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African American Men's Perceptions of Colorism

Naeemah A. Young-Jones
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Naeemah Young

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Review Committee
Dr. Nina Nabors, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Susana Verdinelli, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Brian Ragsdale, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

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BS, Old Dominion University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Colorism bias related to skin complexion is a persistent phenomenon within the African American community and often shapes the family dynamics and results in noteworthy adverse psychosocial impacts for African Americans. Researchers have examined colorism—or the preference for lighter skin over darker skin—primarily as it pertained to women, but little research existed regarding men. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American men with respect to their attitudes toward skin complexion and how those attitudes inform their dating habits and self-esteem. Understanding how this group of men managed living this phenomenon addressed the gap in literature. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 African American men to foster better understanding of their experiences. Using Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self and Goffman's theory of stigma to guide data interpretation, the Moustakas data analysis method led to themes of colorism not being an issue in self-perception, dating, and self-esteem. Among these 3 themes, there are 5 subthemes. Each of these themes were primary to precisely depicting the participants' perspectives pertaining to the phenomenon. These themes demonstrate the complicated influence of colorism on important aspects of life for African American men. These men noted the negative messages received about their skin color but that it did not affect their self-esteem or lead to a preference for light skin. In fact, the participants expressed their preference for medium- and dark-skinned women when dating. Implications for positive social change include helping clinicians and society hold a more nuanced view of the role of colorism in understanding this marginalized group of men.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this final achievement in my formal education to my son, Ramone Jones, Jr., and my mother, Michelle Young. It has been a rocky road, yet they still gave me words of encouragement to not quit. They have sustained me, inspired me, motivated me, and challenged me. The final dedication is to the rest of my family members who've supported this goal.

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I would like to give my praise to my Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. Without much prayer and belief, I would not have made it this far. This has been the longest phenomenal experience, but through it all, I still did not give up. I was challenged on many occasions, but my faith and strength were restored.

I am grateful for this experience, and from the bottom of my heart, I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee chairperson Dr. Nina Nabors. She has given me the best guidance through this process. She pushed me in ways that helped me believe in me. She restored my faith when I felt like I was done with the process. She knew my process was not easy when she came on my committee, but not once has she given up on me. She listened to me vent and cry about things I had no control over but still helped me find my confidence. She told me to put on my big girl hat and finish this process. For that I am grateful, and I cannot thank Dr. Nabors enough.

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To my mentor, who I have met through Facebook in a group that has checked on me daily and made sure I got through this process and stayed on track, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for helping to fix my crown when needed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Skin complexion is an ingrained issue in the African American community (Mathew & Johnson, 2015). African Americans are judged based on the color of their skin and then categorized in groups according to lighter skin or darker skin (Monk, 2015). While skin color varies within the African American community, skin colors are typically generalized into two categories: light skinned and dark skinned. Researchers have pointed out that the phenomenon of *colorism* continues to cause division within the African American cultural group African Americans overcoming many racial barriers (Dunn, Stocker, & Plomin, 1990; Neal & Wilson, 1989; Wilder & Cain, 2011).

Intra racism is prevalent within the African American community. African American men and women tend to divide themselves based on whether they are light skinned or dark skinned (Landor, 2012). While researchers have examined African American women's perceptions of skin complexion and its impact on self-esteem, self-image, and certain habits, like skin bleaching (Mathew, 2013), there has been limited research exploring perceptions of skin complexion among African American men. African American men do not display self-awareness of feelings or emotions compared to women (Landor et al., 2013). This study was needed to fully understand if African American men have self-awareness of emotions and feelings based on the complexion of their skin. This study highlighted how colorism is still an issue in the African American community (Burke, 2008). In this study, I explored the social implications of colorism on African American men, specifically focusing on how colorism impacts their choice of

dating partner and their self-esteem. The purpose of this proposed study was to explore the perception of colorism and how colorism relates to skin complexion, dating habits, and self-esteem in African American men.

Background

Researchers have shown that skin tone biases are socially learned and that perceptions of skin tone can impact perceived self-efficacy of African Americans (Banks, 2010). There is a connection between dark skin and being perceived as unintelligent and violent (Banks, 2010). There have been perceptions that others perceive lighter skin as preferential (Lige, Peteet, & Brown, 2016). According to Baumann (2008), people within their culture, regardless of race, tend to have a sense of culturally ideal facial and body features. Mathews and Johnson (2015) explored the complexity of skin tone among African American women's life outcomes based on the perception and attitudes of light- or dark-skinned complexions. Brown (2009) found that skin tone is a significant factor in African American's socioeconomic status and showed that this bias affects both personal and workplace relationships. Hill (2002) found that half of the respondents in their study believed that skin tone does shape the outcome of African Americans' socioeconomic status. Hunter (2002) found that U.S. culture tends to place a higher value on light skin than on dark skin.

The term *colorism* refers to the preference for a certain skin tone over another. For this study, colorism refers to the preference for lighter skin over darker skin in U.S. culture and among African Americans (Burke, 2008). Layng (2006) argued that skin tone holds considerable importance within the Black community. Lindberg-Seyersted (1992)

pointed out that the descriptions of Black women and Black women's features include crinkly hair, flat noses, and thick lips. Nassar-McMillan, McFall-Roberts, Flowers, and Garrett (2006) found that negative perceptions of African Americans based on their skin tone have been ongoing since U.S. slavery. According to researchers, colorism influences aspects of life (Gasman & Abiola, 2016; Sanchez, Liu, & Goins, 2011). Colorism has an impact on education; individuals with lighter complexions correlate with higher education levels (Gasman & Abiola, 2016). Colorism also influences employment. African Americans with lighter complexions are offered different positions compared to African Americans with darker complexions (Sanchez et al., 2011). In addition, relationships are impacted by colorism in African American culture based on the idea that African American men prefer "light, bright and sometimes White" partners over those who are darker skinned (Mathews & Johnson, 2015, p. 251; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1993, p. 107).

Problem Statement

Skin tone has been a significant issue within the African American community. Breland (1998) found that African American skin tone affects assumptions regarding competency. The National Survey of Black Americans explored Black Americans' skin color and socioeconomic status with evidence from 1950–1980 indicating it continues to have an impact on Black lives (Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Thompson & Keith, 2001). Researchers have addressed the relationship between skin color preference and dating habits (Banks, 2010; Breland, 1998), but none has directly focused on the role of skin color with respect to dating habits among African American men. Banks (2010) explored

the relationship of skin tone bias to self-efficacy among African American students, noting that the bias was socially learned. Colorism continues to be a relevant topic of study because of its capacity to stratify people within the African American culture. The historical influence illustrates the preference for light-complexioned African Americans (Crivens, 2000). Studies have been conducted that looked at colorism as it relates to body image for African American women. Uzogara et al. (2014) researched the impact of gender on colorism. The associations of skin complexions affect both men and women of African American descent; however, it has been suggested that these biases lead to greater harm for African American women (Hill, 2002). Research has specified that skin complexion affects women in the sectors of beauty ideals, partner selection, and social and socioeconomic status (Brown et al., 2003).

Skin complexion plays a major role in the development of a person's self-esteem. According to Goffman (1983), the stigma of skin complexion can lead to feelings of shame, blame, and hopelessness. Coard, Breland, and Raskin (2001) found an interaction between skin color satisfaction and self-esteem. Dark-skinned male participants in their study had lower self-esteem but were more satisfied with their skin color compared to Black men with light skin. Colorism is common in the African American community, especially related to African American women (Hall, 2017). Colorism has led some dark-skinned women to bleach their skin to make it lighter to feel more accepted in society and the dating world (Choma & Prusaczyk, 2018). Because there is minimal research available on colorism's effects on African American men, this research addressed how African American men perceive colorism and how they relate colorism to selecting

dating partners and their self-esteem. Hill (2002) used the term *gendered colorism* to discuss the effect of colorism on African American women versus African American men. African American men's psyche has gauged their feelings in dating African American women that had to be at least light, if not White (Mathews & Johnson, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

In this study I explored the lived experiences of African American men as they relate to their perceptions of colorism and its influence on dating habits and self-esteem. For this study, I used a phenomenological design to better understand intra racism in African American men and to address the gap in the literature. No previous studies have examined African American men's perceptions and attitudes. Therefore, I designed the present study to explore the gap in the literature.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the proposed study:

RQ1: How do African American men perceive the phenomenon of colorism?

Subquestion 1. How do African American men relate their dating habits to colorism?

Subquestion 2. How do African American men relate their self-esteem to colorism?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical frameworks for this study was Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self and Goffman's theory of stigma. Charles Horton Cooley believed personal growth comes from the connection between the individual and society and that the two

must be understood in relationship to each other. Cooley first used the term *looking-glass self* in 1902 in *Human Nature and the Society Order*. The term *looking-glass self* refers to the way people shape their self-concepts based on their understanding of how others perceive them. Cooley argued that the view of ourselves comes from the contemplation of personal qualities and our impression of how we are perceived by others; his concept of the looking-glass self will aid in the understanding of African American men's self-perception based on colorism.

Erving Goffman (1963) recognized different categorizations related to experiencing and feeling related to stigma and social organization, which he called *framing*. Goffman theorized that people develop stigmas based on personal experiences, particularly personal experiences where they felt marginalized, shamed, or distressed. Goffman's theory of stigma helped frame the way negative attitudes toward darker skin can affect personal self-esteem by informing research questions that draw out an internalized symbolic ideology in the participants.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative methodology was best suited to explore this study's research questions. I employed a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of African American men regarding social acceptance based on skin tone. I conducted interviews with African American men, ages 18 and over, using questions on themes of colorism, self-esteem, and dating preference. The purpose of my qualitative research interviews was to review in-depth lived experiences of African American men's

perceptions based on skin tone (Roysircar, Thompson, & Boudreau, 2017). For this study, I used semi structured interviews to gather data to address my research questions.

I obtained the perspectives of the participants by conducting individual interviews. The individual interview format provided a secured milieu for each participant to share his personally lived experiences with this phenomenon. The data analysis consisted of verbatim transcriptions of the audio recording of each interview. The analysis process commenced after the completion of all interviews; this allowed for themes to be identified, helping categorize each interview. I searched through the transcribed interviews for common themes that represent the essence of the experiences of the participants (See Moustakas, 1994).

The analyzed data have helped to explain the growing phenomenon of African American men and their feelings of social acceptance based on skin tone. Sharing the stories of these African American men will aid in informing society how African Americans perceive skin tone's impact on dating and self-esteem.

Definitions

The following terms are used throughout this study:

Colorism: Refers to the preference for a certain skin tone over another. For this study, colorism will refer to the preference for lighter skin over darker skin in U.S. culture as well as among African Americans (Burke, 2008)

Skin tone or skin complexion: The shade of a person's skin color, ranging from very light to very dark. Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, and Gocial (2005) referred to *skin tone* as one's lightness or darkness of skin.

Intra-racism: Racist attitudes within a racial or ethnic group (Harvey, Tennial, & Banks, 2017).

Self-esteem: An individual evaluation of oneself based on worth and abilities, such as liking yourself (Thompson, 2001).

Assumptions

The primary assumptions for this research study came from the nature of the information being studied and the information obtained from the interviews. I assumed that the African American men I interviewed would be sincere, open, and honest about their daily experiences with the phenomenon of colorism during the interviewing process. I also assumed that, as the researcher, I would act as a facilitator for the research during the interview process.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was delimited to African American men in the mid-Atlantic region. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), the Black and African American population in this region is 50.5%. Therefore, this study was appropriately delimited to African American men in the Southeastern region of the United States. Although this study was limited to the mid-Atlantic region in the United States, the high population of African American men in the Central Virginia region of the United States provides participants that will range in age, economic status, societal and cultural experiences providing more meaningful data.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was the potential challenge of conducting research with African American men. Historically, there has been cultural mistrust of research within the African American community; this may influence potential participants' willingness to participate. Another limitation of this study was that not every participant would feel comfortable sharing his personal experiences with this phenomenon due to social desirability bias (See Krumpal, 2013). Researcher bias is another important limitation to consider. I have personal experience with this phenomenon because I am an African American woman. A lack of bracketing on my part could result in responses (see LaBanca, 2011) that possibly skew the data.

Significance

In this study, I sought to provide a better understanding of intra group racism associated with African American men's attitudes regarding skin complexion. African American men are prone to stigmatizing skin complexion, which impacts decisions about dating habits, self-esteem, and body image (Coard et al., 2001). This research was built on Coard et al.'s findings, contributing to the gap in the literature regarding African American men's perceptions of and attitudes about skin color and dating. There are several implications for positive social change associated with this study. Currently, African American men tend to hide their feelings and do not speak out about their skin complexion or romantic relationships (Hall, Livingston, Henderson, Fisher, & Hines, 2007). This study may help African American couples that struggle with expressing their feelings and concerns. This research might also assist therapists working with African

American men who have self-esteem issues. Research has shown that self-esteem can be lower when African American men are dissatisfied with their skin complexion (Coard et al., 2001). Presenting and publishing the data of this study will provide more current and in-depth knowledge that will inform those who study and support African American men. The findings of this study support and promote positive social change in the community, helping cultivate a community that is more aware and considerate of the needs of African American men who struggle with self-esteem and dating.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of African American men and their perceptions of and attitudes toward the relationship between skin tone and self-esteem and dating. Among African American men, self-esteem tends to be lower due to the complexion of their skin (Coard et al., 2001). African American men having lower self-esteem based on skin tone has made it more difficult for them to find a suitable dating mate (Coard et al., 2001). Given the factors listed above, it makes it more difficult for African American men to meet social norms and expectations with dating and self-esteem.

