:

Research Question 1: How do African Americans describe their origins of

awareness of skin tone and its importance to their overall quality of life?

Research Question 2: How do African Americans describe their interactions with

other African Americans in consideration to their skin tone?

Research Question 3: How do African Americans describe their self-esteem in

consideration to their skin tone?

Research Question 4: How do African Americans describe their experiences with

psychological distress based on their skin tone?

Morgan (2011) asserted that the guiding principle in phenomenological interviewing

is the concept of the research participant as the expert in their experience. As Morgan

(2011, p. 17) stated "….the researcher is tutored by the interviewee in highly

personalized knowledge, thus, understanding of the phenomenon of interest is whatever

the research participant perceives it to be" (Morgan, 2011). By exploring the experience

of the research participant mental health professions will be better equipped to service

African Americans. Because the focus of phenomenological research is to provide a clear

description of human experience (Morgan, 2011), phenomenological research was

appropriate for this study.

Role of the Researcher

For this phenomenological research study I was the sole interviewer and data

collector. Tom (2001) eluded to the notion that the researcher and the interviewee are in

joint production with one another, therefore, it is important to maintain the conversational

interaction among the two. Specifically, for this research study, the researcher served as

a participant observer. Here, the researcher was present, serving primarily as an observer,

but interacting with the research participants via the interview process (Given, 2008).

As the researcher my role was to develop interview questions (See Appendix B),

interview research participants, and to probe participants to gain a full understanding of

participant experiences. Research participants were recorded using a recording audio

tool. The researcher took notes following the completion of each interview to document

the body language of the research participants as they answer the research questions.

Prior to the in-depth interviews, the researcher discussed informed consent. An interview

protocol sheet was developed.

To address issues such as confirmation bias and culture bias, bracketing and

reflexivity were utilized by the researcher. Morgan (2011) suggested the usage of

bracketing interviews prior to the research study with colleagues and other researchers in

order to partake in an open dialogue as to why the researcher is conducting the research

study. Further, the researcher kept a bracketing journal to document thoughts and feelings during the interview process with research participants. The bracketing journal allowed the researcher to maintain an awareness of any biases or preconceived notions that could potentially interfere with the research findings. The bracketing journal entries were used in the final report of findings to allow readers to be aware of any biases that the researcher has as the interpretations are read. Reflexivity were a constant throughout the research study as to not influence research participants or the research findings. To avoid further biases or power imbalances, all research participants did not have former connection with the researcher as evidenced by no immediate relationship ties.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The research sample consisted of self-identified light, medium, and dark-skinned African Americans between the ages of 33 and 55 years old who are currently living in a city in the southeast United States. Past researchers (Harvey et al., 2005; Hocoy, 1999; Landor et al., 2013) allowed for the self-identification of research participants. The variance in ages of the research participants provides a representation of several generations which might impact one's experiences. No juveniles were included in the study. Research participants identified themselves as African American, Black, Dominican, Haitian, or African to be eligible for the research study as they are all representative of the African diaspora.

Purposeful sampling was used in the current research study. Purposeful sampling allowed judgment of who or what to include in the sample based on the purpose of the

study (Purposeful sampling, 2013). Purposive sampling was used to identify appropriate participants for the research study based on age, ethnicity, and length of time in the United States. The logic surrounding purposeful sampling aligns itself with the research question and having a sample representative of addressing the key research issue(s) (Purposeful sampling, 2013). Participants were recruited using a recruitment flyer (See Appendix C) placed at the local churches, senior centers, and public buildings (apartment clubhouse message board). Interested participants contacted the researcher using the information on the recruitment flyer. Participants received an informed consent which contained the purpose of the study and criteria for the research study (See Appendix A). The researcher collected all consent forms from the research participant.

Creswell (1988) suggested using a sample size of 5 to 25 for phenomenological research. For this study, the sample size was 10 or until saturation was reached. In qualitative research saturation refers to the discontinuation of data collection when no additional data has been found (Nelson, 2017). Saturation, a tool used in qualitative research, ensures that quality data is collected in research studies. A small sample size was also allowed for timely expenditure for the researcher and also strengthened data analysis.

Instrumentation

Based on the four research questions a semi-structured interview were developed by the researcher (See Appendix B). To provide guidance and direction during the interview, sub-questions and follow-up questions were included. Each participant participated in one interviews with the researcher. Interviews were recorded using an

audio recording tool to allow for accurate transcription. Prior to the interview participants were informed and provided consent to the recording of the interview. Interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes to allow for clarification, elaboration, and the understanding of research questions and participant responses. The researcher also took notes during the interview to capture the researcher's thoughts in the moment. Upon the completion of transcription, data was analyzed and coded for themes.

When exploring the appropriateness and utility of semi-structured interviews in phenomenological research, Rogers and Way (2015) asserted that semistructured interviews have been useful in exploring/investigating race and ethnicity. In support of this notion, Given (2008) postulated that semistructured interviews allow for the construction and implementation of open-ended questions that are useful in identifying important concepts in phenomenological research. For instance, Hocoy (1999) utilized semistructured interviews to explore black racial identity and the alignment with the BRIM within the South African context. Semistructured interviews can be essential in providing how a participant feels about themselves and their relationship the larger culture (Rogers & Way, 2015). For this research study, semistructured interviews were used to understand the lived experiences of African Americans.

Data Analysis Plan

The data collected from the research study were comprised of audio recordings, researcher notes, and interview summaries. Data was analyzed using the following steps proposed by Alfonso, Jackson, Jackson, Hardy, and Gupta (2015): (a) observer notes and audiotapes will be compared for accuracy, (b) data will be coded using a coding guide

based on emerging themes and research objectives, (c) data will be coded using coding guide, (d) codes will be compared for inter-rater consistency, (e) transcripts will be re-coded to sort by category, (f) passages will be sorted for recurring themes, (g) final report will be created.

Saldana (2011) noted that when researchers use coding, process codes transform raw data into new representations for analysis to which codes can be classified into similar clusters. Therefore, the data was coded in two rounds with the first round using descriptive coding to summarize the topic of the data and the second round using values coding which will assist in categorizing what the participant perceived as true (heart of participant worldview) (Saldana, 2015). The "heart of participant world-view" was matched with the appropriate theme related to the racial identity cluster proposed by Cross (1971). As mentioned earlier, worldviews represent personal stances that direct values and are often influenced by various social dimensions (Barnes et al., 2014). Phenomenological research extracts the lived experiences of research participants, thus, the emergence of themes related to one's worldviews assisted in the development of an understanding of racial identity. If the participant's worldview was representative of a preference for a national identity (American) rather than an ethnic identity (African American), based on Cross (1971), assimilation would be the most appropriate racial identity cluster used to categorize the theme. The emergence of themes provided the foundational work for cross-interview analysis.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Morrow (2005) noted that credibility in qualitative research aligns itself with the ability to correspond with internal validity. Further, Morrow (2005 p.252) suggested that "credibility can be achieved by prolonged engagement with participants; persistent observation in the field; the use of peer debriefers or peer researchers; negative case analysis; researcher reflexivity; and participant checks, validation, or coanalysis." To establish credibility in the current research study, researcher reflexivity, member checks, and saturation were employed. Researcher reflexivity was employed throughout the research study to avoid researcher bias. Further, the utilization of member checks ensured that the interpretations were reflective of the interviewee's meaning (Morrows, 2005). Lastly, saturation addressed how sufficiently the data was assessed (evidenced by no new information) (Morrows, 2005).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of research findings to be generalized to other contexts (external validity) (Morrows, 2005). Representation of skin tones (light, medium, dark) and identifications with nationality (African American, Black, Dominican, Haitian, African, and so forth) ensured that a good cross section of the population was represented. Participants were recruited with recruitment flyers in various public domains who live in a city in the southeast United States. Additionally, research participants were recruited via snowball research sampling. Detailed descriptions alongside interpretation

were used to capture the essence of the research study and the experiences of research respondents.

Dependability

Dependability (reliability) in qualitative research entails the ability of the research study to be repeated across time, researchers, and analysis techniques (Morrows, 2005). This strengthens the trustworthiness of research findings and instrumentation used to derive findings. Creating replicability of the research study to other researchers can be achieved by an audit trail and the management of subjectivity (Morrows, 2005). Further, dependability entails trustworthiness that the findings are consistent with the raw research data.

<div align="center">

Confirmability

</div>

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the belief that research findings are derived from the situation being researcher rather than the views, beliefs, or biases of the researcher (Morrows, 2005). In order to sustain an objective viewpoint, the researcher engaged in constant self-reflection. Reflexivity was the overarching goal of this research study.

<div align="center">

Ethical Procedures

</div>

In concordance with the American Psychological Association, the researcher followed the ethical guidelines for researchers in the field of psychology. The guidelines outlined by the APA provided guidance in conducting research with live participants as well as minimizing potential risks, providing informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, representing participant responses accurately, and debriefing participants

(before, during and after study completion) (American Psychological Association, 2017a). Prior to contacting any potential participants, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was secured. Recruitment flyers were placed in various public domains in a city in the southeast portion of the United States to recruit research participants. All research participants were informed that participation in the research study was voluntary. Matters of confidentiality were discussed with research participants in regards to their responses. Participants were also provided with a list of supportive resources should participation it the research study evoke emotional disturbance. This was included in the informed consent.