In this study, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of African American men regarding their attitudes toward skin complexion and dating and self-esteem within the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Phenomenology was selected because it is used to explore the lived experiences of participants (Moustakas, 2004). The mid-Atlantic region in the United States was

selected because, as mentioned above, there is a higher concentration of African

American men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

In this chapter, the phenomenon of African American men's attitudes toward skin

complexion as it relates to dating and self-esteem was discussed. Statistics from the U.S.

Census Bureau were discussed based on the region selected. Also in this chapter, I

reviewed literature detailing data, statistics, and comparison of the region's economic

status and population of African American men. This information supports the

significance of the study. Moreover, the research problem, purpose, and nature of this

study were clearly stated. In Chapter 2, a detailed literature review of the problem and the

conceptual framework for the study will be discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The phenomenon of colorism has a long history in the United States. Though colorism among African Americans has its roots in American slavery, it remains a major phenomenon in the 21st century. For many, discrimination based on skin color remains a legacy of slavery and has led to interracial discrimination that continues to affect descendants of slaves. For instance, African American dark-skinned women receive less favorable treatment than light-skinned women (Matthew, 2013). This prejudice influences dating and relationship practices among African Americans. In this study, I will explore the relationship between self-esteem and colorism and specifically how colorism influences partner selection among African American men.

The literature on colorism and its impact on relationship practices is limited (Hunter, 2002). There is a dearth of literature on the attitudes and perceptions of African American men regarding their skin complexion. Although women are more likely to be willing to communicate how they feel about their complexion, men have historically remained silent in discussions about self-esteem and preferential treatment resulting from different skin tones (Turner, 2013). Despite the lack of studies on men's feelings about complexion, certain observations about their attitudes, self-esteem, and experiences can be derived from their dating practices and forms of self-identification. Many African American men base their dating choices on the skin complexion of potential partners to aid their social status (Matthew 2013). Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, and Belgrave (2015) found that there were no significant differences between light skin and dark skin among individuals who associated it with skin color satisfaction. The following review will

synthesize the literature on the role of complexion in choosing a dating mate within the African American population.

Literature Review Search Strategies

For this study, I conducted the literature search using the following Walden University Research Center multidisciplinary databases: Academic Search Complete, Expanded Academic ASAP, ProQuest Central, Science Direct, Google Scholar, Search, and African American Research Starter Literature. The search terms used to locate relevant literature were *skin tone, African Americans, men/males, females/women, colorism, Black, Black Americans, Black males, Black men, attitude, self-esteem, social norms,* and *dating among African Americans*.

This chapter will include a review of the literature on perceptions of skin complexion among African Americans, including the history of colorism and how it is related to the history of American slavery, definitions of colorism, perceptions of skin complexion, and variables associated with colorism such as self-esteem and social norms. This chapter will also include a review of 21st-century dating practices, preferences, and attitudes of African American men and women, as well as an exploration of the relationship between skin complexion and self-esteem in African American men aged 18 and over. Because there is so little current research on colorism, self-esteem, and perceptions of skin tone in African American men, I have relied on research on the history of slavery studies that focus on the relationship between skin complexion and self-esteem in African American women where African American men are tangentially

mentioned. This chapter will also include a discussion of the study's theoretical

framework, arguments against colorism, and a summary of colorism.

Theoretical Framework

The first theoretical framework for this study was Cooley's (1902) looking-glass

self theory. Cooley, a sociologist, wanted to understand group and social behaviors based

on social interactions. Cooley first used the term *looking-glass self* in 1902 to refer to the

idea that people shape their self-concepts based on their understanding of how others

perceive them. Cooley believed a person's self-growth results from connection to society

and individual identity is based on that individual's relationships. Cooley argued that the

looking-glass self is shaped by how society views a person and not how that person views

themselves. Cooley explained the way the looking-glass self plays out in the primary

group (family) interactions by breaking it into three phases. In the first phase, individuals

imagine how they appear to others, but may not be correct, as this self-image is based on

an assumption. In the second phase, individuals imagine how others judge them based on

appearance. In the third phase, individuals shift their behavior based on how they

perceive other people feel about or judge them (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983).

Cooley's (1902) argument is based on the concept of reflected self-images formed

by other people in one's close environment through communication and interaction. I

chose the looking-glass self theory as a theoretical framework for this study because the

study of colorism in African American culture is also a study of self-concept based on

how others perceive skin color. Other researchers exploring the role of skin color have

used the looking-glass self theory. For example, Hochschild (2007) explained that higher

values (i.e., privileges and socioeconomic status) are more often associated with light skin complexion than dark skin complexion. Mathew (2013) used the looking-glass self theory to explore skin complexion and stigma among African American men. Mathew (2013) used Cooley's theory to explore how individuals internalize responses from others and then appropriate those signs as rational. For instance, if a woman accepts that others think of her as ugly, she is likely to acknowledge this as an objective reality (Mathew, 2013).

The second theoretical framework for this study will be Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma. Goffman identified different categorizations of experiencing and feeling related to stigma and social organization (framing). Stigmatized people (i.e., people who are considered *abnormal*) often feel they must change to fit into society (Goffman, 1963). Goffman's theory of stigma can help illuminate the relationship between negative attitudes toward darker skin and the self-esteem of dark-skinned people. Goffman identified three main types of stigma: (a) stigma associated with mental illness; (b) stigma associated with physical deformation; and (c) stigma attached to identification with a particular race, ethnicity, ideology, or religion. Harvey et al. (2005) researched the effect of skin-tone stigma on dark-complexioned African American women. Mathew (2013) found that feelings of shame or distress resulted from the stigma against dark-complexioned African American skin. Davis's (2001) findings corroborate Mathew's, showing that African American women mask their true image with make-up in order to better match the idealized self they have absorbed through society's stigmatization of darker skin. Thus, Goffman's theory of stigma can be used to explain

the internalized symbolic ideology that light skin is better than dark skin. Because U.S. society sees a dark complexion as subordinate to a lighter one, African Americans absorb this view as well.

<center>**Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts**</center>

History of Colorism

Colorism in its pure form is discrimination based on skin color (Hunter, 2013). The term *colorism* was coined by Alice Walker, who defined it as "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" (Walker, 1983, p. i). Hunter (2005) defined colorism as "the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people over their dark-skinned counterparts" (p. 237). For the purposes of this study, the term *colorism* will be used to describe the preference for African American light skin complexion over African American dark skin complexion among African Americans. Skin color is just one of many features that are the target of African American in-group discrimination; others include hair texture, lips size, eye color, and body tone (Hill, 2002). However, the stratification of groups based on skin tone or other features is widely understood to be merely a race-based social construction not based on biology (Maddox, 2004). *Color line* is a term used in relation to racial segregation in the United States after slavery ended. Maddox and Gray (2002) explained that the phrase *color line* is another allegory for outlining the social divisions cultivated by ideas of White superiority. Such divisions have created interracial attitudes that benefit lighter complexions over darker complexions. The distinguishing factor of colorism is that it is interracial discrimination among African Americans. The African American community

has animosity among its members based on the complexion of their skin (Maddox &

Gray, 2002; Wade & Bielitz, 2005). Brown (2004) argued that both African American

men and women have color hierarchies and view people with dark complexions

negatively. This subsection will illustrate the term's origin during slavery, its impact after

slavery, and its current effects in the 21st century.

Colorism during American slavery. Current attitudes regarding skin tone,

among African Americans, and in American society more broadly, can be directly traced

to African enslavement. Rape was a primary tool of physical and psychological

oppression used by slaveholders. Although African women were perceived to be

"animalistic" and coitus with any member of the African population was considered

bestiality (Russel1 et al., 1993), slave owners used forced sexual relations to exert power

over enslaved women and their husbands (Hall, 1992). The systematic rape of slave

women over generations resulted in enslaved people with a wide variety of skin shades

(Hall, 1992).

The use of rape as a tool of oppression, as well as the resulting practice of

privileging lighter-skinned slaves over darker-skinned slaves, was not merely a side

effect of the brutality of slavery. Instead, it was an overt practice discussed and written

about in great detail by White slaveholders. In 1712, Willie Lynch, a British slave owner

in the West Indies, was invited to the colony of Virginia to teach his methods of "making

a slave" to slave owners (Walker & Thomas, 2016). Lynch recorded these methods in a

letter entitled "The Making of a Slave," which gave step-by-step instructions on

controlling African slaves. In the letter, Lynch recommended various methods of

fostering animosity and creating division in slave communities to preserve power, suggesting that division weakened bonds between slaves and kept them manageable as laborers. One such method he suggested was to separate slaves based on skin tone, arguing that darker-complexioned slaves were better suited to fieldwork, whereas slaves with a lighter complexion could be permitted to work in the house (Lynch, 2008). Woman slaves were also privileged based on hair texture, facial features, body structure—the more European their appearance, the better their treatment and the more likely they were to do housework rather than field work (Brown et al., 2003). While still enslaved, slaves who worked in the plantation houses received less physical and emotional abuse, lived longer, and were generally looked upon as closer to the slave-owning family, often because they were actually related to the slave master (Brown et al., 2003). Breland et al. (1998) explained that this preferential treatment of light-skinned slaves did, in fact, create animosity in slave communities. Over time, the privilege of slaves with lighter skin over those with darker skin resulted in in-group bias among enslaved people.

"White supremacy ideology" was used during slavery to justify the system of slavery by actively associating African origin or blackness with shame, unpleasantness, and inferiority (Hill, 2002). Hill argued, in this racialized context, phenotype came to be the preeminent indicator of social standing and moral character: physical traits such as skin color, eye color, hair texture, nose shape, and lip prominence became powerfully loaded symbols of beauty, merit, and prestige. (pp. 77-78). Hall (2008) pointed out that mulattos, a derogatory term used to refer to mixed-race slaves or descendants of slaves

with lighter skin, often received special advantages from slave owners because of their light complexion. Pearson-Trammell (2010) also indicated that biracial children of slaves were considered part of an upper class within the slave community. Lighter-skinned slaves were more likely to acquire education from the slave owners and to be authorized to hold personal possessions (Mathew, 2013). Thus, lighter-skinned came to be associated not just with physical and emotional comfort, but also with socioeconomic and class benefits (Pearson-Trammell, 2010). Darker-skinned meant fewer social, political, economic, and educational privileges (Russell et al., 1993).

To summarize, colorism can be traced directly to the systemic oppression and subjugation of African slaves by White slaveholders in the 18th and 19th centuries. The creation of a class system among slaves, which privileged light skin and "European" features and denigrated dark skin and "African" features, remains a significant factor in intragroup prejudice within the African American community in the 21st century. Colorism remained a significant factor in African American culture even after the end of slavery and continues today.

Colorism Post-Slavery

The establishment of a color hierarchy based on skin tone by American slave-holders laid the groundwork for in-group discrimination based on skin color in African American culture long after the end of slavery. Russell et al., (1992) described the way in which African Americans continued to view themselves through the lens of skin tone privilege imposed on them over generations by White slaveholders: "After the civil war, light-skinned African Americans tried to distance themselves from their darker-skinned

brothers and sisters, forming exclusive civic and cultural organizations, fraternities, sororities, schools, and universities" (pp. 24-40). Hill (2002) further explained how, believing that refinement and emotional restraint were embodied in persons most resembling the dominant White population, these elite African American groups established color bars, such as the "brown bag test," to restrict admittance to fraternities, churches, and social clubs: persons darker than a brown paper bag were denied entrance. (p. 78)

Similar to the brown paper bag test, in the 1950s, some clubs in the Black community required members to have visible blue veins (Frazier, 1957). Russell et al. (1992) explained that admission to a blue vein society depended not on the family background but on skin color. "An applicant had to be fair enough for the spidery network of purplish veins at the wrist to be visible to a panel of expert judges" (p. 25). Both these practices show how engrained colorism was in African American culture, even after physical enslavement had ended.

Colorism and the Black Power Movement

These active and systemic ways of privileging lighter skin within the African American community continued through the 1950s. Then, in the early 1960s, Black activists started a movement to unite African Americans around a shared identity of Blackness. Black power movement was a turning point in how African Americans viewed dark skin, allowing Blacks to see themselves as one and to celebrate and find proud in dark skin (Joseph, 2009). The development was hailed by positive and proactive Black power members that went for helping Blacks accomplish full balance with Whites,

yet it was chided by others as an activist, now and then fierce group whose essential objective was to drive a wedge between Whites and Blacks (Joseph, 2009). In truth, the Black power development was a mind-boggling occasion that occurred when society and culture were being changed all through the United States, and its heritage mirrors that multifaceted nature (Kirk, 2016). The Black power movement was created to lift up Blackness. Neal (2008) explained how this attitude permeated popular culture at the time; for instance, the James Brown lyric "Say it loud; I'm Black and I'm proud" reflected the Black power movement's values of self-sufficiency and empowerment for African Americans of all skin tones.

Colorism in 20th and 21st Century Media

In spite of the Black power movement's uplifting of Blackness, a privilege for light-skinned African Americans persisted, and over the next 50 years, was reinforced by popular media. In movies and on TV, darker skin tone has generally been associated with negativity and unwontedness, whereas lighter skin tone is perceived as vibrant (Fears, 1998). Colorism is unmistakable when looking at pictures in the media of African Americans (Roberts et al., 2000). African American woman with light skin complexions and long hair are far more likely to be famous and successful (Neal & Wilson, 1989; Parrish, 1944; Pearson-Tramell, 2010). Vanessa Williams, a light-skinned woman, was the first African American to win the Miss America crown in 1983. Halle Berry, the first African American woman to win an Academy Award for Best Actress in 2002, also has very light skin. Historically, dark-skinned women were seldom highlighted as celebrities by the media and instead were usually cast in films and TV shows as negative roles such

as mammy, the matriarch, or welfare mother (Robert et al., 2000). Mathews (2013) found that light skin is still privileged and that society devalues dark skin tone, but individuals with a dark skin complexion reported they would not change the complexion of the skin if given the opportunity (53). This explains that dark-skinned complexion women are learning to accept themselves as being dark-skinned and learning to accept the criticism as well from within the media. More recently, the movie industry is beginning to showcase women more routinely with darker skin complexions such as Lupita Nyong'o and Danai Gurira in the hit movie Black Panther in 2018 and Viola Davis in both film and television.