Informed Consent

Research participants received an informed consent form (See Appendix A). This form outlined the rights of the research participant, information regarding the research study, information about supportive services needed should participation evoke emotional distress, a detailed description of data collection techniques, and the anticipated amount of time it will take to complete the research study. Further, a confidentiality statement and a section outlining voluntarily opting out of the research study was provided. Within the informed consent the acknowledgement that the interviews will be recorded using audio recording tool was outlined. In-person verification of understanding of the forms was conducted, further, all research participants signed the informed consent form in-person prior to participation in the study.

Confidentiality

A coding system was implemented to identify interviews rather than the participant's name in order to ensure confidentiality. Research participants were made aware of this coding system as to promote open and honest responses without fear of jeopardizing one's anonymity. Both paper documentation and audio files (thumb drive) will be kept in a locked safe. All documentation will be destroyed after 5 years from study completion.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to contribute to the existing literature concerning origins of awareness of color consciousness, in-group interactions based on skin tone, perceptions of self-esteem based on skin tone, and experiences with psychological distress based on skin tone among African Americans. Chapter 3 provided details of the phenomenon of study in addition to the role of the researcher, potential biases, participant selection, instrumentation, and data analysis. Further, issues of trustworthiness and bias reduction were explored. Ethical considerations were also outlined.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the developmental awareness of color consciousness, the influence of skin tone on in-group interactions among African Americans, perceptions of self-esteem based on skin tone, and experiences with psychological distress as dictated by one's skin tone. This qualitative study was conducted using research interviews with African American participants aged 33 to 55 years living in a city in the southeast United States. The following research questions guided the research study:

Research Question 1: How do African Americans describe their origins of awareness of skin tone and its importance to their overall quality of life?

Research Question 2: How do African Americans describe their interactions with other African Americans in consideration to their skin tone?

Research Question 3: How do African Americans describe their self-esteem in consideration to their skin tone?

Research Question 4: How do African Americans describe their experiences with psychological distress based on their skin tone?

Chapter 4 will include demographic details of the research participants, the settings in which the data was collected, and the data collection method employed by the researcher. The data analysis process from which coded units emerged into significant themes are provided. Strategies for credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability are described. Chapter 4 is finalized by major findings as they relate to the research questions.

Setting

Data collection took place face-to-face in a private room at the public library and also a private room in an apartment complex clubhouse. The researcher selected a neutral meeting location to ensure the safety and comfort levels of the research participants. Prior to scheduling the interview sessions, the researcher obtained informed consent from research participant to ensure that there were no physical or emotional circumstances that would impede participation in the research study. The researcher made herself available for any questions that the research participant had prior to and after the completion of the research interviews.

Demographics

The research study was conducted with self-identified African American adults between the ages of 33 and 55 years residing in a city in the southeast United States. Personal details about each participant were withheld to ensure the protection of confidentiality. The research participants included three male participants and seven female participants. In the African American community skin tone can range in variation from light, medium, and dark. Research participants reported the skin tone that they perceived accurately described them using the Fitzpatrick Scale (See Appendix D). The Fitzpatrick Scale has the following skin tone ranges: Type I-Light; Type II-White/fair; Type III-Medium; Type IV-Olive/medium brown; Type V- Brown; Type VI- Black, very dark. Using the Fitzpatrick Scale, one respondent rated their skin tone as skin type I (light), four rated their skin tone as skin type IV (olive), and five participants rated their skin tone as type VI (black, very dark).

Participant Demographics

Demographic details of the 10 participants are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics

Participant number	Age	Skin tone type	Gender
1	35	VI	Male
2	48	VI	Male
3	51	VI	Male
4	52	I	Female
5	33	IV	Female
6	35	IV	Female
7	33	VI	Female
8	55	IV	Female
9	46	IV	Female
10	33	VI	Female

Summary of Demographics

All research participants were self-identified African Americans 18 years or older currently residing in a southeast city in the United States. The demographic information lends insight on criteria required for participation in the research study while still protecting the confidentiality of each research participant. Participant 1 was a 35-year-old man who identified himself as having skin-type VI on the Fitzpatrick Skin Tone Scale.

Participant 2 was a 48 year-old man who identified himself as having skin-type VI on the Fitzpatrick Skin Tone Scale. Participant 3 was a 51 year-old man who identified himself as having skin-type VI on the Fitzpatrick Skin Tone Scale. Participant 4 was a 52-year-old woman who identified herself as having skin-type I on the Fitzpatrick Skin Tone Scale. Participant 5 was a 33-year-old woman who identified herself as having skin-type IV on the Fitzpatrick Skin Tone Scale. Participant 6 was a 35 year-old woman who identified herself as having skin-type IV. Participant 7 was a 33 year-old woman who identified herself as having skin-type VI. Participant 8 was a 55 year-old woman who identified herself as having skin-type IV. Participant 9 was a 46 year-old woman who identified herself as having skin-type IV. Participant 10 was a 33 year-old woman who identified herself as having skin-type IV.

Data Collection

The researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis alongside usage of the NVivo 12 software. An audio recording device was used to record each interview with the research participants. The Nvivo 12 software was used to transcribe, code, and organize research interviews to establish emerging themes. Each participant received a copy of the consent form via email prior to the interview. Participants signed the consent forms prior to the interview being conducted and the researcher scanned and emailed a copy of the informed consent form to the participant to keep for their records. The informed consent form included a title and summary of the research study. Contact information for the researcher along with the institutional review board approval number were also included on the consent form. Example interview

questions, eligibility criteria, and contact information for local mental health facilities was provided to address any psychological distress that the participant may experience following participation in the research study.

Once inclusion criteria had been established the location and time of the interviews were scheduled. Semi-structured interviews were conducted along with follow-up questions. A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix B. Interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes in length. Interviews were conducted via in-person interviews in a private room in a public location. An audio recording device was used to record participant responses. Additionally active listening skills and field notes were used by the researcher. Prior to usage of the audio recording device, the device was tested to ensure that the device worked properly. The device and storage capacity was also checked prior to each interview to ensure proper operation. Field notes were used to capture perceived discrepancies among that researcher's reported skin tone and the perceived skin tone as viewed by the researcher. Prior to the beginning of each interview I ensured that each participant was comfortable and reviewed the informed consent form to confirm understanding of participation and the option to discontinue the interview at any time. None of the research participants refused to answer the interview questions and all interviews were completed without any breaks. Research questions were asked in sequence. Some participants were forthcoming with deeper disclosures while probing was used with other participants to gain a deeper understanding.

The interview recordings were transcribed using Nvivo 12 transcription software. Each audio file was uploaded into the Nvivo portal. All transcriptions were saved in a

Word document. Transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy by the researcher by

listening to the audio files while reviewing the transcription. The data collection

procedures remained consistent with the procedures that were outlined in Chapter 3.

<center>**Findings**</center>

Chapter 4 begins with an analysis of the data from Research Questions 1, 2, 3 &4.

The discussion highlights the awareness of skin tone among African Americans which

climaxes with in-depth revelations on how the research participant became aware of their

skin tone. Further, discussion on how skin tone positively or negatively influenced the

research participant's interactions with other African Americans, the participant's self-

esteem, and also experiences with emotional stressors are presented. Together, the data

from all 4 research questions provide insight in understanding how the lived experience

of the research participant varies based on skin tone and how the origins of awareness of

skin tone have impacted the African American community individually and collectively.

Sub-questions were derived from each research question to probe research participant and

gain greater insight on the lived experience. To gain further insight on research question

1, research participants were asked questions such as "Can you tell me when you first

became aware of your skin tone?" and "Can you describe a time in your life when others

made comments about your skin tone?" To gain further insight on research question 2,

research participants were asked "When you are around other African Americans, how

conscious are you of your skin tone?" and "Describe time when you felt included or

excluded from other African Americans." To gain further insight on research question 3,

research participants were asked "Can you tell me what word best describes your skin

tone?" To gain further insight on research question 4, research participants were asked

"Has there ever been a time when you felt proud of your skin tone?" and "Has there ever

been a time that you were ashamed of your skin tone?" Questions for further exploration

were explored pending how in-depth the research participant responded to the research

questions. Not all of the research participants required questions for further exploration as

outlined in Appendix B.

In conducting the research interviews the researcher discovered that some of the

interview questions overlapped with some of the research questions which provided a

plethora of insight. For instance, questions used for further exploration that probed the

research participant's feelings invited discussion on self-image, self-worth, and comfort

levels in interacting with other African Americans.

Research Question 1: Origins of Skin Tone Awareness

Research Question 1 sought out to explore how African Americans described

their origins of awareness of skin tone and its importance to their overall quality of life.

Here, research participants discussed their earliest recollection of having an awareness of

the color of their skin. The main theme that emerged, which will be discussed below,

included an awareness brought on by others, particularly from one's family members or

from other school-aged children. Further, the language/comments that were used to

describe the research participant's skin tone is also provided for further insight on skin

tone awareness.