African American artists have produced work that discusses colorism in the African American community overtly as well. For instance, in 1988, Spike Lee's film "School Daze'' highlighted issues of colorism and hair texture bias in the African American community. Producer Chris Rock has also created work pertaining to the texture of African Americans hair based on what is accepted and not accepted in society. Thus colorism has been a part of the mainstream discussion within the African American community for a period of years. It is unclear how that discussion has impacted self-esteem and other identity factors for African American men and women.

Impact of Colorism

In the 21st century, colorism continues to impact African Americans in a multitude of ways, including privileges in the work environment, socioeconomic status, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, education, self-esteem, and self-image. Research has even shown that people with lighter skin tone have better health (Klonoff &

Landrine, 2000). This is in part because lighter-skinned people are less likely to

experience racism, which means they have lower stress levels and are at a lower risk for

hypertension (Klonoff and Landrine, 2000). Hargrove (2016) found that darker skinned

men's allostatic loads (a stress indicator) were higher than those of women and lighter-

skinned men. Thompson and Keith (2001) also pointed out that lighter-skinned people

are less likely to work jobs that require physical labor, which they trace back to slavery

when lighter skin was associated with weakness. Fultz (2014) reported that people with

darker skin tone are twice as likely to be a machine operator or laborer, whereas people

with lighter skin tone are twice as likely to have a professional occupation (p. 17).

Privilege and Discrimination Based on Colorism (Behavioral Bias)

The 1980 National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) illustrated four waves of

data showing that lighter-skinned Black Americans have advantages over darker skin

Black Americans in the areas of education attainment, occupation attainment, and

characteristics for spouses (Keith & Herring, 1991; Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Gullickson,

2003). Hughes and Hertel (1990) examined quantitative data from the 1980 National

Survey of Black Americans (N = 2,107) and determined that lighter skin tones were

associated with having higher social status, less culture consciousness, and spouses from

a high socioeconomic status. Hughes and Hertel found that skin color has affected the

socioeconomic status that lighter skin was high of holding a better occupation than darker

skin tone (Black and White). These researchers showed that Black lives were affected

based on society advances associated with social and political levels (Hughes & Hertel,

1990; Thompson & Keith, 2001). Essentially, the survey showed a distinct privilege for

those with lighter skin. Privilege is defined as a special right granted to a particular group of people (Black & Stone, 2005). Additionally, Thompson and Keith (2001) examined data from the 1980 National Survey of Black Americans and found that skin color forecasted Black men reporting of self-efficacy and the ability to be effective within society. These findings suggested that though the effects of colorism for African American men may be different from women, men do not escape colorism altogether. Discrimination is also common based on skin complexion, even within the African American community (Uzogara et al., 2014).

"Don't play in the sun. You're going to have to get a light-skinned husband for the sake of your children as it is" (Glenn, 2009, p. 25). This type of comment stays with a child and can have a psychological impact on her self-image later (Fultz, 2014). Lynn (2002) found that African Americans with lighter skin had higher IQ scores and those with darker skin had lower IQ scores, and explained these results using Hill's (2000) theory of positive correlation of skin color and intelligence. Hill (2002) argued that because African Americans with lighter skin tone had higher social and material privileges before the civil war and experienced greater upward mobility after the end of slavery, those with lighter skin were more likely to view themselves as intelligent and perform well on IQ tests. Downward mobility, which was experienced by those with darker skin, resulted in limited resources, opportunities, and jobs (Hill, 2002, p. 375). More recently, this research about socioeconomic effects of colorism was not readily available in the exhaustive review of the literature reporting there were few studies on this issue. The most effective researcher who applied an updated, massive scale

investigation of responses from a national sample was Monk (2014). Monk used responses from native-born Black Americans (N = 3,570) to the National Survey of American Life from 2001 to 2003 was conducted to determine whether the conclusions from the National Survey of Black Americans in 1980 were nonetheless operative. Using OLS, logistic, and ordered logistic regression analyses, Monk found that skin tone became appreciably related to household income, occupational status, academic attainment, and spouses' instructional attainment and skin tone in this study. For occupational status, skin tone was related for the sample as an entire for Black men, but not for Black women. Therefore, Monk suggested that skin tone stratification remained an issue in the early 21st century. Moreover, the results had variations in reports of colorism based on gender, a common subject matter in the literature.

Stereotypes Based on Skin Color (Cognitive Bias)

Stereotypes related to colorism also have a significant impact on African American culture. Stereotypes can be considered negative or positive based on perception. Brown (1998) theorized that positive stereotypes are more likely to be related to lighter skin than darker skin. For instance, African Americans with lighter skin are viewed as more intelligent and attractive whereas darker skin is associated with negative stereotypes such as being dirty, ugly, and unintelligent. Brown et al. (2003) trace these stereotypes back to slavery, arguing that mixed-race slaves were bought at a higher price and presented as more desirable. Hunter (2007) also traces positive stereotypes of lightness to the fact that, post-slavery, light-skinned African Americans had better chances of becoming early business leaders, teachers, clergy, and artisans because their

complexions were closer to those of European Americans (p. 239). Those with lighter

skin, smoother hair texture, and more "European" facial features are still given better

opportunities and more privileges in the 21st century (Wilder, 2008). A study of 113

African American (46 men, 67 women) college and universities students with skin color

identified as light, medium, and dark, reported that darker skin had a noteworthy

connection between the impression of the skin and inclination for the skin color (Coard et

al., 2001). Moreover, this study used the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B) by

Parham and Helms (1981) and Skin Color Questionnaire (SCQ: Bond & cash, 1992) to

conduct this study in which RIAS-B showed no significant findings based on light,

medium, or dark skin color groups but a significant finding for all three using the SCQ

(Coard et al., 2001). Men and women both had a self-perception of skin color based on

their perception of how they perceive their skin (Coard et al., 2001). Therefore, the

researcher has suggested that perception versus reality based on skin color is an issue

with men and women. Hannon and DeFina (2014) researched an in-depth longitudinal

study based on discrimination claims using the Massey-Martin skin color guide for White

interviewers with a sample of 293 African Americans in 2012 between the ages 12 and

16 at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The researchers used cross-

tabulation based on the skin tone recoded into three groups, such as: "Light (1-3),

medium (4-7), and dark (8-10)" to help with the interviewer determine the participant

skin tone (Hill, 2002; Hannon and DeFina, 2014). Hannon and DeFina (2014) found that

interviewer's race tended to have a powerful effect on the assessment related to darker

skin tone. Therefore, the researchers indicated that racial hierarchy does occur in which lighter skin tone is considered dominant and an advantage over darker skin tone.

Colorism and Education

Research has shown that lighter-skinned African Americans are more likely to obtain an education, resulting in other societal privileges. According to Hughes and Hertel (1990), African Americans with lighter skin achieve "higher educational attainment, occupational prestige, personal income, and family income than those with darker skin" (p. 1109). Hunter (2007) indicated that teachers respond in a positive manner to students with lighter skin. Those with lighter skin tones are more likely to be encouraged by school counselors to go to college whereas those with darker skin are less likely to be encouraged to pursue higher education (Hunter, 2007). Again, this disparity can be directly traced to the practices of slavery, when African Americans with darker skin complexions had limited access of educational material while being in the field (Hunter, 2007), while lighter-skinned slaves worked in the house and had more access to educational material (Hunter, 2007). Documentaries such as "Dark Girl" (Berry, Berry, & Duke, 2011) and "Light Girl" (Duke, 2015) further illustrate how those with darker complexions felt stupid in 21st-century schools, and how lighter-skinned students are viewed as smarter. Hunter (2007) indicated darker-skinned students were perceived to need more discipline in schools whereas lighter-skinned students were disciplined less. Therefore, this reported that darker-skinned students were not knowledgeable due to having a disadvantage whereas lighter skin students had privileges and more advantages. Branigan et al. (2013) found that lighter-skinned African Americans completed more

years of education than those with darker skin. Researcher suggested that dark skin men had no desire to go farther in education whereas lighter skin men completed more years. Sanchez, Liu, Leathers, Goins, and Vilain (2011) also found that African American men had less desire to earn a college degree compared to White and Asian American men. Therefore, Sanchez et al., (2011) suggested that African American men had no desire to farther their education beyond high school whereas White and Asian American men continued to earn a college degree.

Colorism and Employment

Davis (2001) pointed out that, after slavery, White Americans were more comfortable conducting business with those with lighter skin. This showed that a lighter-skinned man is considered to be more intelligent and more likely to attend college than a darker-skinned man (Gasman & Abiola, 2016). Employment seemed to be a big issue when it comes to whom will be successful. The labor market outcomes based on skin color, men, and wages gap that skin complexion is unrelated (Hersch, 2006). Thompson and Keith (2001) identified that dark-skinned African American noticed light-skinned African American being successful and moving up the hierarchy with jobs and advertisements. Jones (2010) pointed out that intra-group discrimination has been on the rise as more research is being conducted in this area results in nonconformist and identity performance. For example, employers have been looking for differences when it comes to hiring based on shades of skin (Jones, 2010). Sanchez et al. (2011) analyzed 14 African American men in graduate school at a White university identified that one's skin color

can affect the social class and upward mobility. Therefore, this suggested that social class is affected by one's skin color.

To summarize, skin tone does influence employment. Being African American has limited job opportunities. There are advantages and disadvantages based on the skin color on employment. The advantages were pointed out that lighter-skinned African Americans tend to receive better opportunities in offices and supervisor positions whereas darker-skinned African Americans are more likely to be offered labor jobs and working with heavy machinery. This can affect one's self self-esteem and how they feel about themselves.

Impact of Colorism on Self-esteem and Self-image

Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) defined self-esteem as an efficacious action based on how socio-structural conditions shape the way a person acts and heighten the desire of self-assurance. Thompson and Keith (2001) pointed out that self-esteem is a predictor of skin tone for African American women but not for African American men whereas African American men are more self-efficacy and African American women are not. Coard et al., (2001) indicated that darker-skinned men had low self-esteem based on their skin tone. Mathew (2013) pointed out that darker skin tends to be related to lower self-esteem due to having less power. Oney, Cole, and Sellers (2011) indicated both African American men and women are affected by the lighter skin preference, but skin color is a predictor for women compared to men. In society today, light skin and dark skin tones are major impacts on how they are perceived by others (Meyers, 2008). Sengupta (2000) analyzed 118 Black women students and 114 White women students that participated in

the study to identify the increasing use of lighter skin complexion Black models in ads with White women. The study illustrated that Black participants where more favorable to the mixed-race ads and the White women ads compared to the classic Black women ads (Sengupta, 2000). While an important study illustrating the role of colorism in the media, the study did not review colorism with respect to men of color. Coard et al., (2001) analyzed 113 African American undergraduate and graduate students in which 46 were men and 67 were women that ranged in age 17 to 41 years of age to study perceived skin color and self-esteem. The Racial Identity Attitude Scale was used in this study to illustrate a finding between three skin color groups on self-perceived, self-preferred, and opposite gender ideal group of African Americans (Coard et al., 2001). Skin color and self-esteem pointed out negative significant relationships based on the three groups of light, medium, and dark (Coard et al., 2001). Therefore, the researchers found that skin color does affect self-esteem negatively in which darker skin tone had lower self-esteem.

Low self-esteem eventually led to identity confusion with the extremes of the rejection of one's biological attributes (Frantz, 2008). Thompson and Keith (2001) pointed that self-esteem affects men when it comes to their weight size (under or overweight) in which being underweight decrease for light skin men and increases for overweight light skin men.

Mathew (2013) pointed out that African American women had to do more extensive work such as the sexual acts of performances with the White superiority slave owners that eventually lower self-esteem. This has created a level of self-esteem among the African Americans based on skin complexion given laborer duties (Keith, 2009).

Some African American women and men are embarrassed by their skin complexion of being dark or being light skinned in which lead to lower self-esteem (Mathew, 2013). Self-esteem tends to be based on the complexion of skin and being accepted in the African American community. Dark skin men and women conceptualize that light skin is more acceptable (Mathew, 2013). Gendered colorism explained that lighter-skinned is more accepted in society than darker-skinned complexion whereas little information is given about men skin complexion being accepted. Uzogara et al. used the Detroit Area Study from 1995 and the National Survey of American Life from 2003 to get a sense of the development of colorism during that time period. Addressing the gap in literature pertaining to African American men will specify the experiences with colorism and skin tone discrimination based on self-image. Uzogara, Lee, Abdou, and Jackson (2014) investigated data from the 1995 Detroit Area Study (N = 1,139, with 586 African Americans; total sample of 944 completed surveys that were not missing essential information) and the 2003 National Survey of American Life (N = 5,191, including 1,217 African American men). The researchers found through statistical analysis of the Detroit Area Study that, for relations with other races and ethnicities, dark-skinned men experienced the most discrimination, followed by medium-skinned men and light-skinned men (Uzogara, Lee, Abdou, & Jackson, 2014). Therefore, the researchers have evidence that African American men are affected by discrimination. Maxwell et al., (2015) investigated skin tone perceptions in the African American community based on skin complexion satisfaction with 191 African American college students. The study was 116 women and 75 men between the ages of 17 to 32 years of age and a sample of being a 1,

2, 3, or 4-year college student (Maxwell et al., 2015). The researchers found that there was no difference with skin color satisfaction (light skin and dark skin) and that skin color is not a significant predictor based on skin satisfaction (Maxwell et al., 2015). Therefore, this suggests that darker skin is perceived as negative in the African American community, but this research explains that skin tone does not support the differences between skin color satisfactions.