Early awareness brought on by others. All research participants disclosed an

awareness of their skin tone as a result of an outside source and not an awareness brought

upon by self-discover or one's own insight. The average age of awareness of skin tone was reported about age 5 or 6 years although there were a few reports upward to ages 13 or 14 years. There were two significant categories to which the research participants became aware of their skin tone which included the family unit, particularly from a grandparent, or interactions with other children in a school setting. Participants 2 (black, very dark), 8 (olive), and 9 (olive) reported learning about skin tone from their family unit. Participant 2 stated:

> My grandmother referred to me as being. No, not my grandmother my aunt referred to me as me being very black and and she meant it in a joke-ish way but she kept on saying it and so I was a little boy. So I started crying. And so when I got older and a matter of fact my aunts they still joke about it now. So I asked my grandmother I said I said bae I'm not black am I? And my grandma said baby you so black you don't even know you're black." "But that was a little thing when I was little. I guess because of my dark skin tone. And they would kinda I guess say it was joke-ish but it was a negative color you know when you go back and think about it. But but it did help me as I got older to appreciate you know my skin color. But I became aware of it really way back there in early age.

According to Participant 8:

> Well I think that because me and my brother were two different skin colors my brother was lighter than me and I was considered to be the darker one. I remember going to the store my brother walked to a corner store and the lady who worked at the store she said you would be really cute if you were the same color as your

brother. And so that was an awareness to me that there was he was my brother you know. And then my grandmother I noticed the difference between her lighter -skin grandchildren and her darker- skinned grandchildren and she favored my brother over me because he was lighter than me. And then I had a cousin that was much darker than me like your darker skin tone. And so she and I were not her favorite grandchildren. So she made that distinction and her affection or whatever she wanted to give and she made a difference based on skin color.

According to Participant 9:

So probably at age five and the reason why I say that is because my grandfather used to call me redskin. And my grandfather was a dark Indian. And so yeah probably age 5. He coined that name for me. So that stuck with me all my life.And like I said he was a dark complected man. And instead of telling me that he didn't want me to drink the coffee because of the caffeine in it he told me because if I drink it then it would make me black as if that was a bad thing. So he equated darkness with being bad. Where is at age five I didn't necessarily see it as being a bad thing. I saw it as instantaneously if I drank something I would change colors. So I was afraid of morphing into something different not necessarily turning into the color of my grandfather I had no problem with that because he was like the greatest thing to me. But I was scared. Like when you watch a cartoon and you saw someone you know like Bugs Bunny or something change color. That's what I was more afraid of than anything. That makes no sense to me even at five. So I'm not gonna drink the coffee because I don't want to instantly

change color. And then fast forwarding to my early teen years and that's when he finally explained to me the reason he didn't want me to drink the coffee was because of the caffeine not because of his fear of me being a different complexion. So I never had an issue with the complexion piece because both my grandfather and my grandmother were darker hues.

For Participants 2, 8, and 9 the role of grandparents in uncovering the significance of skin tone was prominent and instrumental in the development of awareness. These research participants ranged in age 46- 55 years representing the eldest research participants interviewed. Of this interview cluster 1 male was represented while 2 female research participants were represented. While it was perceived that research Participants 2 and 8 provided an accurate self-report of their skin tone, there was a noticeable discrepancy in the skin tone that Participant 9 reported. This discrepancy will be discussed later in Chapter 4. In describing their experiences, research participants provided vivid recollections of the encounters without hesitation. Whether the interaction was deemed positive or negative, it evoked thoughts towards how the research participant viewed themselves at a very early age.

Participants 1 (black, very dark), 3 (black, very dark), 4 (light), 5 (olive), 6 (olive), 7 (black, very dark), and 10 (dark, very dark) all reported learning about their skin tone at school from other children. Of this interview cluster 2 males were represented and 5 female research participants were represented. The awareness of skin tone described were a result of other children making comments about the research participant's skin tone. These interactions were described to be negative interactions that

caused the research participant to become aware of their skin tone. It is interesting to consider that the research participants in this interview cluster self-identified as black, very dark or olive. One participant identified as light. Significant responses are provided below:

> According to Participant 3:
>
> Eventually we moved to Birmingham Alabama. The seed of racism at its best. And that's when I would get called names darkie the N word. So probably between the eighth grade and the 9th grade when I really started hearing. I mean you heard the slurs and negative slurs and racial slurs but it wasn't really as impactful to me. So probably when I went to high school and I was we were minority in a predominantly white school.

According to Participant 6:

> In fifth grade everybody was saying African booty scratcher. That was the thing. …….. I remember a little white girl and we had to hold hands to make a circle. She said I don't want to. I don't want you get your dirt on me. She said you're the color of dirt.

According to Participant 7:

> Yeah. Young age young age I remember even other black girls you know how your hair is nappy so you're blacker than me You know they just happened to be part of the light-skin gang. Young age so from first grade I knew the difference I knew what that was.

According to Participant 10:

Probably elementary school; it wasn't me directly. It was my cousin who was who had switched from predominantly white school to a predominately black school. And then we're getting comments about being chocolate. And I was like huh? I went to school there weren't a lot of us [Black people] so it was never variations of black because you're black or you were not. So it wasn't like I'm a certain color. It just never was a thing. So at that point I kind of started paying more attention.

Participants 3, 6, 7, and 10 provided detailed insight on their earliest recollection of skin tone awareness as revealed to them by interactions with other school aged children. It must be noted that there was a discrepancy in the self-reported skin tone that Participant 7 provided. This will be discussed later. Interestingly, participants introduced the impact of learning about skin tone from non-African American individuals. For instance, participants 3 and 6 spoke candidly about the role of White children in bringing about an awareness of their skin tone. Both accounts were negative interactions that challenged the essence of who the participant was. Next, we will move into a discussion on the comments that were made to the research participants concerning their skin tone.

Language used to describe skin tone. Research participants discussed the comments/language they heard concerning their skin tone.

Light skin vs. dark skin: Light skin rules. The vast majority of research participants reported comments that they heard about their skin tone from either family members or those outside of their family. The overarching theme regarding comments about skin tone revolved around a hierarchal system that was divided into being grouped as light-skinned or dark-skinned. From there, positive or negative attributes were equated

based on the research participant's closeness in resemblance to the European standard of beauty.

According to Participant 1:

My mom would call me a black boy…… No I guess negative or positive feelings towards it was just natural.

According to Participant 2:

Oh, probably my cousin. He made- put out a song about that [my skin tone]. We were maybe party third fourth grade but he made a little song. Yeah my nickname was baby. So he said. Oh yeah I would say if I had had a real bad asthma flare up my skin tone got darker. So my mother and grandmother kind of knew that if I was getting sick because it's hard to breathe I guess you're low on oxygen and your skin tone changes. So of course my cousin start saying a little rap- It's black baby black baby black black black; black baby had a heart attack.

According to Participant 4:

I think most recently I have two sons; they're in college age. One went to a historically black school. And I went down there. I have short hair at that time- I have really long hair. And when I went on campus a man told my son your mom was white because she looks kind of Hispanic kind of you know-I told you your mom was white! He's like mama not white. Fast forward a few years later. Both my boys were in the same school. And I came on campus and you know go visit them bring them cases of water to the athletes in anyway they're like hey man who's that white woman you will walk in with?.....In the deep south the lighter

you are they automatically assume that either your white or your mixed;. If you're

not dark there's a problem here.

According to Participant 8:

Well I mean because I went to an all black Catholic school and then I went to an

all white high school small Christian school.And and as I remember one person

saying to me that you know you're not as dark as some black people that I know.

According to Participant 9:

God it's like, oh you know, is that that yellow person or that high yellow person

or that weird person or whatever that case maybe. Yeah but that's silly to me you

know. Because oftentimes when I refer to someone that looks like me I don't care

what end of the spectrum you are. I still say that now you look like me you know.

According to Participant 10:

You know like when I'm overseas a lot because of me having curly hair people

are trying to figure out what I am. And so typically darker than what I guess

they're accustomed to with curly hair and so [they ask] what country are you

from?" [Comments Participant 10 heard about others referencing her cousins]

""You're pretty for a dark-skinned girl" or you got a lot of hair…you can't say oh

I think you're pretty or I like your hair.

Research Question 2: Interactions With Other African Americans

Research question 2 sought out to explore how African Americans described their

interactions with other African Americans in consideration to their skin tone. Although

research participants did not directly disclose personal accounts of how their skin tone

affected interactions with other African Americans, their responses could be found in the way that they discussed their awareness of skin tone and the comments that family members and non-family members made about their skin tone. It is hypothesized that the framing of the question, the likelihood that research participants had not been asked a direct question as such, and the deeply personal nature of the question could have affected the manner in which participants responded. The emerging theme from this research question was associated with skin tone playing a significant role in the comfort level to interact with other African Americans and how other African Americans interacted with research participants based on the tone of their skin. A few research participants did answer directly and provided the following insight:

According to Participant 2:

> I think I'm more conscious of it when I'm around other African-Americans who are very high. I don't know what the technical term. But from where I'm from we just say high yellow it's like I kind of become aware of it. I'll look at their skin tone they'll look at their hair and sometimes I can tell the difference between their hair pattern and mine then their skin tone. And I remember dealing with some issues like that in college. Going into a historically black university and I just thought that was ok for and this young lady. She was very light-skinned and she just felt that she was more superior and you never said because she was light – skinned but I get kind of vibe from her that because she was not that intelligent. But that she put me in a very awkward position and it kind of really made me felt intimidated. And intimidated in the sense that what I was asked to do. I got kind

of nervous because I kind of sense that she too thought and she talked as if she
was more than me.

According to Participant 3:

I don't see a difference a lot of this because I just love people I love black people.
I like black you black. You just lighter than I am or you darker than I am. Oh you
know there was one time when we were in high school that I was real dark-
skinned compared to most kids. And I did get another slur I didn't mention it was
blue black. He'd call me blue black and that was that would take me off really but
that was the other slur so I forgot about that. But I don't you know I don't see a lot
of variances in color.

According to Participant 4:

And then the military; High school. They- especially guys you know in high
school you want to date and stuff but the black guys didn't want to date me
because they said I looked and acted like a white girl. And conversely White guys
when they want to date out of their race they like somebody with brown skin. So I
was kind of on an island unto myself because they didn't- nobody wanted to you
know I didn't like you know in the military. The darker you are the more chance
you get. You know not necessarily wanted attention but you know in the end they
think the lighter you are the prettier you are regardless of your features or your
attitude or care to resist. They automatically expect if you really dark skin you
have an attitude. You know in the army there is a joke. The ugliest girls when you
go overseas you end up being the prettiest girls because the guys don't like the

locals in a foreign country. So regardless if your light or dark you're a hot

commodity. So we had girls hair looking you know. You know needed you know

much perm and just here in the states nobody would look at them [but] overseas

oh they would.

According to Participant 4:

I don't necessarily feel like I fit in because you know my truth. Is not necessarily

their truth and vice versa. I went to a little seminar that was about hair care and nd

I'm sitting there and I'm like they're talking about we don't need wigs; don't wear

braids. Don't do that. And you know dreads- that won't happen. And it really

bothered me because I'm like they haven't addressed me. You identified me as one

of you. So I just left. So. I feel different. I feel like they look at me differently

because at times they don't know what I am. And I think sometimes they're afraid

to ask

According to Participant 6:

When I got older I'll go into the club when I get older. Oh my God along with

this- with the skin tone. Now everything is all coming back to me. Like this with

my skin tone. I'm just you know…I consider myself black whatever you know.

But there would be at the time was the green room [name of club] and we'll you

know we'll be partying and whatever and I noticed that the darker much darker

than me women would get mad they wouldn't get the attention. They wouldn't get

the attention and because of that some of them would be real nasty. You know

they would they would they would be real nasty towards women like myself

where the light complexion and stuff like that in that brown paper bag test. To me

that's what television was like. Very prominent. You know nobody would

celebrating melanin like we do now. You know like we get down with it now but

back then it was it was a for real. The only time I got negative treatment- to say

my skin was dirty or whatever it was from a white person. It wasn't from my

home. You know I'm saying but I did notice. I didn't notice that darker women

would go through some things. And if I could use that as an example kind of like

how white privilege. White people not speaking up in their white privilege they're

just as wrong. So I felt like my whatever this cut privilege is not dark and it's not

light but if it's acceptable it's paper bag. You know what I mean. So if I didn't

speak up I would be held accountable myself. That's how I felt. So I do I use my

paper bag privilege outfit to celebrate my sister over here just talking to me. She's

fine she's fine just like I am.

According to Participant 9:

Well my mother's side of the family it was always inclusion because we were just

you know we were family and we came in all types of you know skin tones. So

there was no difference there. The difference was really made on my father's side

of the family and I could remember this my grandmother's sister passed and we

went to the wake they had him at the house it's the strangest thing I'm from

saying was I know I've been to a house where you just bring in a casket but so we

go to that and we're standing around and we're talking to you know everybody's

talking and talk to her. That's how I walked up to my grandmother she had other

people around her and she was acknowledging them and I walked up to her and I just said you know Grandma I'm so sorry you lost your sister. And she just gave me no reaction. She hugged me. She didn't say anything about this to anyone because I was fed up with her and I was old enough to know I turned around tell my father I said this is why I don't talk to this crazy woman. And I did it while I was at the wake. So he was like he didn't know what to say and I left crying and I was so upset because I just couldn't believe that you know you won't even take my affection to the point of recognizing me that I have acknowledged your loss. And so that sticks with me and I used to I used to be able to talk about her calmly because she just gets so mad because the hurt that happened and still seem so real as you know the next you know the next day and you know even at that point you know I'm bringing her one granddaughter that didn't have any children out of wedlock. You know that was married and had a family and even when my uncle who had got hit on a bike in which my father had to go down it was in December. We had to go down and help with funeral plans and make those arrangements. You know just not even a thank you.

According to Participant 10:

So once we got to high school and people start talking about you know the workplace and going to work and then you maybe afforded a different opportunity because of your complexion or whatever the case may be. Yeah I didn't understand that so much. Gosh. And then once I started interning and I was fortunate enough to intern at an accounting firm for celebrities and so I got a

chance to see different celebrities come in and out and so. One in particular was Grace Jones who's of a darker hue. And so again my lenses may be different because I saw so many different ways you know people were growing up where I grew up but then coming to the south in the summers. And would be with my grandparents who were of a darker hue and being a of a lighter skin then you're going into the city my area and then you see people and they're looking at you differently or they perceive that you're you know oh you're a parent must be white or whatever but that's not the case. My mom is brown skinned my dad is brown. So I mean I just never had any I mean I guess my self-awareness was just not as prevalent like as to what was the big hype. You know until later on in life and now you know you learn more and. I've never really had any major setbacks within relationship to color in the northern states. It's been more so pronounced here in the south. And so now I find myself safeguarding my children more so here than ever before. Now if I were to go back to the north and I don't know how it is but growing up there I didn't have nearly as much of an issue as I'm thinking it is here in the south this present day.

Research Question 3: Self-Esteem

Research Question 3 sought out to gain an understanding of how African Americans describe their self-esteem in consideration to their skin tone. To better aid in describing how they currently viewed themselves, research participants discussed the word of phrase that best described their skin tone. Usage of single words or phrases provided insight on the participant's view of their self-worth in addition to their self-

assurance. Research participants used positive trait theme words to describe their skin tone and how they felt about themselves. The emerging theme for this research question was associated with a pro-Black stance; I accept myself. It must be noted that Research participants described their present day terminology to describe their skin tone rather than an eclectic usage of words to describe their journey towards self-acceptance across their lifespan.

As research participant described situations of acceptance and rejection of others based on their skin tone, an emergence of self-acceptance began to appear as participant's discussed their present day emotions regarding their skin tone. Although early experiences invited self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, as research participants aged and matured there came to be a greater degree of emotional stability when considering their skin tone

Pro-Black stance; I accept myself. Despite early experiences with negative connotations and or language to describe the skin tone of dark-skinned individuals, research participants of a darker hue seemed towards self-acceptance and to embrace their skin tone. Likewise, those research participants who were of a lighter hue who did not feel accepted or privileged due to their skin tone also shifted towards a greater acceptance of self. At the research participant's current stage of life there appeared to be an overwhelming consensus of self-acceptance. All research participants provided positive descriptors of their skin tones. Prominent responses are provided.

- Participant 2: "I'm torn between the nature or earth."

- Participant 3: "Chocolate….sexy chocolate drop."

- Participant 7: "Popping"

- Participant 8: "Beautiful"

- Participant 9: "Caramel"

- Participant 10: "Faux chocolate"

In explaining why the descriptive words were chosen, research participants elaborated on their word choices. For instance, research participant 10 described using the word "faux chocolate" to describe the versatility in appearance of her skin tone depending on the time of year. For instance, participant 10 described the appearance of being very chocolate in the summer time versus in January when her makeup no longer matches. She expressed that she felt that her skin tone was "in between"; not dark enough to be considered chocolate but not light enough to be caramel, hence, her choice in using the term "faux chocolate". Giving the appearance of being chocolate but not really chocolate. Participant 9 described her skin tone by using the word "caramel". She communicated that when she thinks about the word caramel she thinks about something that is smooth; something that is a piece of candy; something that is sweet. Ultimately, her descriptive word not only described her outer appearance but also placed importance and emphasis on her core inner self.

Participant 8 used the word "beautiful" to describe her skin tone. She stated that she chose this word because she views herself holistically as beautiful. She described a time when she did not feel beautiful and struggled with her weight. A time when she received negative comments from her grandmother concerning her weight and her skin tone. However, she was able to shift to discussing the positive affirmations that she

received from her mother, particularly, compliments about her dimples and begin told that she was beautiful and pretty. Participant 7 used the word "popping" to describe her skin tone. She expressed that she decided to use this word because when she hears that word she thinks about the pop rocks candy in addition to things that are glowing or related to being a star. She also describe herself as being a loaded cocoa ball and her excitement about Black Girl Magic- a term used in African American culture to describe the beauty of African American women. Participant 3 used the term "chocolate/sexy chocolate drop to describe his skin tone. In using this descriptive word participant 3 described that he was ok with his chocolate hue and marveled at the notion that no matter what hue you are there is a crayon color for it. Participant 2 used "nature/earth" to describe his skin tone. Participant 2 stated that our [African American] ancestors [Africans] showed to us how we should look and how the darker hue reflects peace and serenity. Participant 2 went on to state that we are all made in God's image and we are all of his creation and this gives him confidence to be who he is and to love himself.

Research Question 4: Experiences With Psychological Distress

Research Question 4 sought out to explore how African Americans described their experiences with psychological distress based on their skin tone. Experiences with psychological distress within this context were mostly described by the feelings that were attached to their experiences. Research participants discussed their feelings of pride and shame when evaluating their skin tone and how it has been a factor in emotional stability. Shame, which can be considered a secondary emotion of sadness, can impart feelings of worthlessness. The emerging theme that was evidenced from this research question

surrounded itself around early experiences of sadness and shame when considering the acceptance or rejection of others based on the research participant's skin tone.