To summarize, self-image and skin color pointed out that there were significant findings based on the complexion of the skin. Lower self-esteem was pointed out based on the having darker skin complexion. The idea of the skin color of being light or dark skin does have to argue that skin complexion does affect the self-image or self-esteem of an African American men or woman. African Americans are learning to accept their skin complexion and understand the social norms. African American women perception and attitude on skin complexion are more noted whereas men do not communicate as much about skin complexion. Self-esteem seems to affect African American women more than it effects African American men. Majority focus primary on women and limited research on men.

Colorism and Relationships

Gendered colorism is a label that colorism has a greater impact on the lives of African American women compared to African American men (Hill, 2002). African American men have a significant proportion that consciously and subconsciously associates with bias in terms of skin complexion in the form of interracial discrimination. Brown et al., (2003) cited that men preference for women is focused more on a lighter

complexion due to overrepresented images in the media of lighter skin complexion. Men chose to marry women with lighter skin to increase their own social acceptance (Brown et al., 2003). Fanon (2008) described the psyche of African American men wanting to be White based off the White superior personality and actions related to unfeasible goals. African American men knew they had less power and having the desire to be White and rationalize like the White superior (Fanon, 2008). African American men would pick their spouse based on their counterbalance feelings of inferiority to increase their self-esteem of dating lighter skin women due to being unable to get a White woman (Fanon, 2008).

Society plays a major factor in attitude or perception based on physical appearance and what is visibility acceptance in society (Mathew, 2013). Mathew (2013) reviewed Cooley "the looking glass" and Goffman "stigma" associated with the perception of skin color based on judgments and opinions from others in the social world. Wade and Bielitz (2005) reproduced that fair skin African American women and darker skin men tends to receive higher ratings for attractiveness, personality, and life success. Fair skin is also a common explanation of having lighter skin tone. Mathew (2013) pointed out the theoretical framework by Cooley and Goffman is looking at how one perceived themselves as well as how others perceived in the social world. Goffman theory pointed out that people learn what is acceptable in society based on social cues (Mathew, 2013). One's self-attitude or perception is based on the ideal social world of feeling accepted in society (Link & Phelan, 2001).

It is the social norm of acceptance when dating within African American society. It is noted that African American men choose its mate based on the complexion of his/her skin. McDermott and Pettijohn (2008) indicated women with lighter skin had higher perception related to attractiveness and more likely to be dated. Mathew (2013) recalled that African American men choose to marry lighter skin women in order to uphold their social standing. Russell et al. (1993) described in Spike Lee movie "Mo Better Spike" that Black men will not admit that they prefer light skinned women with long hair more attractive than dark skinned women with short hair due to social media. African American women preference for dating is darker skin men (Mathew, 2013). Darker skin men were considered the "macho man" whereas light skin men were pigeonholed as not being powerful due to not being Black enough (Mathew, 2013). Lighter skin men were considered weak and not having ties to their ethnic identity due to being too light (Keith and Herring, 1991). African American women's' perception of having a powerful man that would be a hard worker was tied to darker skin tone (Keith and Herring, 1991). African American men preference is lighter skin women to feel socially accepted in society (Coard et al., 2001). Darker skin women have a stereotype of being mean or bad attitude (Mathew, 2013). Mathew (2013) indicated that dark skin women were not acceptable for dating whereas lighter skin was known as being more attractive. Hall (2017) use a sampling technique to recruit women from four sororities (Zeta Phi Beta, Sigma Gamma Rho, Alpha Kappa Alpha, and Delta Sigma Theta) and social clubs (Links, National Council of Negro Women, and Jack and Jill of America) in Southeast Tennessee (N=67) participants. This was a semi-structured interview with six questions

based on skin stratification ages 18 and 72 years (Hall, 2017). Hall (2017) found that colorism does affects women psychologically and causes distress. Therefore, this research suggests that light, medium, and dark all encounter some psychological distress associated with colorism.

It is important to note that the roles have changed based on skin tone. As a reminder, men preferred lighter skin women regardless of their skin tone and women preferred darker skin tone. Lighter skin was known to be more attractive due to being closer to European American skin tone (Corad et al., 2001). McGrath et al., 2016 addressed that dating online profiles and matching leaves a broader social force to allow races to date outside of their racial or ethnic group. McGrath et al., (2016) pointed out that dating downwards was directed to Blacks and dark-skinned Hispanics who are a collective Black group.

In summary, this section explained studies related to finding a mate based on the complexion of the skin. This illustrates that lighter skin complexion is more favorable for African American men whereas darker skin complexion is more favorable in mating for African American women. The idea of feeling accepted in society and having upward mobility due to the skin complexion being lighter for women and darker for men. The purpose of my study is to find the reason behind dating based on skin color.

Summary and Conclusions

The research literature has shown that limited research has been done in the field of skin complexion associated with men and that more research needs to be done. Although slavery ended, colorism remains internalized within the African American

population (Hill, 2000). Kerr (2001) noted that skin complexion was associated with stereotypical characteristics, such as light skin is considered smarter and attractive and dark skin is unattractive. Coard et al., 2001 pointed out that those with lighter skin tone have a higher socioeconomic status than those with dark skin employment wise. Over time, African Americans with lighter skin complexion began to purposely reproduce eventually creating offspring that might have more of an advantage (Kerr, 2006). The idea of light skin complexion had physical attractiveness traits associated with European Americans including straight hair and facial features (Patton, 2006). Hochschild and Weaver (2007) described that African Americans were categorized by their skin complexion and light skin complexion was considered historically favored over the darker skin complexion. While much research has been conducted about skin complexion, most of the findings related more to the effects of colorism on African American women. Less information is known about the effects of skin complexion on African American men.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and gain meaning of the lived experiences of African American men and how they perceive the association between skin complexion and dating habits and self-esteem. Through individual interviews, the researcher explored lived experiences of the phenomenon of African American men participants. This chapter contains an explanation of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation and data collection, and data analysis plan. Issues with trustworthiness and ethical procedures will be included as well. The chapter closes with a summary of the material for this chapter and a transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for this study are the following:

RQ1: How do African American men perceive the phenomenon of colorism?

Sub question 1. How do African American men relate their dating habits to colorism?

Sub question 2. How do African American men relate their self-esteem to colorism?

To gain a better understanding of lived experiences of African American men, a qualitative research methodology was used. The central phenomenon I explored is based on the theory of skin tone or intercultural inequality among the African American community (Hall, 2005).

A qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study. A qualitative study allowed the participants to communicate about their own experiences and determine the direction of the narrative (Granot, Brashear, & Motta, 2012). A quantitative methodology is a mechanical application of instruments that results in new insight, whereas qualitative research uses an open-ended approach that can change directions or have new insight (Bryman, 2006). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a qualitative researcher is a vital instrument employed to garner data, as opposed to quantitative research that relies on the use of created instruments. Moustakas (1994) reported that qualitative research seeks to discover; it seeks to understand human experiences using scientific research. As indicated by Hatch (2006) and Patton (2015), qualitative research attempts to find how participants partake in a lived experience, which helps in better seeing how they rationalize their world. The use of a focal research question, for this study, supports the qualitative research approach that helped the participants better explain their lived experiences. Qualitative research does not seek to generalize a target population but depends deeply on comprehensive inquiry toward a specific target population and explain the meaning behind the participants' responses (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is used when the researcher seeks to explore, understand, and become more enlightened about the studied phenomenon; whereas, a quantitative design is used to investigate the phenomenon of study to forge generalizations and predictions (Patton, 2015). Creswell (2013) reported that the qualitative method was created to understand the essence of personal encounters and life events through semi structured interviews and open-ended questions. Thus, qualitative research allowed for the lived and told experiences and

perspectives of African American men who communicated their feelings and a better understanding of how it feels to be an African American man. This allowed African American men's voices to be heard, interpreted, and shared from my comprehension, garnered from interaction with these participants. From this study, a deeper understanding and meaning of this phenomenon was gained, which was the essence of a phenomenological approach.

A phenomenological approach was suitable for this study because my objective was to describe the personal experiences of the participants concerning the phenomenon of this study (see Creswell, 2013). I aimed to provide deeper and richer meaning and understanding of attitudes and perceptions of African American men's experiences with skin tone. Using a phenomenological approach, I was able to reach an understanding of each man's unique experience of skin tone, self-esteem, dating, and the process of living it daily. I employed this approach to uncover the core of their experiences by fully describing, explaining, and interpreting their experiences (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014).

As the primary research instrument, I needed to reduce any potential biases that I might bring to the study. It was the responsibility of the researcher to listen to the narrative of the participants and to actively refrain from personal biases, assumptions, and prejudgments (Pattons, 2002). To achieve a reduction in biases, Moustakas (1994) recommended employing the techniques of epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Epoche is a process where one refrains from judgment. Moustakas (1994) informed that epoche does not eradicate everything of ordinary thought, such as

reality and doubting; therefore, only the personal opinions, and feelings, biases of

common knowledge, as a basis for truth as a reality. The process of epoche generates a

focus, clarity of thought, and an opportunity for researchers to develop a new perspective

to approach the phenomenon as a blank slate, free from inclinations of how things ought

to be. Rather, there was no position taken when practicing epoche. According to

Moustakas (1994), the researcher is positioned to view what is present and attain the

truths of the experiences told through reflection and meditation.

Phenomenological reduction was produced by employing epoche to create a

textural description of a phenomenal essence (Moustakas, 1994; White, 2013). The

internal act of consciousness and the external object are described by the researcher

(White, 2013). Phenomenological reduction is often referred to as *transcendental*

phenomenology, as it challenges the researcher to revisit the story multiple times, with

each return reaching deeper into the layers of the nature and meaning of the experience,

initially considering its singularity and next its totality to create brackets that center on

the topic and research question (White, 2013). A reduction is a lengthy, itemized process,

further scrutinizing established brackets by composing textural meanings and invariant

constituents, then enacting and organizing horizons (Moutstakas, 1994; White, 2013).

Imaginative variation creates a structural description of interviewee experiences

by identifying the *how* of the condition that will, in turn, highlight the *what* of the

experience by addressing it from various aspects and functions. At this point, the textural-

structural themes will be synthesized into a representative essence of the phenomenon

that includes the study sample (White, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), the

essence of any experience is replete; its reflection is only distinct to a selective time and place.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in this study was to develop interview questions that instructed data collection. I also acted as an instrument of data collection by conducting one on one interview with each male participant. The process for this data collection would be the researcher attempt to engage the male participants by asking open-ended questions and allowing expression of experiences. The participants being interviewed were also asked to provide information about their age, ethnicity, dating habits, self-esteem questions, and skin tone complexion. The variables were evaluated to explore whether they have a negative impact on the opposite complexion of their skin tone when dating within and self-esteem. I filled numerous roles during this study: participant recruiter, interviewer, data collector, interview transcriber, data analyst, and interpreter of findings. I seemed to collect and report the narratives and rich details of the lived and told experiences of each participant. My goal was to gather information about the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants through semi-structured interviews. Asking open questions (with follow-up probing questions if necessary) allowed the participants to freely share descriptive answers about their lived experiences with this phenomenon. In addition, because I am also an African American my skin tone may have potentially influenced participants' responses thus could be a limitation.

The researcher asked opening ended question for data collection by conducting separate interviews with the participants. The researcher does have natural tendency and

must avoid bias. As indicated by Tufford and Newman (2012), each qualitative researcher would be tested with some type of inclination; thusly, sectioning is utilized to moderate the possibility to be subjective in assumptions and in the conveyance of the information. Reflexivity helps researchers avoid constructing research from a biased standpoint. I used the strategy of reflexivity because I related to the topic of study. Reflexivity explained that the analyst effectively takes part in genuine introspections concerning predispositions they may conceivably have without anyone else reflecting, self-recognizing, and checking (LaBanca, 2011). La Banca (2011) pointed out that reflexivity will function as a cradle to detailing predispositions and helped in enabling the researcher to gather precise of the members' encounters with this phenomenon without interruption of projection.

After data collection, I analyzed the data to determine if I collected enough information or if more interviews would be needed to be conducted. To ensure that my findings are accurate I contacted each participant to see if the findings explained were accurate and approved by each participant to report. It was my honor to report accurate findings. The lived experiences of African American men would help other African Americans understand their roles in society and promote social change within the African American culture.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

In a phenomenological study, the participants must identify themselves with the phenomenon of the study and be able to articulate their lived experience (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). When selecting participants, they were recruited from a posted flyer in public settings, such as: local churches, universities, colleges, and local libraries (Appendix A). The purpose of using these locations for recruitment was to be able to get diverse lived experiences, which would have a range of ages and various marital statuses.

After receiving approval from the IRB for my research proposal and approval for my flyer (Appendix A) I was able to post to various location listed. I recruited 10 participants using purposeful sampling. Palinkas et al., (2015) explained that purposeful sampling is broadly utilized as a part of qualitative research for identification and determination of data-rich cases identified a phenomenon of study. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that purposeful research was subject to assist in recruiting participants giving knowledge of the phenomenon of interest. Validity to the example is included when members are chosen through purposeful sampling; be that as it may, this may not be illustrative of the population, which confined generalizability of the information (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To better comprehend this phenomenon, the participants of this investigation was men within the age 18 and over, who self-identified as African Americans. I facilitated and publicized the study by posting flyers at neighborhood settings already specified. While planning with different sites, I requested that they promote the study on their web-based social networking channels, for example, website, newsletters, Facebook page, and Instagram page.

The posted flyer included my Walden University email address for each interested participant to respond to. Once I received an email from the participant of interest in the

study, I emailed the potential participant in the screening questionnaire (Appendix B) to make sure that they meet the criteria for the study. Once I received the screening questionnaire from the potential participants that confirm they meet criteria, I coordinated a time and location for the interview. The participants that have been selected and approved for the study received an electronic version of Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) approval consent Form (07-31-19-006286) would be an attachment in the email back to the participant confirming the date, time, and location for the interview.

Instrumentation

Qualitative instruments are primarily used to collect and analyze data for a qualitative researcher (Chenail, 2011). The researcher is a large part of the process associated with qualitative instruments (Xu & Storr, 2012). During the collection of data, the researcher and interviewee are primary components to the process. The researcher communicated through structured and unstructured interviews to be able to gain insight on the participant's experiences and perspectives with the phenomenon (Xu & Storr, 2012). The participants shared lived experiences in hopes of causing social change for the population of African American men. The interview was an open dialogue with standardized, open-ended questions that helped fully understand the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I collected data from verbal and nonverbal cues during a face to face interview. I asked probing questions to get in-depth responses from the interviewee and be able to obtain a better understanding of personal experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Xu & Stor, 2012). I summarized data based on the

interpretation of what the participant shared during the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These benefits are accessible to the researcher during the data collection process. This study used interviews to get a lived experience on African American men perception and attitude towards their skin tone, dating preference, and self-esteem.

Possible Types and Sources of Information or Data

African American men 18 and over are solicited from universities and colleges in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. They will be asked to be interviewed based on lived experiences.

Another potential source of data is soliciting African American men at local business or churches.

Prior to Interview there will be a brief demographic questionnaire to solicit demographic information and investigate personal characteristics (perceived skin color) in Appendix B.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once approval granted by Walden University's IRB, the data collection process was conducted. Participants was able to get in contact with researcher through flyers and social media. The recruitment process was through flyers and social media. The flyers and social media had information on the purpose of the interview pertaining to African American men. The interview took place in a public place in a quiet meeting room that was private and free of external noise as well as distractions. Upon approval for data collection, the prospective participants provided consent to understanding and

participating in the study by stating, "I consent" in an email response. I interviewed all participants.

The lived experiences of African American men's perception and attitude towards their skin tone, relationship desire, and self-esteem shared during the in-depth face-to-face semi structured interviews; this data offered a deeper understanding and meaning of their particular set of circumstances that accompany those males and the way they manage daily, while society still expects the adult males to maintain particular social norms. According to Patton (2015), phenomenological interviewing presents the individuals a milieu to share their private encounters with the phenomenon in the study. According to Seidman (2013), building rapport with the participants assisted the participants with feasible tension or uneasiness; the participants felt secured and comfortable as well as at ease before beginning the interviews, with a purpose to aid the contributors to feel safe to share deeper, heartfelt experiences. Creswell (2013) informed that it is far critical that the contributors feel non-threatened at during the conduction of portions of the study, this permit for a greater authentic sharing of their perspectives, therefore, more true statistics can be reported.

Phenomenological research was well known to comprise semi-structured interviews and perspectives this as an essential factor of data collection (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were conducted at a local library in a private study room, which was reserved prior to every interview. The length of each interview was spawned from 60-90 minutes. To establish a comfortable environment and to prepare the researcher for the in-depth interviews, a list of interview questions (Appendix C) were created and used as a

framework (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). These questions did assist the researcher with retaining consciousness and make sure that the pertinent questions are asked for rich data collection. A welcoming environment that was nicely-suitable for interviewing, such as appropriate environmental temperature, well-illuminated place, safely assembled and positioned electronics (recorders, cameras, and so forth.), cozy seating, and an organized researcher (who may also have anxiety but does not show off it) are a something that will aid in the participant feeling secure and comfortable with sharing their lived experiences with this phenomenon; this would also aid in building rapport between the participants and the researcher as a way to make the atmosphere conducive for interviewing.

Another benefit of employing an interview guide is to resource in consideration of time; the interviews have to be carried out in a well-timed way in order that the participants don't tire out and could no longer create attrition if in addition interviewing is wanted (Patton, 2015). The in-intensity interview questions are used to resource the researcher in acquiring a broader and greater complete know-how of the reports and perspectives of the members. The endeavor was to ask thought-provoking questions with a view to allowing every participant to go looking inwardly and provide their most honest, personal accounts with this developing phenomenon to enlighten society on their reviews, whether it is good, terrible, or indifferent. Before commencing each interview, the participants were reminded that each interview would be transcribed verbatim and that they would be given a summary of their data to ensure accuracy and proper portrayal of their experience (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the participants would be informed that the researcher may take notes, if necessary (Janesick, 2013).

Each participant would be given a summary of their data description to make sure that all portrayals of perspectives and experiences are accurately reported, as well as if there is any need for clarification of data. This will help assist with trustworthiness, which will aid in establishing credibility for the researcher based on the study conducted (Shenton, 2004).

All instruments utilized and data collected, during the conduction of the study would be password protected and stored in a locked file that the researcher would have sole access to. After five years, all data would be destroyed. Content validity would be accessed and established throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis Plan

Phenomenological data coding and analysis reveals the significant statements from the interviews of the participants and themes are created from the clusters that are discovered (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) informed that data can be organized when the researcher studies the transcribed interviews through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis. Phenomenal analysis entails identifying expressions relevant to the experience, then creates meaning or units of meaning to develop textural descriptions of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The modified Van Kaam methodology developed by Moustakas (1994) was employed for this study to give the phenomenology data analysis process. After completing the semi-structured interviews and transcription process, the transcribed interviews were inputted in Microsoft Word to assist with the qualitative data analysis

(LaPelle, 2004). The utilization of Microsoft Word assisted with identifying the thematic categories and invariant constituents of the phenomenon of study.

Microsoft Word was a compatible qualitative research data analysis software (LaPelle, 2004). Although the use of a computer software was not mandatory, as the researcher can analyze the data by hand; however, it would be very helpful in simplifying, organizing, and streamlining the collected data (Creswell, 2013). According to LaPelle (2004), Microsoft Word was a user-friendly software that can store qualitative data that would also provide simple retrieval of stored data. Microsoft Word assisted with sifting through the data to categorize the data into codes or themes by inserting tables and convert text to table (LaPelle, 2004). The software benefits the opportunity for the researcher to create and edit transcriptions of the collected data.

LaPelle (2004) demonstrated that Microsoft Word table structure used to tabulate the frequency of themes identified when the researcher creates various nodes from the collected interview data. This feature documented any relationship that appears throughout data analysis. For instance, the focus would be provided to data that reveal negative emotional experiences of living as African American men.

Microsoft Word also offers easy ways to analyze open-ended questions using thematic codes. This allowed data to identify important factors and barriers (LaPelle, 2004). The researcher was able to manage, control, and access collected data easily. This software provides a less arduous data analysis process with secure storage of collected data (LaPelle, 2004). Furthermore, it efficiently creates templates for coding data for phenomenological study (LaPelle, 2004).

The following steps used to generate the requisite themes to answer the research question, and to uncover the lived experiences of the participants, as prescribed by Moustakas (1994, p. 120-122):

1. List and group relevant experiences;

2. Reduce and eliminate extraneous data to capture the essential constituents of the phenomenon;

3. Cluster and thematize the invariant constituents to identify core themes of experiences;

4. Final identification and verification compared to the entire record of the research participants to ensure explicit relevancy and compatibility;

5. Construct individualized textural descriptions grounded on the verbatim transcripts using applicable and valid invariant constituents and themes, for each participant;

6. Construct the individual structural descriptions centered on individual textural description and imaginative variation, for each participant;

7. Construct a textural-structural description of the meaning and essence of the experiences for each participant; a complete textural-structural description will be developed representing a composite description of the meaning and essence of the experience for the entire group of participants.

The data analysis was conducted, and the results provided answers to the research question based on the lived experiences of African American men. The results of the data analysis will be presented in Chapter 4.

Issues of Trustworthiness

There are four vital aspects of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Trustworthiness was an essential component of qualitative inquiry because it provides reliability and validity to the researcher, which are not separate entities as opposed to quantitative research (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006).

Shenton (2004) and Creswell (2013) suggested various validity strategies for establishing credibility; some of those suggestions were member checking, triangulating, and reflective commentating by using thick and rich descriptions of the experiences shared by the participants. Credibility is a key factor in establishing trustworthiness (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). A qualitative researcher must demonstrate ability and effort, in order to establish creditability in his or her research (Morrow, 2005). Robust data collection and analysis aids in maintaining focus and ensuring that the research centers on the intended focus.

Credibility. Collecting data from at least 10 participants helped to provide an array of experiences with the research phenomenon. This would aid in further establishing credibility through the employment of data triangulation because the data provided a more in-depth telling of the feelings, behaviors, and needs of the participants (Frost, 2011). The use of triangulation was combined with member checking. Morrow (2005) reported that rigor and trustworthiness are afforded by employing member checking because it searches accuracy through findings, interpreting, and reviewing themes. I confirmed with each participant that my summarized interpretations of their

responses are accurate and acceptable by them. This also ensured accuracy, creditability, and validation of the data collected during the interviews. Member checking involves summarizing the data into one or two pages. After receiving approval from the participants that my interpretation of their experiences is correct, additional validity of the findings provided when I report rich, in-depth, and detailed descriptions of the experiences per participant.

Transferability. Transferability was another facet of trustworthiness. According to Golafshani (2003), transferability was contingent upon if the research findings are transferrable to other settings or groups. Offering a transparent and in-depth description of the lived experiences of the participants assisted in providing meaning of the experience. The reader maybe able to transfer meaning to areas beyond the confines of this research, when the findings sufficiently detail the research setting, the descriptions of each participant, the procedures, and the interactions between the participants and the researcher (Golafashani, 2003). You will also use rich description of the findings through the use of vignettes, read Shenton.

Dependability. Another entity of trustworthiness is dependability. Dependability guarantees that each interview was conducted in the same manner, establishing consistency and reliability (Frost, 2011). The purpose of dependability was to ensure consistent data collection that is void of unnecessary variations to guarantee repeatability in the research process (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). This means that the data, methods, and decisions that were created in the fieldwork are traceable sources of the retrieved data (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). Therefore, consistency should be present throughout the

research process to achieve dependability. According to Johnson and Rasulova (2017), dependability and credibility are closely related; hence, establishing dependability ensures credibility. Dependability centers attention on the researcher-as-instrument and the extent to which interpretation is created in a consistent manner (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017).

Confirmability. Lastly, confirmability must be employed to establish trustworthiness. Confirmability was used to ensure that the real-lived and told experiences of the participants are accurately reported versus misconstrued interpreted perspectives of the participants by way of the researcher (Morrow, 2005). This was where bracketing is necessary. I extracted my personal experiences with the research phenomenon to not skew the data collecting from the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Reflexivity was vital during confirmability because it, too, safeguards against misinterpreted collected data. It allowed me the opportunity to understand how my personal experiences can shape my perception and interpretation of the phenomenon, which can create biases (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Reflexivity allows for introspection to ensure that the researcher is not leading or misleading during the interviews and data analysis, which will skew findings. It was important that I exercised self-awareness through the data collection and analysis process. Self-reflective journaling was positive in safeguarding against biases (Patton, 2005). Through journaling, I detailed my detailed experiences with the phenomenon, which allowed me the ability to see how my experiences related to or opposed the phenomenon. I was also aware of my perspectives and feelings, which aided in bracketing self and not prohibiting biases. Moreover, this

helped to establish ramifications for me so that I did not embellish or fabricate the findings and extend the conclusion pass the what the data supports (Berger, 2015).

Ethical Procedures

Prior to collecting data, an application for permission to conduct the research was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval was granted for consent to proceed (07-31-19-006286), the interviews commenced. Each participant received an attached consent form detailing the rights of the participants, also mandatory reporting issues and confidentiality. Each participant has signed the electronic consent form before beginning the interviews.

According to Keen and Todres (2007), researchers are ethically responsible for safeguarding against reporting data that will reveal the identity of any participant. As only I have access to the personal identities of the participants, an assigned pseudonym (Participant 1 [P1], P2, P3, and so on) given to each participant to protect their identity throughout the study. All information pertaining to the study that was maintained on my computer that was password protected. No one else would have access to this computer. All study related material, such as copies of interviews and external hard-drive and any other back-up copies of materials are stored in a locked fireproof safe box for the mandatory five years and then will be destroyed.

To be in accordance with guidelines concerning the proper treatment of human subjects, each participant informed that, although her complete participation in the study is greatly appreciated, it is not mandatory. These solely voluntary participants were not to incur any repercussions should any participant decide to withdraw from the study;

therefore, their full participation was encouraged but not obligatory. The participants were informed following participation in the study they would receive a token of appreciation, a $5 gift card.

During the interviews, participants shared their personal experiences that may conjure negative emotions. Due to this possibility, Crisis Link hotline toll-free number (1-800-273-8255) was provided on the consent form and accessible at the participant's request.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore and gain the meaning of the lived experiences of African American men's perceptions and attitudes toward their skin tone, relationship desire, and self-esteem. In this chapter, I focused on justifying the employment of a phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994), provided the steps taken with recruiting volunteers and detailed the specific criteria mandated for study participation. Furthermore, I discussed the data collection process, the handling of all study-related information, and explained the steps that would be followed during the data analysis (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2015). Moreover, attention was given to the ethical measures created for the study to ensure the protection of the voluntary participants and issues of trustworthiness. In chapter 4, the findings of the study were reviewed and reported. Chapter 4 discussed the setting, demographics, and specific information detailing the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American men related to their perceptions of colorism and its influence on dating habits and self-esteem. To explore this concept, I conducted individual interviews with African American men. There was one central research question used to initiate the interview for the study: How do African American men perceive the phenomenon of colorism? In the following chapter, I discuss the setting and demographic information representing the participants of this study. Data collection and analysis are also described along with evidence of the trustworthiness of this study. Finally, the results of this study are presented.