Early experiences of sadness/shame. As research participant described situations of acceptance and rejection of others based on their skin tone, an emergence of experiences with sadness and shame emerged. Research participants shared their experiences of being ridiculed by others and how this affected how they felt about themselves which at times led to feelings of sadness. As a result of treatment from others based on their skin tone, many research participants reported feeling shameful, hurt, and sad as a result of their experiences with others. One research participant also reported feelings of sadness for others of a darker hue as they reflected upon skin tone and experiences with psychological distress.

According to Participant 1:

My skin tone make me feel empowered….. I feel sad when I see other people of my same race treat others bad.

According to Participant 2:

Well, you know what they started laughing at me and then I started thinking you know is this is that something wrong? You know and the way they were laughing and it was as if I was awkward or something. But you know even as young child when they're rooted in the Lord those things still doesn't affect you or your personality. So I think if you did not have the Lord in your life and so it didn't faze me-like they would laugh. This probably hurt maybe a few seconds. I think

the hurt that I had was probably typical of anybody that would be hurt by anybody. But I just shook it off and get back to playing.

According to Participant 3:

Yes the answer is yes and sometimes not happy. But most time yes I think I'll say yes because I believe that what I've learned is in my… my chocolateness or my humanness or my ethnicity. I have- I try and I know this is a God given. I think it's just the Lord has inspired me to do this is take my gifts and my talents and cross them with my color. Like you know across colors the hip hop group cross color. They had a group the clothing line was crossed colors and they had it mixed.

According to Participant 4:

Probably in high school because you know, you know you want to date Black guys- like you look too much like a white girl. You act too much like a white girl. White guys they don't even look at you because of your skin tone so probably I had I had I guess that's the one time in my life I really had a complex because of the way I looked. Any times where it may have I guess influenced how I think. Probably maybe twice. When I first went to college I went to I grew up in an area that's about 6 percent black. So all I saw was white people. When I went to college and went to college in Atlanta I had reverse culture shock for about a semester because I was not used to that many black people- prosperous black people and see guys say hey [to me].That was my truth. That wasn't my experience. But to have somebody holler at you coming out of high school when

nobody said anything to me is like oh you know it makes you feel kind of good

even within the army. You know I'm uncomfortable in my own skin. Yeah I

realize some people are going to accept me some people are you know but now

I'm 52 years old so really don't matter.

According to Participant 10:

Half would say it depends on the circumstances. I have cousins who do have not

American parent where I come from Africa and some of the islands so they

maintain their color all year and their one color. One color and so I would see

their skin and think why can't I hold this color like them? It's like what is the

difference between my American dad and their African dad? I'm like has this

whole slavery genes messed up our ability to be one color the whole time? Why is

it? That there has always annoyed me that I'm not one color. So when I see people

one color it makes me jealous.

Discrepant Cases

  Discrepancies in reports of skin tone. In conducting the research interviews the

researcher noticed that two research participants reported their skin tones significantly

darker than what the researcher perceived the research participant's skin tone to be.

Participant 9 reported her skin tone as type IV (olive), however, the researcher perceived

her skin tone to be type II (fair). Additionally, participant 7 reported her skin tone to be

type VI (black, very dark), however, the researcher perceived her skin tone to be type IV

(olive). The researcher did notice that during the research interview participant 9

appeared to become agitated about the discussion on skin tone perceptions within the

African American community. This agitation was noticed in the shifts in her body language and fluctuations in her voice dictation. It must be noted that the researcher participant did remain compliant throughout the interview. The agitation appeared to stem from the notion that skin tone perceptions still exist and can serve as a determining factor in the manner in which people are treated and how they view themselves. It almost appeared that research participant 9 was agitated by their apparent discomfort around the notion of differential privilege based on skin tone.

On the other hand, participant 7 presented as very pro-black and proud of the skin she was in. She often times mentioned "Black Girl Magic" throughout the interview and how her skin was "Poppin". It is inferred that her over exaggeration in self-report of her skin tone could have been a result of a need to explicitly self-identify as black. Further, research participant 7 did note that her skin tone varies based on the time of the year which could have also been instrumental in her self-report of skin tone. By reporting herself of darker, there would be no denying her "blackness" and pride associated with being African American.

Self-report of skin tone and the time of year. Research participants 6, 7, and 10 reported that their self-report of skin tone is strongly influenced by the time of year. For instance, these research participants reported that they are darker during the summer months due to exposure to the sun than in winter months where there is less access to the sun. Research interviews were conducted during the spring months so research participants were asked to report their current skin tone. This appeared to be a significant factor for self-report and could also have significant effects on the treatment that research

participants received from others, their own experiences with self-worth and self-esteem, and also speaks volume to the consciousness of skin tone based on the time of year.

Regional differences in skin tone importance. Participants 3, 9, and 10 reported regional differences in skin tone importance. Each research participant relocated to the south and report not having the same emphasis or importance of skin tone while living in northern states. Participants reported having experiences with racism, being called racial slurs, and an awareness of treatment having moving to the south. Participant 9 described the northern state that she lived in as a "melting pot" that was open and accepting to people of all races, religions, and backgrounds. Further, participant 10 reported that she had not been around a large sum of African Americans growing up because she grew up in a very small predominately White town in the north which caused the few African American people that lived there to cling together rather than establish hierarchies of separation based on skin tone. Likewise, participant 3 reported that skin tone importance or awareness only emerged after he and his family relocated to a city in the south to which he described as "the seed of racism at its best."

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Evidence of Quality

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The quality of the data collected was ensured through the following steps. First, the researcher recorded each interview in its entirety. Secondly, each interview was transcribed by Nvivo Transcription and reviewed for accuracy by the researcher. Each step of the phenoography data analysis was followed exactly as described by by Alfonso, Jackson, Jackson, Hardy, & Gupta (2015). After the audio files and transcriptions were compared for accuracy, emerging themes were developed based on each research

question. Once emerging themes were identified to establish participant experiences, the emerging themes were again reevaluated by the researcher by reviewing both audio and transcription files. After the sorting and establishment of dominant recurring themes, the final report was created.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I provided an in-depth analysis on the developmental awareness of color consciousness, the influence of skin tone on in-group interactions among African Americans, perceptions of self-esteem based on skin tone, and experiences with psychological distress as dictated by one's skin tone. In Chapter 4 I explained how participants were chosen for participation in the research study, the interview process, and how the data was analyzed to generate key findings that reflected the research participant's experience. Key findings were discussed for research questions 1 through 4. Research Question 1 explored the awareness of skin tone and its importance to the quality of life of African Americans. Research Question 2 explored how African Americans described their interactions with other African Americans in consideration to their skin tone. Research Question 3 explored how African Americans described their self-esteem in consideration to the skin tone. Research Question 4 explored how African Americans described their experiences with psychological distress based on their skin tone.

In Chapter 5, I will examine the data in greater detail alongside formulating conclusions. Further, I will summarize the data and explore how clinicians can better become culturally competent in working with Africans as we consider matters of skin tone perceptions as it can affect self-esteem, perceptions of acceptance and social

mobility, and also occurrences with psychological distress. I will also discuss

recommendations for future research examining the ongoing skin tone perceptions within

the African American community.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, & Recommendations

Introduction

In this qualitative research study, I explored the developmental awareness of color consciousness, the influence of skin tone on in-group interactions among African Americans, perceptions of self-esteem based on skin tone, and experiences with psychological distress as dictated by one's skin tone. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the developmental awareness of color consciousness in self-reported African Americans, and others in the African diaspora, for example, dark skinned Dominican, Haitians, Africans, and so forth. Exploration assisted in understanding how the awareness of skin tone and colorist ideology can directly relate to mental health of African Americans. A secondary purpose of this study was increase our understanding of the in-group interactions of African Americans as it related to one's skin tone. It is hoped by understanding the lived experiences of African Americans, as it relates to their skin tone, that the origins of skin tone awareness can be identified to assist in improving colorist mindsets among this community.

Previous research has explored the consciousness of skin tone among African Americans, however, this is the first research to date that explored the origins of awareness of skin tone and how these origins of awareness positively and negatively impacted the research participant's worldview. More research needs to be conducted exploring how the current generation perceives skin tone and how the origination of these perceptions have change or remained consistent across generations.

Although physically separated from the act of slavery, colorism still exists in the United States and has strong connections to the oppression that African Americans faced during that time (Hill, 2002). So much so that Wilder & Cain (2011) noted that despite the many advances that African American have made, there still exists a modern-day colorism among this community. This modern-day colorism has had strong implications for the psyche of African Americans and has been an active antagonist against the progression of unity within the African American community in addition to the creation of a false aspiration towards beauty and societal acceptance. For this reason the self-esteem and self-worth of the African American is still lost and closely tied to the closeness in resemblance to the European standard of beauty. This association with European standard of beauty has permeated within the African American community causing both the younger and older generations to be categorized based on a colorist social hierarchical system. The pressing concern present-day is understanding how these colorist mindsets continue to exist, essentially the origins of their existence, although America has been removed from the systematic enslavement of African Americans and the emphasis on value that slavery evoked by assigning certain tasks to certain African Americans based on their skin tone.