Data Collection

To recruit participants, I posted flyers at local businesses and churches requesting that those interested contact me for further information. A copy of the flyer is available in Appendix A. A flyer was also posted on social media on Facebook and Instagram that requested those interested to contact me at my Walden University e-mail address for further information. A copy of the social media flyer is available in Appendix D. Once interested participants contacted me, they were e-mailed the screening questionnaire (see Appendix B) to ensure they met the criteria for the study. The participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had regarding the study. I explained to the participants that the study was voluntary and coordinated a time, date, and location for the individual interviews.

Face-to-face interviews for this study were conducted in a mid-Atlantic state in local libraries for an average of 30 to 45 minutes per interview. The interviews were projected to last 60 to 90 minutes; however, this amount of time was not necessary. I audio recorded the participants' interview responses on a tape recorder. There was a small technical difficulty with the tape recorder, but it was able to be fixed; the tape recorder was not recording in the first 2 minutes when I was explaining the interview process and starting to build rapport with small talk, so no data were missed from the participant. This technical difficulty occurred during Participant 8's interview. The interviews were held on Tuesday through Saturday evenings at 7:30 p.m. over the course of 8 weeks. There was a total of two participants interviewed each week.

After every interview, I transcribed the audio recording into a Microsoft Word document. Each Word transcript was double checked against the audio recording of the interview to ensure the transcript was accurate. Once I completed transcription, as outlined in Chapter 3, I had each participant member check the transcription of their interview, as suggested by Koelsch (2013). I e-mailed each participant a copy of the transcript to confirm that the transcript was accurate and reflected their perceptions of the interview. Once the participants were able to verify the accuracy of the transcript, data analysis commenced. Once all 10 interviews were completed, I was able to code the interview responses and extract data into Microsoft Excel.

Setting

The interviews for this study were conducted in private rooms in local libraries in a medium-sized city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The participants'

signed consent forms and other information was kept confidential. The study room was in a setting that had limited disturbances and interruptions. These locations were chosen due to their exclusivity and proximity to both me and the participants.

Demographics

I recruited 10 participants for this study. As a result, I was able to conclude that the 10th participant interviewed was enough to meet saturation. These 10 participants were African American men whose ages ranged from 30 to 74 years and who lived in the midsized city (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participants Demographics

Participant	Age	Skin tone	Marital status	Children
Participant 1	36	Dark	Married	2
Participant 2	74	Medium	Widower	3
Participant 3	31	Light	Dating	0
Participant 4	30	Medium	Engaged	2
Participant 5	40	Medium	Married	2
Participant 6	37	Dark	Married	3
Participant 7	30	Dark	Engaged	2
Participant 8	30	Medium	Married	3
Participant 9	36	Dark	Married	2
Participant 10	32	Medium	Married	3

Data Analysis

I used the six-step thematic analysis process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). In Step 1 of this procedure, I transcribed and read the information to gain an understanding of the content. Once the interview transcriptions were completed and verified by each respective participant, I commenced the qualitative analysis of the

interview data. The second step of the evaluation entailed coding the information. During the coding process, I reviewed the data, denoting and labeling all phrases or statements made by individuals, and I organized the data based on the discovered codes. In the third step of the analysis, I arranged the codes into themes and combed through the rest of the data to identify support for the discovered themes as outlined by Braun and Clarke. In the fourth step of the process, I assessed the tentative topics by means of comparing them to the coded information as well as to the data set in its entirety to find out the thematic structure. The fifth step was refining each theme to provide named and demarcated themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the final step of the process, I produced a narrative description of the findings for this chapter. The presentation of the results includes quotations from the accrued data to verify the identified themes and subthemes that align with the research question.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I was able to establish credibility by asking participants to review their interview transcript. I asked each participant to review his transcript to ensure the data transcribed were accurate concerning his perspectives and points of view on the topic being studied. None of the participants requested changes to the transcripts.

Transferability

I was able to establish transferability through a transparent and in-depth description of the lived experiences of the participants, which assisted in providing their meaning of the experience. I outlined the research setting, collection process, data

analysis protocol, and the results of the research study. Providing such description enabled me to convey all relevant facts concerning the research process, so future researchers can draw their own conclusions from the information.

Dependability

I ensured that dependability was achieved by following rigorous and systematic procedures when conducting this study. I created a log file by providing an in-depth description of the methodological process that was carried out and the findings that were obtained in this study, so any future researcher would be able to follow or replicate the process used in this study. Therefore, consistency should be present throughout the research process to achieve dependability. According to Johnson and Rasulova (2017), dependability and credibility are closely related; hence, establishing dependability ensures credibility. Dependability centers attention on the researcher as instrument and the extent to which interpretation is created in a consistent manner (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017).

Confirmability

I wanted to ensure the confirmability of the study; therefore, I used bracketing and reflexivity. Bracketing is when a researcher is not judgmental or biased based off their personal beliefs (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Reflexivity is vital during confirmability because it, too, safeguards against misinterpreted collected data by allowing the researcher the opportunity to understand how their personal experiences can shape their perceptions and interpretations of the phenomenon, which can create biases (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Another way I improved confirmability was by using a log file, which

contains a detailed description of the methodological process in the study. The log file

contributes to being able to see the study clearly through the methodological and analytic

designs in the study.

Results

I identified three main themes in the data analysis of this study: perception,

dating, and self-esteem. Each of these themes were primary to precisely depicting the

participants' perspectives pertaining to the phenomenon under research; among these

three themes, there are five subthemes (see Table 2). The themes and subthemes were

grouped by the research question and sub questions. In this section, I discuss the themes

beginning with perception and concluding with self-esteem.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes by Research Questions

Research question	Themes	Subthemes
RQ1: How do African American men perceive the phenomenon of colorism?	Colorism not an issue in self-perception	Discrimination Learning about skin tone
SQ1: How do African American men relate their dating habits to colorism?	Dating	Light skin Medium skin Dark skin
SQ2: How do African American men relate their self-esteem to colorism?	Self-esteem	

Theme 1: Colorism Not an Issue in Self-Perception

Theme 1 has two subthemes: discrimination and learning about skin tones. The

participants were interviewed and asked questions related to the research question. All

participants discussed their perceptions of being an African American man during the interviews. Perception refers to how participants felt about themselves based on skin tone. Several of the participants discussed the views and attitudes they have developed over time because these views and attitudes significantly impacted how their lived experiences contributed to their perceptions of being an African American man. All the participants talked about perceiving themselves as being confident and proud of being an African American man. One participant considered himself light skinned (Participant 3), five considered themselves medium skinned (Participants 2, 4, 5, 8, and 10), and four participants considered themselves to be dark skinned (Participants 1, 6, 7, and 9). When asked about changing their skin color, all participants responded that they would not change their skin color. While all participants stated that they were happy with their skin tone with no desire to change it, three participants did note that if they were forced to change that they would choose a lighter skin tone.

These are examples of how participants described their skin tone. Participants 6 and 7 were able to communicate how they felt having a dark skin tone. Participant 6 explained:

> I feel empowered. I feel there is a misconception about us but being empowered as man. We look back in slavery; there is a reason I was brought here to America. They would not gotten anyone that was less than to fulfil their needs back in the slavery days. I also have opportunities to create for my family. I am dark skin. I would not change nothing because I think my family done a good job educating

me on who I am. I am confident about myself and do not allow the shade of my

skin to determine things I cannot accomplish.

Participant 7 also explained how he thinks he is perceived as an African American man. He stated,

I love being Black. It sounds weird but I love being Black, especially the person

that I am that seems to be challenged daily. I am that person that would step up to

the plate because misconception of being me. In the media and as adults, I have

learned in the last 10 years how African Americans are perceived and treated.

Everything on the media and reputation of us is a stereotype. I am described as an

athletic that once played football with dreadlocks that is heavy with tattoos.

Stereotype is not every day what you see, that is why I love being Black. I am

dark skin, brown skin, and caramel color. The terminology I believe there are four

shades of Black. I am dark skin. If I could change my skin tone, I would not. If I

had to change it and had no choice, I would brighten skin tone up just a little bit

more just for personal reasons so my tattoos can show more, but I would not want

to be light. I love my skin color and that is the only reason I would brighten it up,

my skin tone.

Participant 3 was able to communicate about he felt as being a light-skinned African American man:

I feel like although I did not notice too much of colorism or any of that mess. As

an African American man, I do feel there are obstacles that are placed in front us

more than others. I do also believe with the right mentality and perspective on life

that we get over or around any obstacles with the right guidance. Right mentors or leadership as African American men can guide in right direction due to the area I lived in. It was more of a male mentor due to being raised by a single mother. No boundaries but only limitations are what we set on ourselves. I am light skin. I would not change my color.

Participants 4 and 5 were able to communicate about how they felt having a medium skin tone as African American men. Participant 4 stated,

I feel proud of being an African American, but like I said, we might have to do a little bit more, but overall, I am proud of me. I consider myself to be medium skin tone. I would not change my skin color. The reason being, my mom taught me to be proud of my own skin color.

Participant 5 said,

I feel proud. I do not think I am the pro-typical or a pro-Black person with my fist in the air, but I am very aware of the up side and down side of being an African American man as it relates to society and the workplace. Something I am aware of but do not make it an issue unless it must be an issue related to being an African American man. I am medium male. I would not want to change my skin or anything about me because I am proud of me.

To summarize, in this subsection, the participants' responses illustrate how they felt about being African American men. Participants described themselves as confident, dominant, and proud of being African American men. These participants expressed that they became stronger and more confident due to the issues and obstacles that were put in

front of them. The participants felt there were no differences on how they were perceived based on the complexion of their skin tones.

Subtheme 1: Discrimination. Participants felt that discrimination was an issue concerning how they were perceived based on their skin tone. They explained how colorism influenced prejudicial treatment. Participants discussed their views and attitudes as African American men and how they have been discriminated against based on the color of their skin. Participants did express that they had to be a certain person at times when looking for a job so they would not be judged based on their skin tone. The participants felt they had to focus on themselves and not care what others think about them.

Participant 1 said,

I have seen it all as a youth. I once was treated unfairly by the cops. I was not allowed to ride bikes like we want in our neighborhood due to associating us as a gang because we wore white t-shirts. In the corporate world I seen it when it was time to get a promotion and raise, I had the same credentials as my White co-worker but was looked over because of skin color. Yes, in the corporate world, business, and college.

Participant 2 stated,

I was treated different. Especially in the school growing up I was born in the era where color was an issue and activist created our rights. Well different for me they would get called on in the school plays to have leading roles. They would oversee leading roles and I was treated just different while being a participant in

the play by getting all the roles that was not important. I felt like I was in the background and they treated the light skin different. In 1962 there was a lot of judgmental issues. Some folks are judgmental they think they are pretty much all the same which is not true. They got treated better than some with a darker complexion and in school they were treated better than me because they were a lighter complexion.

Participant 5 explained,

I had a lot of incidents that colorism has played a part of my life negativity. I have been called a nigger once when I lived in Tennessee. I was walking down the street and a White guy yelled out of his car "go home niggers". Another time I was told I was on the wrong side of the Mason Dixon line by an old White guy that came up to me.

Participant 7 stated,

I am a professional and I am a big individual and I am Black or maybe I am the biggest person they seen in their life that is tall and Black. I had a Caucasian women with me when I went to the hospital to visit a client, the trainee was with me on my visit (shadowing me). I was talking to my client and the nurse that was a Caucasian woman about 65 years asked the Trainee a question. I answered the Caucasian women by saying "we are here for XYZ "and she did not look at me and again asked the Trainee again. I answered again. The Caucasian women would not give me the respect until the woman trainee reported that he is the one that has the answers I am just shadowing.

In this subsection, the participants discussed how they felt they were discriminated against due to the color of their skin. All the participants were able to address a time in their life when they felt that they were not treated equal or felt less than. This discrimination took place on the job, school, and neighborhood. One participant discussed he went the school in 1962 and felt like discrimination still exists today in society and that he is still treated differently. Several participants stated that they felt that they had received prejudicial treatment based on skin color whether light, medium, or dark and had been treated unequally at one time in their life. In the next subsection, I discuss how they made sense of these messages and who taught participants to fully understand colorism as well as reactions to skin tone.

Subtheme 2: Learning about skin tone. Some participants discussed skin tone messages during their interviews. Some learned about skin tone messages growing up in the home with their moms or by a mentor in the community, while others were not taught in their home or community. Skin tone messages in the household and the community are related to the complexion of skin based on words or behaviors that are conscious or unconscious reflections. Participants 1, 2, 4, and 7 discussed that their moms helped them learn and make sense of skin tone. Participant 8 reported that his track coach helped him make sense of skin tone. Participants 3, 5, 6, 9, 10 stated that their experiences caused them to recognize and make sense of skin tone.

In the following responses, participants discussed that they were taught about skin tone by a mentor in the community who helped them fully understand the different types of skin tone.

Participant 1 stated,

> I was a former basketball player and my mentor help me understand different skin tone messages. I was told because of my skin tone treatment will be different for me. My mentor was Caucasian male and he was able to express that being an African American playing for this team in this area that things may be different. I have also learned from my mom based on history of our ancestors. The things they went through and how they were treated and how it still exists today. I learned that my skin color will never change from my mom.

Participant 8 explained,

> My track coaches communicated about skin tone message and how someone can be treated different based on their skin complexion. My track coaches expressed that I was confused throughout my life when it came to color due to my whole household was dark skin and we would always joke about high yellow complexion. I was confused for two years of my life about color in the beginning stage of adulthood not knowing about complexion but now I am fully aware of skin complexion. I realize other people frustration of other brothers (African American men) being quiet or separated.

In the following responses, participants state that they were taught skin tone by their mom and expressed that their mom was the one that helped them make sense of different skin tones.

Participant 4 discussed as well that his mom was an educator as well as,

Growing up my mom comes from the South during the Jim Crow era. My mom told me that being Black we do not get treated equal and racism was taught early. My mother had me look at movies "Roots and The Color Purple" movies that gave good examples of the message my mother was communicating about being Black. We must do a little bit more than other people do get ahead.

Participant 9 said,

To embrace and be glad that I'm a Black, strong, and powerful man. I would always remember those messages from my family when things got hard or difficult in life. My mom would communicate them to me when I felt down or low on myself as a means of encouragement. I also learned that people may view me as lazy and will not be a good father or husband.

All participants had someone they felt had been an impact on their life and helped them learn about their skin tone. Several of the participants expressed that their moms were a big influence on their lives when learning about colorism and racism. Other participants communicated that they had mentors that were a great influence in their lives and helped them understand skin tones. They all expressed that learning about skin tones had impacted them in some way concerning learning about colorism. All participants experienced a time when they felt their mom or mentor taught them about skin tone or helped them understand more about being an African American man. In the next subsection, I discuss dating related to the complexion of the skin.

Theme 2: Dating

Theme 2 has three subthemes: light skin, medium skin, and dark skin. All participants discussed dating during the interview. Dating concerns individuals that have been in a relationship and spending time together. All the participants gave insight into a time when they dated or were currently dating someone with either light skin, medium skin, or dark skin. They discussed their experiences with dating and colorism, specifically who and what contributed to the perception's men have about skin tone. Four participants responded that they had no preference when dating (Participants 4, 8,7, and 10). Three other participants discussed their preference was caramel brown or medium brown (Participants 1, 5, and 9). The other three participants preference was dark skin when dating (Participants 2, 3, and 6). When asked about who and what reflected their dating preferences, Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 responded that their mom was an impact. Their mother's skin tone was a representation on what skin tone they chose when they decided to date. The other five participants stated they did not have any influence when it came to reflecting on the skin tone of the people they dated (Participants 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10).

Participant 2 said, "My preference was dark skin women. My mom was same as me. My wife was a darker complexion like my mom. Women do contribute to the way a male feel about their skin tone."

Participant 6 said,

I like my women dark skinned. I think a lot of what I like in skin color comes

from growing up around a lot of women. Because a lot of the women in my

family are around that shade of color (dark skin). I think my mom's skin color

was my first love or loved. I just like dark skin women.

Participant 10 stated.

 I do not have a preference, but if I had to choose, she would be medium. No, they

(referring to mother and friends) did not have a reflection on who I dated They

allowed me to make my own decisions and did not judge. I believe males helped

get them to this conclusion by not treating them both fairly.

To summarize, all participants recognized what society thought of dating and their

preferences. There were some that preferred dating dark skinned and medium skinned

complexions. There were some that discussed that they had no preference when it comes

to dating. None of the participants communicated that they would date light skinned

women but gave reported on experiences when they dated light skinned women in the

past. The next section will discuss specific experiences with dating light skin women.

Subtheme 1: Light skin. All participants communicated about a dating

experience with light skin women during the interview. Several participants discussed

during the interview that they would not date light skinned women due to an incident

occurred or a bad experience.

Participant 1 discussed," I used to be team light skin, but things changed due to

light skin attitudes. It was light skin until I realized they were crazy. I ended up marrying

someone close to my skin color but lighter".

Participant 5 stated,

> I am typically anti-light skin as far as dating women because I had a bad experience (I had a bad experience in 8th grade that stuck with me forever that I would not date anyone light skin. It was the way she behaved, her demeanor was aggressive, and a child match always arguing and fussing) with light skin and sound petty but it stuck with me since the 8th grade. It was a child match for no reason and everyone I now date has been brown skin medium tone to dark skin. I believe it was the attitude I was unable to deal with when it came to dating lighter skin.

Participant 8 explained,

> I believe light skin is different based on the blue veins and they must use more makeup to color their complexion whereas a dark skin complexion does not. I believe lighter vein is never pretty. It was a time that light skin was popular due to the media and the betrayal of darker skin males.

To summarize, some of the participants discussed that they had issues when dating light skin women. Some participants described the relationship with a light skin woman to mean, they had an attitude, not attractive, or just bad experiences. The participants discussed a bad experience with dating light skin tone was characterized as being mean, they fussed, they treated them differently, and aggressive. These types of experience made them not want to date that complexion. One also expressed that the blue veins being shown in the body was not attractive to him. All the participants discussed

that they would not date a light skin woman. The next section will discuss lived experiences of African American men dating medium skin woman.

Subtheme 2: Medium skin. All participants communicated about a dating experience related to medium skin during the interview. Participants discussed they have dated caramel or medium tone women. Several participants defined caramel skin complexion is medium skin tone. Participants 1, 4, and 10 discussed their preference of dating a medium skin tone.

Participant 1 stated,

> We all seem to date the color of our parents, some don't but for me it was major that I found a woman who had the values of my wife. No preference but I had married a woman the same color as my mom that is caramel brown. It brings a sense of security as I tried other skin colors and they carried traits that weren't aligned with my view.

Participant 4 said,

> I am not going to pick and choose I would say whatever loves falls under. She was my skin color that is medium skin tone. My skin tone is medium or whatever you consider medium dark. I would just say the skin tone, but we share the same likes, the same upbringing, and same struggles.

Participant 10 said,

> I do not have a preference, but if I had to choose, she would be medium. My dating experience has been with light and medium skin tones. Yes, because the lighter woman to me think that they are more entitled to different things. The

darker woman to me seem to have lower self-esteem. I believe males help get them to this conclusion by not treating them both fairly.

To summarize, several of the participants gave experiences of dating medium skin tone. Some had admiration of the medium skin tone and how much they loved the color of the skin. They called it "caramel" also known as medium skin tone. The next section will discuss why the participants prefer dark skin over medium skin tone.

Subtheme 3: Dark skin. All participants communicated about a dating experience related to dark skin during the interview. Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 discussed their preference of dark skin woman because they feel comfortable dating them due to their confidence and beauty of their skin complexion. Participants 7, 8, & 10 discussed where dark skin woman are more aggressive, have a chip on their shoulders, and have lower self-esteem but that did not mean they would not date them due to these characteristics.

Participant 2 discussed,

> I choose dark women. You heard me talking about a redbone, but I prefer dark women because in school they called us Black (redbone/light woman did). Redbones made us feel less than because they told us our hair was knotty and we needed straighten combs. Light skin was mean to me. Women of same complexion. Dark women were no different and they were down. Hood was hood. My wife did contribute a lot to my manner and behavior over time. She made me feel powerful and not less than. I think women does contribute to the way a male feel about the skin tone. Racism is coming that fool bring it back making people

come out of the closet that was holding it in. 150 to 2019 is a big different and a big change.

Participant 3 stated,

 I would not say I have a preference but over my dating lifetime it seem like all my girlfriend was a darker complexion. I would not say I would not date a light skin woman, but light skin women are not attractive to me. Stigma is stigma. I choose dark skin complexion. It was not that I was choosing dark skin women that is what was choosing me. Um...but as far as the experience with people in the family. I have heard people over critical of self and gives negative stigma. I have heard the negative undertone for darker skin women and for light skin women. I have dated enough where person is person and a stigma are a stigma. I do not date based on the look of skin tone. I let the women show me who they are because I give them the respect. Show me some who you are over time. My experience has been good and bad.

Participant 7 stated,

 I believe that Black woman is more aggressive, but I still only date dark skin because I like their confidence. Light skin woman I have never dated. I dated all dark skin woman. Black (dark skin) is more respective but aggressive. Black women demand more respect "do's or don't.

To summarize, all participants have discussed their dating preference. Some prefer medium skin whereas others preferred dark skin. Participants 6 and 7 were a match with dark skin tone and their dating skin tone preference of dark. The three participants

that discussed they had no preference but will date medium skin tone considered themselves to be medium skin tone. Participant 1, 2, 3, and 9 considered themselves a different skin tone and would date opposite of their skin tone of either medium or dark skin. Some participants discussed how they love the confidence in a dark skin woman whereas others believe that the dark skin woman have lower self-esteem based on their experience with dating dark skin women. Some participants communicated that dark skin women embrace their skin tone. Some participants discussed that dark skin women are more aggressive and have a chip on their shoulders. The next section will discuss the participants' self-esteem related to colorism.

Theme 3: Self-Esteem

All participants talked about their levels of self-esteem as being an African American man during the interview. African American men rate themselves with 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest on how they feel about themselves. Also, how they viewed themselves. Six participants discussed that they are 5s for their level of self-esteem. One participant discussed that he is a 7 and not a 5 for his self-esteem is high. Two participants discussed that their self-esteem is a 4.

Participant 2 said,

> My confidents came in the 1960s from "Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King, Jr. I am proud of me, I am proud of my color, and I haven't always been like that but oh shit I am a 7. I feel like I am 7 because I can survive, I can take care of family, and grandkids. I have never been without. I have felt infrared and less than in the 1950s due to doing drugs, but I was able overcome it and feel

confident about my self-esteem. I was raised in the 50s and 60s era where many colors were an issue and the past has created the diversity amongst African Americans.

Participant 4 stated,

My self-esteem level is a 5. I believe people might perceive me as being lazy or a thug or whatever, but I know myself so and I do not care what other people think. I am proud of being an African American man. Yes, Whites contribute to the perception I have on skin tone because they just try to give us a bad name especially in the media and on social media. They have been betraying us as something we are not and making us look bad in society.

Participant 7 stated,

I am proud of being a Black male and my self-esteem is a 5. I am perceived as a threat due to my size, color of my skin, and hair texture with dreadlocks. I am a strong African American man, very independent, and not being held by something based off what I look like. I know I am big, Black, and with dreadlocks when curly hair faces are the faces of the media for Whites compared to images like me.

Participant 10 explained,

I am a 5 and to me it does not relate to my skin tone. If I were darker skin tone, I can see how self-esteem could influence people. I think I am perceived as knowledgeable and well-educated young man. I am a 5 because of the experiences I have overcame and I feel there are no circumstances too big that I cannot overcome. No, I have not experienced any challenges, but stigmas follow

the generation and most White people think that is all males do if you are medium or even darker skin tone

To summarize, all the participants were able to discuss their self-esteem levels and how their self-esteem were not impacted based on the color of their skin. Some participants' self-esteem levels were high, and some considered themselves higher than the scale of 5 being the highest. Two participants discussed they are a 4 when it comes to self-esteem. One participant expressed that his skin tone does play a part when it comes to his reflection on his self-esteem. One participant discussed if his skin tone was darker, he can see where self-esteem can be affected. Several of the participants discussed they are confident and strong. Some participants discussed being able to boost their self-esteem levels based on how they are perceived from others. All participants were able to give experiences on how they were able to build their self-esteem over time. Some participants discussed that their self-esteem was boosted by being picked on in school, their name being judged, or not being accepted. Whereas, some participants were able to give their experiences of their self-esteem was high due to just being African American. Some were able to give insight on how others perceived them as African American men based on certain characteristics. These participants were able to be discuss that their self-esteem is still high. They felt they can accept themselves and not feel treated like they are less than. All participants were able to discuss issues of how they believe Whites contribute to their perception based on stigmas, media betrayal, and separation to create animosity.

Summary

This chapter depicted the shared lived experiences of ten men based on how they see themselves as African American men based on dating and self-esteem to colorism. Allowing the participants expressions to be used directly provided a more realistic view of what it is like to be an African American man based on everyday stressors in their daily lives, interacting with others in society, and learning how to cope being an African American man. The results of this qualitative study found that African American men experienced colorism in so many ways based on experiences related to how they were perceived from others, how they see themselves through self-image, how they pick their dating partner, and how they felt they are treated based on discrimination. Furthermore, African American men noted different characteristics and attributes were placed on them based on their skin tone. For example, they felt having darker skin or medium skin made it harder to get promoted or finding a job. The participants appeared to be knowledgeable about colorism related to others in society as well as skin tone. The participants were able to communicate about the three themes: perception, dating, and self-esteem in their lives. There were also eight sub themes that the participants were able to discuss related to colorism. The subthemes are discrimination, learning about skin tone, light skin, medium skin, and dark skin. Additionally, African American men said that light skin was considered mean whereas dark skin women had an attitude with a chip on their shoulder, but medium skin and dark skin were the preference when dating. In Chapter 5, I will provide connections between these findings and relevant literature, discuss the

interpretation of the results, the limitations of the research, the implications of the study

results, and the recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American men regarding their attitudes towards skin complexion and dating habits and self-esteem. Few recent studies have examined African American men's perceptions and attitudes on the role or impact of colorism, so I designed this study to explore the gap in the literature. Addressing the gap in literature pertaining to African American men will lead to a greater understanding of their experiences with colorism based on dating and self-esteem. This chapter will highlight the interpretation of the findings, the limitations, the implications of the study results, and recommendations for future research studies.

The findings in this study indicate that although participants received messages that aligned with stereotypical thoughts regarding their skin tone, those messages did not affect their perception on self-esteem and dating habits. There were specific themes that transpired from the analysis of the participants' lived experiences. The themes that transpired were (a) perception with subthemes of discrimination and learning about skin; (b) dating with subthemes of skin tone, light skin, medium skin, and dark skin; and (c) self-esteem.

Interpretation of the Findings

The research question in this study was: How do African American men perceive the phenomenon of colorism? The sub questions were (a) How do African American men relate their dating habits to colorism? and (b) How do African American men relate their

self-esteem to colorism? As indicated in Chapter 4, through thematic analysis I identified three themes and five subthemes. The interpretation of the findings are organized by theme.