Face-to-face in person interviews were conducted with ten self-identified African American adults aged 33 to 55 years. Research participants consisted of three male participants and seven female participants. Potential research participants were recruited via a recruitment flyer and thereafter by snowball sampling. Research participants met all requirements of the research study prior to inclusion in the study. Interview questions

were asked to understand awareness of skin tone and its importance, to understand interactions among African Americans based ok skin tone, to describe self-esteem based on skin tone, and to describe experiences with psychological distress based on skin tone. Additionally, research participants were asked to rate their skin tone using the Fitzpatrick Scale. All interviews were recorded using an audio recording device and transcribed using NVIVO Transcription. Data were analyzed using the phenomenographic method.

The Black Racial Identity Model

The BRIM, a conceptual model, was developed to investigate Black identity as a means of understanding how Blacks interact in the world (Barnes et al., 2014). The BRIM consists of the following stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization (Vandiver et al., 2001). This model is also accompanied by seven identity clusters which include Assimilation, Anti-Black, Afrocentricity, Anti-White, Black Nationalist, Multiculturalist, and Biculturalism.

This theoretical framework characterizes Black identity as a process of development as one relates to and reacts to social and environmental pressures and circumstances (Hocoy, 1999). Mobility from each stage of the BRIM can be largely impacted by the way an individual views themselves individually and also within a social context. Essentially, the loudness of the outside world can sometimes override the inward voice, thus having a greater influence on one's racial identity and how that racial identity either assimilates to or goes against the norms of society. So much so that Neville, Cross, & Cross (2017) asserted that racial awakening or racial epiphanies are often triggered by a personal encounter/experience that results in personal exploration of one's heritage and

what it means to be Black. Ultimately the BRIM helps to better understand how an African American either accepts or rejects who they are within the context of the world in relationship to which stage of Black racial development they most identify with.

In relation to Research Question 1, which sought out to explore how Africans Americans described their origins of awareness of skin tone and its importance to their overall quality of life, participant responses appeared to line up with the encounter stage of the BRIM which is distinguished by the acknowledgement of racism and the forced focus of one's identity. This is evidenced by the overwhelming presence of outside sources such as family members and school aged children who promoted an acceptance of the European standard of beauty which caused the research participant to evaluate where they fit within the color line continuum. Further, experiences with racism and discrimination help to further promote being forced to focus on one's identity. The overarching theme evidenced by the participant responses was centered around the participant being forced to focus on who they were and how society would view them within the context of their skin tone. To provide further explanation, the response from research participant 8 will be explored. Research participant 8 described learning about their skin tone as they interacted with their grandmother; particularly, the differentiation of treatment that was present between them and their sibling. This notice of treatment essentially forced the research participant to recognize that they were not white nor were they representative of the desired skin tone which was more closely related to the European standard of beauty. Here, encounters have shaped how the research participant

has viewed their race, specifically, what it means to be a light-skinned or dark-skinned African American.

In relation to Research Question 2, which sought out to describe how African Americans interact with other African Americans in consideration to their skin tone, participant responses similarly appeared to line up with the encounter stage of the BRIM. Due to the treatment that research participants faced from other African Americans, research participants described a heavy consciousness of their skin tone which in turn resulted in an ever greater awareness of who they were and how their skin tone impacted their experiences. The overarching notation within the encounter stage consists of the individual experiencing a personally significant impact to be the catalyst to spur change in their thinking (Ritchey, 2014).

In contrast to Research Questions 1 and 2, Research Question 3 which sought out to explore how African Americans described their self-esteem in consideration to their skin tone and Research Question 4 which sought out how to describe how African Americans described their experiences with psychological distress based on their skin tone, research participant responses began to align with the immersion-emersion stage of the BRIM in addition to the internalization stage.

When considering Research Question 3, responses aligned with the internalization stage which reflected Black self-acceptance. During this time people move away from how others view them to how they view themselves (Ritchey, 2014). In regards to Research Questions 1 & 2, there was a heavy presence or tone of how others perceived the research participants in consideration to their skin tone, however, Research Question

3 provided insight on how the research participant currently viewed themselves. To help better understand how the research participants viewed themselves, research participants were asked to use a descriptor word that reflected how they viewed themselves. The descriptor words offered by the research participants were all positive words, reflective of self-acceptance and as the BRIM would describe, an emergence of Black self-love. Self-love, which is indicative of positive regard for oneself, appeared to increase and eventually stabilize among the research participants as they navigated through various life experiences.

Research Question 4 appeared to align with the pre-encounter stage of the BRIM as early experiences with psychological distress were explored. This stage is characterized by a preference a preference for European Americans and a rejection of Black culture. As research participants provided responses there was a noticeable move from feelings of shame and sadness in regards to their skin tone towards a more positive idea of what it means to be Black but more importantly what is means to be either light-skinned or dark-skinned. For instance, Participant 3 reported that at times they did not feel happy about their skin tone but eventually they began to love their "chocolateness" and their ethnicity. Likewise, Participant 4 reported that they felt excluded due to their light complexion and experienced psychological distress during high school, however, after beginning college and attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) they began to connect with other African Americans and received positive feedback and interactions. Skin tone no longer played a major role in the ability to date others nor did it play a role in experiencing depressed symptoms.

It must be further noted that a four status model towards ethnic development has been developed and implemented to better understand racial identity development. From the emergence of Helm's White Identity Development Model and Cross' Black Racial Identity Development Model Status the field of psychology has been able to track, compare, and understand the emergence of how an understanding of racial development has evolved over time. The emergence of the racial identity models morphing into stage models of racial identity demonstrate the subjectivity of experience and loosens the constraints upon the reliance upon developmental modalities that follow a confined the mastery of a stage before there is progression into the next stage. This was evidenced when reviewing Research Questions 3 and 4 and the evaluation in alignment of responses to the development stage as outlined by the BRIM. While Research Question 3 appeared to align with the final stage of racial identity development Research Question 4 did not and was actually a regression backwards on the racial identity development process. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that racial identity is not necessarily a step by step progression but rather an ongoing cycle influenced by one's experiences and encounters. This was certainly evidenced by participant responses as they detailed their experiences throughout childhood and adulthood and responses shifted from one stage of development to the other not necessary in sequential order.

In their study Seaton, Scottham, & Sellers (2001) explore the utility of the four status model proposed by Marcia (1966) to better understand ethnic identity development. Of their significant findings, the researchers indicated that reaching achieved identity status does not necessarily represent an endpoint of racial identity

development but rather, racial identity development is ongoing and does not follow a strict linear progression with a specific end point (Parham, 1989). Therefore, it is safe to conclude that racial identity is not necessarily a step by step progression but rather an ongoing cycle influenced by one's experiences and encounters. This was certainly evidenced by participant responses as they detailed their experiences throughout childhood and adulthood.

In summation, the BRIM served as the theoretical orientation to assist in the interpretation and analysis of the participant research responses. Upon analysis and interpretation three significant stages of the BRIM were identified in assisting the researcher in better understanding the lived experiences of the African Americans who participated in the research study. Those three stages included the encounter stage, immersion-emersion stage, and the internalization stage. Ultimately this model assisted in identifying the stage that each participant was in regarding their racial identity development which in turn influenced the responses to the research questions.

Interpretation of Findings

The analyses of data allowed for the emergence of several noteworthy findings.

The first set of data analyzed pertained to Research Question 1. This question inquired about how African Americans described their origins of awareness of skin tone and its importance to their overall quality of life. Research participants described their earliest recollection of recognizing their skin tone and the possible implications that it introduced. The second set of data analyzed pertained to Research Question 2. This question inquired about how African Americans described their interactions with other

African Americans in consideration to their skin tone. Research participants described their comfort, discomfort, and/or indifference towards interactions with other African Americans. The third set of data analyzed pertained to Research Question 3. This question inquired about how African Americans described their self-esteem in consideration to their skin tone. Research participants described their acceptance and love for who they were presently with consideration to their growth and development over time. The fourth set of data analyzed how African Americans described their experiences with psychological distress based on their skin tone. Research participants described their acceptance or rejection of their skin tone with variations evident across their lifespan. In the following section I discuss each of these areas, specifically the following themes which emerged from each research question: (a) early awareness of skin tone brought on by others/light skin vs dark skin (b) interactions with other African Americans (c) pro-Black stance (d) early experiences of sadness/shame.

Awareness Brought on by Others

Research participants described their earliest recollection of skin tone importance having been brought to their attention by an outside source such as a family member or other children within their cohort. Specifically, research participants identified having an awareness based on the interactions with a grandparent when considering the awareness brought on by a family member. No research participants disclosed that this awareness of their skin tone was an epiphany realized and established from within themselves. Research participants who reported these feelings explained that their grandparent would make disparaging remarks about darker skin tones and would promote a more favorable

stance towards lighter skin tones. Prior literature does identify the Black family as a major factor in naturalizing racial hierarchies (Cash, 1992; Wilder, 2011). This is a noteworthy consideration given the constant interactions and feedback that African Americans have within their family unit. Naturally, learned behaviors, conversations and insights on how the outside world views oneself is first introduced in the home. This was certainly evidenced in the responses offered by the research participants.