The first theme noted in this study was colorism not an issue in self-perception. This theme arose from how the participants indicated they feel about themselves based on their skin tone. Participants felt confident and proud of themselves. These participants addressed that they became stronger and more confident due to the issues and obstacles that were put in front of them. There were no differences in how African American men felt they were perceived based on the complexion of their skin tone. These findings are broadly consistent with the literature (Coard et al., 2001; Maxwell et al., 2015). While researchers have examined African American women's perceptions of skin complexion and its impact on self-esteem, self-image, and certain habits like skin bleaching (Mathew, 2013), there is limited research available that explores perceptions of skin complexion in African American men. The few studies that have included African American men found that African American men's perceptions of their skin tones were more positive compared to African American women, who experienced a more negative perception of their skin tones (Coard et al., 2001).

Nassar-McMillan et al. (2006) noted that negative perceptions of African Americans based on their skin tone have been occurring since American slavery. While research has demonstrated the negative impact of these perceptions, the participants in this study appeared to express more positive self-perceptions overall. The participants expressed that they felt proud of their skin color and felt more empowered of their skin

tone based on how they are perceived. There were two subthemes related to perception: (a) discrimination based on their skin tone and (b) learning about their skin tone.

The subtheme on discrimination addressed how the African American men participants experienced discrimination based on their skin tone. Several of the participants felt they were discriminated against due to the color of their skin. All the participants were able to address a time in their lives when they felt that they were not treated equally or they felt less than others who were not African American. Participants were able to address that the discrimination occurred in several contexts, including on the job and at school. Some participants noted that they continued to experience discrimination in society today. The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature (Hill, 2012; Monk, 2014; Uzogara et al., 2014). Hill (2002) argued that historically African Americans with lighter skin tone had higher social and material privileges before the Civil War and experienced greater upward mobility after the end of slavery. Those with lighter skin were more likely to view themselves as intelligent and perform well on IQ tests, which further perpetuated the idea that skin tone influenced perception and discrimination based on perception. Discrimination based on skin complexion is also present within the African American community, which further influences self-perception (Uzogara et al., 2014). Monk (2014) suggested that skin tone stratification remains an issue in the early 21st century, which further supports the findings from this study.

Learning About Skin Tone

Learning about skin tone through messages from others was another subtheme related to the perception of being an African American man. Participants learned about skin tone messages verbally or behaviorally when growing up in their home with their mother or by a mentor in the community. Participants explained that their mothers or mentors helped them understand being an African American man including the "dos and dont's" of being accepted in society. These messages including learning about colorism and its impact on racism. The findings of the study were consistent with previous literature (Bond & Cash, 1992; Greene, 1990; Hunter, 2002, 2007; Maddox & Gary, 2002; Suizzo et al., 2008; Wilder & Cain 2011). Studies found that people created assumptions about others based on the color of their skin tone (Maddox & Gary, 2002) Studies further reported that family relationship is powerful enough to encourage colorism and its belief systems (Bond & Cash, 1992; Greene, 1990; Hunter, 2002, 2007; Suizzo et al., 2008). These mentors help the participants about skin tone messages and how to survive in society being an African American man. All participants had someone they felt has been a major impact on their life and help them fully understand about being an African American man. Wilder & Cain (2011) found Black families has been taught about colorism in a way that helps African American survive colorism within the Black community.

Theme 2: Dating and Skin Tone Preference

The second theme noted in this study was dating and its relationship to skin tone preference in dating partners. This was a particularly complicated theme as participants

focused on their current beliefs about skin tone dating preferences, while also describing past skin tone dating preferences. Most participants preferred dating either medium skinned or dark-skinned women, while some participants had no preference. None of the participants expressed a preference for light skinned women. These results are mostly inconsistent with the literature (Brown et al.,2003; Coard et al., 2001; Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Mathew 2013). Several studies have identified a dating preference for light skinned women for African American men for a variety of reasons including to improve their social standing (Coard, et al, 2001; Thompson & Keith, 2001; Mathew, 2013) or due to their over representation in the media (Brown et al., 2003). Esmail and Sullivan's (2006) study was partially consistent as they found some percentage of their African American men participants preferring medium skinned women. Participants in this study also noted particular beliefs about dating partners based on their skin tone including the belief that light skinned women caused trouble or had an "attitude", while dark skinned women either embraced their skin tone or had low self-esteem. Other beliefs of dark-skinned women were that they had "a chip on their shoulder" or were too aggressive. These findings are partially consistent with studies that have associated dark skin with negative characteristics (Banks, 2009; Mathew, 2013). The participants beliefs about skin tone partially reflected the messages they received about their own skin tone as noted in other themes.

Theme 3: Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the third theme for this study. Participants in this study discussed how they viewed themselves. Participants rated their self-esteem as high feeling

confident and strong. Some further noted that their self-esteem was directly tied to their identity as African Americans. They discussed factors they believe influenced their self-esteem including how others perceived them and being judged. Participants noted that overcoming these early experiences increased their self-esteem as adults. Their expression of a high level of self-esteem was true regardless of their skin tone. The literature on the relationship between skin tone and self-esteem among African Americans is mixed. Past researchers reported that darker males had low self-esteem based on their skin tone (Coard et al., 2001). Other studies are more consistent with my findings as they found no relationship between skin color and satisfaction (Maxwell et al., 2015).

Theoretical Considerations

Both theoretical frameworks help to explain the findings of this study. The looking-glass self theory posits to the idea that people shape their self-concepts based on their understanding of how others perceive them. Cooley argued that the looking-glass self is shaped by how society views a person and not how that person views him or herself. Cooley explained the way the looking-glass self plays out in the primary group (family) interactions by breaking it into three phases. In the first phase, individuals imagine how they appear to others, but may not be correct, as this self-image is based on an assumption. In the second phase, individuals imagine how others judge them based on appearance. In the third phase, individuals shift their behavior based on how they perceive other people feel about or judge them (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). Participants were able to discuss their lived experiences based on perception versus reality.

Participants expressed that they did not allow others to shape their lifestyle. Participants were able to remain positive based on how they felt based on others perception. Participants did express that they had to be a certain person so they would not be judged based on their skin tone. Similar to Mathew's explanation of Cooley's theory (2013), these participants did combat the internalization of messages received from others about themselves. Participants expressed their struggle to focus on their own perception vs other expectations.

The concept of social stigma of different categorizations of experiencing and feeling related to stigma and social organization (framing). Stigmatized people (i.e., people who are considered abnormal) often feel they must change to fit into society (Goffman, 1963). Mathew (2013) found that feelings of shame or distress resulted from the stigma against dark-complexioned African Americans. Participants that were dark skin did express that they believed they had to do more to feel accepted in society. Participants also reported that they have experienced society's stigma about African American men, and they must uphold themselves in a certain way. That way was to be proud of being African American.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this current study. First, this study was limited based on the geographic location of the participants. The participants were drawn from a small area in the mid-Atlantic region. It is possible that having a broader sample of African American men from different regions of the country may have resulted in different themes related to colorism. Another potential limitation is the fact that I alone

coded the data. Using more than one coder could have increased the reliability of the themes. Finally, the results are potential limited as they are based on self-report. The participants could have answered the interview questions based on social desirability. As I am a dark-skinned African American woman, my skin tone may have influenced the participants' responses. The participants may have skewed their answers to not offend me or give answers they assumed that I wanted to hear.

Recommendations for Future Research

Colorism continues to be a relevant topic and is being researched today to understand the impact on the culture. Therefore, this study encompassed multiple implications that warrants further study. Future research should include a larger sample from a broader geographic region to determine whether the same themes surface in different African American cultures. Future research should also expand the diversity of the same including a broader age range, the presence or absence of children, and broad education and social class levels. One of the themes of this study, pointed to the role of mothers in influencing their self-perception. These participants did not discuss their fathers. Future research could explore the impact of father or other male role models on the role of colorism in these men's lives. These participants showed no preference for dating based on skin tone. Future research with a broader sample could look at the generational influence of those beliefs. Are older men more likely to be influenced by colorism than younger men? Could this potentially explain the inconsistent findings with other literature that did find a relationship between skin tone preference and dating for African American men?

Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of colorism for African American men. The results of the study may have significant implications for social change. For these men, colorism did influence their perception of self and how they believe others perceived them. Yet it did not influence their self-esteem nor their dating practices. What these African American men did discuss is the role of discrimination and other mistreatment on their life. These findings demonstrate that even though African Americans have made strides, for some African American men there remains the struggle of managing discrimination and negative perceptions based on their identity. Mental health clinicians and other disciplines that serve African American men would benefit from understanding the themes from this study. Parents and others who raise, nurture, and mentor African American boys to men would further benefit from these findings. Those in the media would further benefit from understand the impact of the negative stereotypes based on colorism.

Furthermore, counselors could use this study to help them better understand African American men habits. There are limited numbers of African American men that seek counseling to address their skin tone, self-esteem, and their identity overall. In general, African American men struggle to communicate about how they feel about themselves based on the complexion of their skin. Multicultural therapists could use the themes derived in this study to begin specific dialogue with African American about these issues.

Conclusion

This present study indicated that colorism does have an impact on African American men. Colorism is an existing issue in the African American community and discovering strategies to alleviate its effect on people by addressing inter-racism is necessary. The findings of this study can be added to the minimal literature available on the importance of colorism for African American men. This study may help to raise awareness of the varied experiences of African American men including the role of discrimination. Colorism they were able to learn about the complexion of their skin tones and the do's and do nots of being an African American man. They discussed being an African American man they had to always be aware of their surroundings and do a little more to feel accepted or to stay out of trouble.

The study showed that African American men choose medium and dark skin women due to their bad experience with light skin women. African American women are mostly affected by colorism; physical attraction is the exact focus. The idea of learning to feel comfortable around a certain skin tone without having judgements. In addition, there was a theme of rejection, such as: light-skinned women seen as more aggressive, attitude, and have chip on their shoulder and a theme of attractiveness, such as: medium and dark-skin women seen as more attractive than light-skin women. African American men expressions to be used directly provided a more realistic view of what it is like to be an African American man based on everyday stressors in their daily lives, interacting with others in society, and learning how to cope being an African American man. African American men expressed that they are proud and they have high self-esteem. Overall,

African American men perceptions allows society to see that Colorism within is still an issue and change is needed. The stigma of being an African American man is still a big issue with discrimination, stereotypes, and judgements.

Colorism continues to be a significant issue in the United States. As evidenced by previous research and supported by current research findings that skin tone can lead to psychological effects within the group of being an African American. African American men are learning to uphold a standard to not be judged in society.

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Appendix A: Informational Flyer for Recruitment

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON THE EXPERIENCES OF LIVING AS AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

We are looking for volunteers to be interviewed for a study about attitudes towards skin complexion related to dating and self-esteem amongst African American men. You must be a MALE, of the African American race, and within the age range of 18 and over. This study has received permission from Walden University to be conducted. As a participant in this study, you would be asked questions about your own life and about your experiences with societal and cultural expectations of being an African American man. The interviews will take about an hour and will be held at the main local library in Hampton, VA. Please include your full first name and first initial of your last name and phone number and/or best-preferred method of contact. Once you have emailed this information, a demographic questionnaire will be emailed to you, along with a detailed description of the purpose of this study.

Appendix B: Screening Questionnaire

1. Are you within the age range of 18 and over?

a. Yes

b. No

2. Are you able to communicate in English?

a. Yes

b. No

3. Are you an African American male?

a. Yes

b. No

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Research Question 1: How do African American men perceive the phenomenon of colorism?

What views or attitudes have you inquired as an African American male?

What messages did you learn about skin tone in your home as a child?

How did you make sense of these messages?

How did the messages get communicated to you?

How do you feel about being an African American male?

Do you consider your skin tone to be (Light, Medium, or Dark)?

Have you ever been discriminated based on the color of your skin tone?

If you could change your skin color, what would it be changed too? Why?

Sub Question 1. How do African American men relate their dating habits to colorism?

What is your skin preference when dating? Why?

In your dating experience, what was the skin tone of the persons you dated? (preference vs. actual behavior).

What makes you feel comfortable with dating that skin tone?

Since you mentioned that you dated …. (fill in with the participant's experience), did you notice any differences in your dating experience based on your partners' skin tone?

Do your mother (or friends?) has a reflecting on the skin tone being dated?

Do you believe that African American women contribute to the perceptions males have about skin tone? And/or: What or who do you think contribute to the perceptions male have about skin tone?

Sub Question 2. How do African American men relate their self-esteem to colorism?

a. How do you think you are perceived as an African American male?

b. What is your self-esteem level from 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest?

What factors contributed to your level of self-esteem?

How do you relate your skin tone with your level of self-esteem?

c. Have you encountered issues/problems finding a job based on your skin color?

d. How do you think you are perceived as an African American male?

Have you faced challenges with skin tone?

If so, can you share them with me?

Do you believe whites contribute to the perceptions males have about skin tone?

If so, can you please elaborate.

Appendix D: Social Media Flyer

I am seeking African American men whom are 18 and over for a study that explores their lived experiences as African American men. These men must live in the Hampton roads area. You will be interviewed for a study about attitudes towards skin complexion related to dating and self-esteem amongst African American men. Participation is voluntary and confidential. This study has received permission from Walden University to be conducted. As a participant in this study, you would be asked questions about your own life and about your experiences with societal and cultural expectations of being an African American man. The interviews will take about an hour and will be held at the main local library. Please include your full first name and first initial of your last name and phone number and/or best-preferred method of contact. Once you have emailed this information, a short demographic questionnaire will be emailed to you, along with a detailed description of the purpose of this study. Looking forward to hearing from you!