Additionally, research participants reported negative songs, names, and treatment from those within their family unit based on their skin tone with the darker complexions resulting in a high proportion of the negative interactions. This is not uncommon within the African American community. In fact, Parris (1946) identified the large vocabulary that Black youth use in describing the various shades of African Americans. We must not ignore that although the family unit has played a significant role in the introduction of color consciousness among African Americans, colorism and skin tone bias has its roots in racism and White supremacy. This is evidenced by the mass enslavement of African Americans within the United States and the preferential treatment of African Americans based on skin tone. Wilder (2010) asserted that light-skinned African Americans had more economic value than dark-skinned African Americans. Thus the introduction of value and skin tone emerged and spread as an incurable diseases within the African American community.

These distinctions in treatment and the acknowledgment of favorable skin tone complexions were significant in the self-perceptions of the research participants. Most research participants reported that they recalled being called names such as "black boy"

or "high yellow". When considering the affect that this had on the research participant, this awareness brought on by the family unit evoked negative feelings towards the family member's verbal and physical distinction of treatment based on skin tone. One research participant reported having a strained relationship with their grandmother due to the treatment that they received based on their skin tone. Because the research participant was not of a lighter complexion like their sibling, they expressed feeling unloved and noticed that they were being treated differently than the children who had a lighter complexion. The research participant further reported that the treatment that they received was not only limited to them, but also their cousin who was also of a darker complexion received the same treatment. This eluded to the notion that other extraneous variables singular to the research participant could have played a significant factor in their treatment. Thus, skin tone played a significant factor in their treatment based on the preference that their grandmother had for lighter individuals.

When considering the awareness of skin tone brought on by peers within the research participant's cohort, many research participants expressed hearing comments from non-African Americans, particularly Caucasian children during their elementary school years. Research participants reported experiencing racial slurs and interactions that were derogatory in nature. Particularly, one research participant reported that a Caucasians girl likened their skin to "dirt" or being "dirty" and refused to hold their hand during a class activity.

Interactions With Other African Americans

It is hypothesized that due to the framing of Research Question 2 research participants did not disclose any personal accounts of significant experiences with other African Americans based on their skin tone, however, responses that supported the research question were found in the ways that research participants described their awareness of skin tone and the comments that were made about their skin tone. For instance, one research participant responded feeling more aware of their dark skin tone when they were around 'high yellow" African Americans. The term "high yellow" is often used in the African American community to describe African Americans who are of a lighter complexion, specifically skin types I and II on the Fitzpatrick Scale.

Further, one research participant also expressed how their skin tone effected their dating life during their teenage years and the fact that dating options were limited because you were either labeled as being too dark or too light. Another research participant reported that they experienced the reality of inclusion and exclusion primarily from their family members. This was evidenced through the treatment that the research participant expressed when comparing the treatment that they received from their maternal and paternal family members.

Colorism, a term coined within the African American community has heavily influenced how African Americans interact with other African Americans and how they perceive social mobility within their own community as well as outside of their community. As previously mentioned in the literature review, media outlets such as television and movies play a significant role in promoting the European standard of

beauty. This promotion has caused African Americans to become more conscious of their skin tone, thus imparting fear of where their skin tone will place them among the racial hierarchy. This was evidenced throughout participant responses.

Based on the fact that responses to this research question could be found in the overall explanation of lived experiences of the research participants via other responses, there was common trend that reflected that whether the research participant was light-skinned or dark-skinned there was a prominent presence regarding the interactions with other African Americans. Certainly the opportunity for inclusion or exclusion was expressed as the individual skin tone of the participant was considered. Respondents of bother darker and lighter complexions expressed fractures in interactions whether positive or negative.

Self-Esteem: Pro-Black Stance/I Accept Myself

Research participants described their self-worth/self-esteem as moved towards a pro-Black stance, a stance more reflective of self-acceptance despite the negative interactions and encounters that they received early in life. This is quite different from previous research that suggested that African Americans who do not possess "desirable" skin tones which may have implications on self-worth (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005). This stance towards self-acceptance appeared to go against the desire to uphold and attain the European standard of beauty. In their responses it appeared that there was a movement towards self-acceptance as the research participant got older when compared to their descriptions of experiences during their younger years. Particularly, research participants were able to identity positive words to describe themselves such as

"poppin", "beautiful", "sexy chocolate" and "caramel". When considering the current

narrative in Black culture there has been a shift towards Black self-acceptance as

evidenced and seen through causes such as "My Black is Beautiful". This movement is

comprised of an online community of women who challenge beauty standards and

represent the diversity in beauty within the African American community.

Not only did research participants express a positive outward character word to

describe themselves, descriptive words were also indicative of how they viewed

themselves inwardly. For instance one research participant used the descriptive word"

caramel" to describe themselves. Their rationale for using this word was found in the fact

that caramel is both smooth and sweet- sweet being the inward description of who they

were as a person. Further, one research participant described themselves as "faux

chocolate" to describe their skin's unique ability to lighten and darken based on the time

of year. This research participant decided upon this descriptive word because they felt

that they give the appearance of being chocolate by they really aren't because of the

exposure or non- exposure to the sun during the fall, winter, spring, and summer months.

Another unique finding that research participants shared was their self-acceptance

from a holistic perspective. One research participant labeled themselves as "beautiful" as

they discussed their weight, skin tone, and overall self- perspective. This came as an

overall shift from the internalization of the negative comments that they would receive

from family members. Although, the research participant would hear negative comments

regarding their skin tone, the research participant was able to balance the negative

comments with the positive comments that they received in order to develop an overall

positive sense of self. This research participant brought into perspective other erroneous variables such as weight as we consider the many influences that can effect one's self image and sense of self.

Psychological Distress: Early Shame and Sadness

Research participants expressed a current sense of self-acceptance as they have matured and had various life experiences that led them to realize and achieve self-acceptance. This is consistent with past research conducted by Seaton, Scottham, & Sellers (2006) which indicated that advanced racial identity correlated with higher levels of psychological well-being. There was an overwhelming consensus of the realization of positive attributes despite the negative connotations that were associated with their skin tone. Research participants described early experience of self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy as they detailed their personal experiences (which can be found in other responses) throughout the interviews, however, this began to shift into self-acceptance statements as research participant's discussed their present day emotional stances. Past ridicule from family members and from non- African Americans fueled feelings of sadness and inadequacy which shaped the narrative of self-hate among participants. However, there appeared to be both a verbal and physical reaction to how research participants viewed themselves presently as evidenced by strong, positive vocabulary as well as positive body language and smiles. The APA (2013) does define depression as feelings of sadness and emptiness an given the long standing of race related issues within the United States it is understandable that African Americans would have a tendency to experience anxiety and fear surrounding how they will be perceived within society.

Perhaps this shift in feelings of shame and sadness concerning one's skin tone shifted among research participants due to present day social movements such as "My Black Is Beautiful" which introduced normalcy to the African American community with regards to skin tone and hair texture.

Research participants described current feelings of empowerment in their skin tone. Further, research participants expressed the role of religion/faith in their ability to accept themselves for who they were despite their skin tone, despite how others treated them, and also despite how the world projects a European standard of beauty. One research participant described being ridiculed by a family member who made up a song picking on their dark skin tone and also their medical condition. The research participant described being hurt by this experience, feeling awkward, and even posing the question to themselves "Is there something wrong with me?" Another research participant expressed their struggles during high school and often being overlooked for dating opportunities due to their light skin tone. This research participant expressed the idea that potential daters would comment that they talked and look too much like a Caucasian. During this period in life the research participant disclosed that this caused them to develop a complex about themselves and really feel bad about their look. However, in many of these instances, research participants stated that as they have become older the opinions of others did not matter and they were finally happy with who they were.

Reflections of Researcher's Experience

I approached this study as a self-identified African American female counselor who has one young son and who is married. When rating my skin tone on the Fitzpatrick

Scale, my skin tone would be rated as Skin Type III. I come from a family representative of a variety of skin tones ranging from very dark to very light. I attending both a predominately White University and also a historically Black University. This has assisted in having a better understanding of the experience and narrative an African American woman exposed to both learning environments might undertake.. I've been a Master's level counselor for approximately eight years and I have worked with a variety of populations of individuals. Further, personal affiliations with a variety of organizations have awarded the opportunity to witness and hear personal accounts from other African Americans regarding their experiences with colorism.

Hearing these experiences from colleagues, friends, and family members sparked an interest in further exploration of colorism, particularly, the origins of colorist mindsets of African Americans today. What was most alarming was a conversation that a youth in my family presented regarding skin tone some years ago. My nephew, perhaps 8 years old at the time, made a comment about dark-skinned girls being ugly solely because they were dark. As I pondered his statement, curiosity began to arise regarding where his stance regarding skin tone had emerged. I further pondered the fact that he was already color conscious not only concerning others but perhaps maybe even himself. It caused me to self-reflect and consider my own awareness and thoughts about skin tone and when this awareness had emerged. As I reflected I began to realize that at an early age I too equated beauty to lighter-skin. As I dug through the files of my mind I was unable to pinpoint the origin of where colorism was introduced to me. It almost felt as if the colorist divide, the awareness of my skin tone, and the awareness of skin tone of others

had been preprogrammed into my brain; as if it was a core component of my DNA this awareness, emphasis, and hierarchical trend of colorism. I was even harder for me to comprehend that my young nephew had begun to see color as a major factor as he viewed his African American female cohorts.

Interviewing these 10 research participants was an eye opening experience and it took some time to process the wealth of responses that were offered. The depth of their lived experiences accompanied by the expression of being hurt, being ostracized, and finally climaxing to experiencing self-love was a remarkable experience to have witnessed and participated in. The men and women who participated in the research study were remarkable individuals and were mutually interested in changing the narrative within the African American community concerning colorism. The lived experiences- the encounters that they have exposed to on a daily basis regarding treatment, perception of self, and their place within society is a testament to their strength and resiliency. It is believed that after participating in the research study their level of engagement in affairs concerning the African American community was magnified. This can be stated given the level of engagement in the research study and the positive comments concerning the research topic that many of the research participants relayed to the researcher upon completion of the study.

Prior to the research study beginning, I was very careful in examining any possible biases that could interfere with the results of the study. As an African American researching the lived experiences and challenges of other African Americans allowed me to be mindful to use objectivity throughout the study. If I displayed any bias, especially in

relation to being a self-identified African American who rated herself as having skin type

III, upon reflection I did not identify any biases. I am hopeful that my effect on the

participants was positive as I attempted to make everyone feel comfortable. As a

counselor I was sensitive to the nature of the research topic and the responses that would

be offered by the research participants. As previously mentioned, it was expressed that

the research topic was interesting to the research participant and invited interest in

changing the narrative within the African American community regarding colorism.

       Conducting this research study has added a greater level of respect and

understanding of the issues that African Americans face when considering colorism. It

has also spoken to the magnitude of the power of resiliency accompanied by self-love and

support that assist greatly in dealing with the spoken and unspoken challenges that

African Americans face. These challenges from those within one's macrosystem and

mesosystem.

Implications for Social Change

       This study illustrates that the origins of skin tone awareness within the African

American community which have ties to one's familial system and also to those outside

of the family network. This research study also illustrates how colorism and skin tone

have and continue to influence the interactions of African Americans among other

African Americans. Further, it illustrates the implications that skin tone can impart upon

self-worth and feelings of worthlessness and sadness. This is important information for

the field of psychology, particularly for therapists working with African Americans.

Having a better understanding of the lived experience of African Americans can increase

cultural competence and possibly eliminate the proportions of misdiagnosis within this population. Further, research involving African Americans within the field of psychology is valuable as there is an underrepresentation of this population within the research literature itself.

When considering the promotion of positive social change, this research study brings awareness of the continued psychological distress that African Americans experience as a result of colorism, however, it also offers a lens in viewing the various coping mechanisms and the degree of resiliency that African Americans have imparted within themselves to remain standing despite the in-group and out-group challenges that they have faced. Further, the awareness of the continuation of colorism can invite programs and initiatives aimed at providing supportive resources to those who have and continue to experience colorism. Here, a greater understanding of how stressors that are unfamiliar to the majority population can be explained and valued as to not devalue the experiences specific to African Americans.

Not only helpful to the therapist but this research study could also prove helpful to laypersons within the African American community. Community agencies and organizations aimed at promoting self-esteem and self-worth initiatives to young girls will be able to address the prevalence of colorism while also offering workshops, seminars, and self-help materials to assist with coping better with issues related to colorism. Thus the opportunity for teaching, learning, advocacy for justice, and spotlighting taboo topics is introduced to evoke positive change to improve the quality of life of those most affected by colorism.

Limitations

The first limitation pertaining to this research study on the exploration of the developmental awareness of color consciousness, the influence of skin tone on in-group interactions among African Americans, perceptions of self-esteem based on skin tone, and experiences with psychological distress as dictated by one's skin tone was the reliance upon self-reported experiences from the research participants. Due to the nature of self-report, there was an opportunity for research participants to either over or under report their experiences. Further, self-report relies upon the research participant accurately recalling details of experiences. Recalling specific experiences could prove bothersome, tedious, and prone for inaccurate reports.

Recommendations for Actions

Several actions can be taken to disseminate the information shared in this research study. The first recommendation for action is to provide families and educational settings with the information gleaned from this research study since they would be most likely to benefit from understanding the developmental awareness of color consciousness, the influence of skin tone on in-group interactions among African Americans, perceptions of self-esteem based on skin tone, and experiences with psychological distress as dictated by one's skin tone. This can be best performed by having a journal article or guided reading materials catered specifically to the populations involved. Additionally, media outlets and socially driven causes similar to "My Black Is Beautiful" can be implemented into school settings in additional to community organizations aimed at servicing families.

A second recommendation for action would be to have therapists, counselors, and other mental health professionals host seminars to educate the community at large concerning colorism and the psychological effects that it can impose on those most affected by it. By educating the community at large laypersons are better able to identify when colorist behaviors are prevalent and displayed to themselves and others around them. A final recommendation of action would be to educate African American families concerning the behaviors and home discussion concerning skin tone. Having an open avenue to express concerns regarding skin tone and colorism can assist in changing the narrative and role that the family plays in color consciousness.

The current research study evaluating the origins of skin tone awareness among African Americans is only the beginning of the research that needs to be conducted to better understand the lived experiences of African Americans when considering the role that skin tone plays in daily interactions. An additional study that could be conducted could explore exclusively the role of the family in perpetuating colorism. Identification of the key family members who introduce these colorist mindsets and why they reintroduce these ideas to newer generations can prove beneficial to better understanding this phenomenon. Another study that can be conducted is how African Americans cope with issues related to colorism to provide insight on how this prolonged issues is managed among this population. One more future study could be the role that media outlets play in perpetuating colorism and how educational materials, forums, and pro-Black movements can ultimately eliminate issues related to colorism.

Summary

Colorism affects African Americans despite age, gender, and skin tone. The origins of this awareness of skin tone and the implications that it can have on the ability to confidently interact with other African Americans shapes the lens in which many African Americans view themselves within a social context. Additionally, this shapes how many African Americans perceive their worth, value, and acceptance within society as a whole. Findings from this research study identified the family unit, particularly grandparents and also interactions with children outside of the family unit as the contributing source of early awareness of skin tone. Further, this research study uncovered the ongoing debate on placing value upon lighter skin tones while devaluing darker skin tones, a shift towards a pro-Black stance when considering the present day viewpoints of the research participants included in this research study, and finally a move towards self-acceptance despite any negative connotations that were introduced about one's skin tone early in life.

Another unique finding was the regional differences discussed in skin tone importance from research participants who had relocated from a northern state into a southern state. Many participants reported that they really noticed a shift in skin tone importance having relocated to the South as the narrative among their cohorts began to change. Further, research participants were able to discuss the influence of winter months and summer months when considering variations in skin tone among African Americans. Another major finding from this research study involved the discrepancy among the self-reported skin tone of two research participants and the perceived skin tone that the

researcher noted. Findings from this study confirmed findings from previous studies which explored the prevalence, nature, and extent of color consciousness among African Americans.

Of the ten research participants interviewed for this research study all had experienced colorism either in a positive or negative manner. Whether on the receiving end of acceptance or the receiving end of rejection, each research participant acknowledged feelings related to hurt, disappointment, understanding, and finally acceptance of who they were. Another major finding was the ability of the research participant into a pro-Black stance and a place of self-acceptance as they became older. This is indicative of the resilient nature of African Americans and perhaps a gradual shift from the European standard of beauty among this population.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Semistructured Interview Protocol

Utilizing an open-ended question protocol, the researcher will elicit responses from the research participant based on the research questions. The researcher will expand upon these questions to welcome further exploration and elaboration of responses.

Research Question	Subquestion(s)	Further Exploration
RQ1- How do African Americans describe their origins of awareness of skin tone and its importance to their overall quality of life?	IQ1- Can you tell me when you first became aware of your skin tone? IQ2: Can you describe a time in your life when others made comments about your skin tone?	IQ1- In what ways has this impacted you? IQ2: Can you describe how those comments about your skin tone made you feel?
RQ2- How do African Americans describe their interactions with other African Americans in consideration to their skin tone?	IQ1- When you are around other African Americans, how conscious are you of your skin tone? 1Q2- Describe times when you felt included or excluded from other African Americans.	IQ1- In what ways have you avoided or actively engaged yourself into social activities with other African Americans? IQ2- How were you able to reconcile why you were included or excluded?
RQ3- How do African Americans describe their self-esteem in consideration to their skin tone	IQ1-Can you tell me what word best describes your skin tone?	IQ2- How do you feel about that descriptive word that best describes your skin tone?

RQ4- How do African Americans describe their experiences with psychological distress based on their skin tone?

IQ1: Has there ever been a time when you felt proud of your skin tone?

IQ2: Has there ever been a time that you were ashamed of your skin tone?

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed!

You are invited to participant in a research study

interested in exploring skin-tone among African Americans.

Criteria:

- Must be self-identified as African American, Black, Dominican, Haitian, so forth.

- Must be aged 18 or older

Appendix C: Fitzpatrick Scale

The Fitzpatrick Scale

TYPE I	TYPE II	TYPE III	TYPE IV	TYPE V	TYPE VI
Light, pale white	White, fair	Medium, white to olive	Olive, moderate brown	Brown, dark brown	Black, very dark brown to black
Always burns, never tans	Usually burns, tans with difficulty	Sometimes mild burn, gradually tans to olive	Rarely burns, tans with ease to a moderate brown	Very rarely burns, tans very easily	Never burns, tans very easily, deeply pigmented

SKIN COLOR INDEX

Skin type I	Skin type II	Skin type III	Skin type IV	Skin type V	Skin type VI