

The Hues of History: Colorism within the African American community

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Introduction

Eurocentric beauty standards has dominated society for decades. In modern society, skin lightening creams and skin bleaching products are a flourishing, multibillion dollar industry. However, not everyone can achieve those standards and people within the black community are often faced with the pressure of conforming to the larger hegemonic society, allowing for the perpetuation and internalization of racism. In this project, I will define colorism and terminology relating to it, examine the historical underpinnings of colorism, analyze the manifestation and internalization of colorism in the black community, and assess the psychological repercussions thereof.

Historical Implications

Colorism, also known as skin color stratification, is the valuation of individuals with lighter skin complexion over individuals with dark skin complexions, usually, within an ethnic group. Beginning with the colonization and enslavement of individuals of African descent, Black people in the United States have been ostracized, criticized and systematically oppressed for having coarser hair and darker skin. Additionally, opportunities and resources available were not easily accessible to those who were Black or descendants of slaves.

Below is a list of the concepts addressed in this project. I am more than willing to elaborate on any of these concepts upon request.

Concepts addressed (include, but not limited to):

- Slavery
- Brown Paper Bag Test
- Doll Test
- Media
- Minstrel Shows
- Comb Test/Pencil Test
- Extension of White Supremacy
- Privilege



Gabourey Sidibe. Elle Magazine. 2010.

Methods

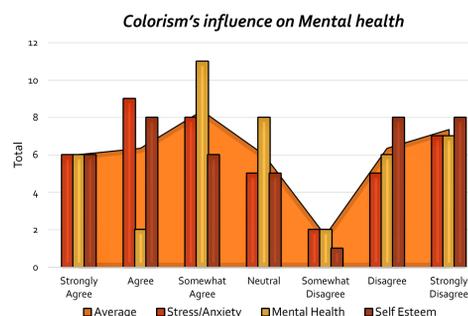
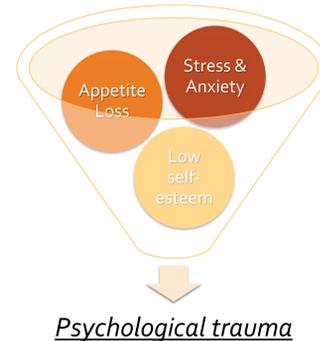
- Convenience Sampling using a questionnaire
- One-on-one Interviews
- Three (3) sections: Appearance & Image; Colorism; Mental Health Status
- Using Qualtrics analytic software, data and graphs of each question was collected



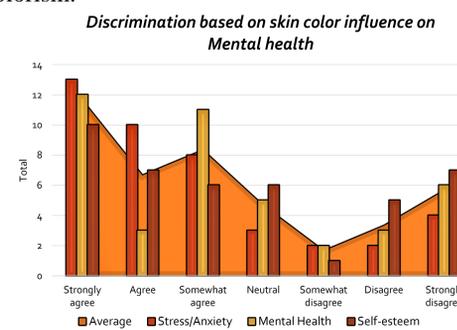
"It's a bleaching cream that I apply before going to bed and whitens my skin some... It's a cream that I have, that I use to soften [my skin], but has bleached me some."
--Sammy Sosa. "Primer Impacto" interview with reporter Tony Dandrades.

Results

- As a way to maintain the status quo, the systematic oppression of Black people through the perpetuation of White Supremacy allowed for the manifestation and perpetuation of colorism within the African American community.
- Psychological trauma can include, but is not limited to mental illnesses such as Body Dysmorphia, Depression, Anxiety. Additionally, there are physically illnesses such as hypertension and high blood pressure that is also associated with colorism.



The purpose of the graph above is to show that colorism does influence mental health, but not to a vastly large extent.



The purpose of the graph above is to show that discrimination based on skin color influences mental health to a large extent, while perpetuating Eurocentric beauty standards.

One limitation of this study is that it is currently in progress during the time of this presentation. Thus, the data displayed on the charts above are incomplete. Another limitation is the study's small sample size which is contributing to some of the graphs abnormal curves. However, over the past decades, colorism and discrimination have transitioned from overt to more discrete acts which could be another possible contributor to the abnormal curves. Also, the collection of data was intentionally left open for anyone who identified as a black individual to permit the analysis of how colorism manifest differently (or doesn't) in various genders, age groups, education levels and cultures.

Future Steps

- Solidarity amongst different skin tones within the Black community
- Although the damage cannot be undone, all of society, especially white society, must work towards the dismantlement of the systematic oppression of white supremacy
- Work towards the Destigmatization of Mental Health issues in the Black community.
- Lastly, we must acknowledge that Discrimination, Racism, and white supremacy are alive and kicking. We cannot adopt the 'Colorblind' approach because that approach ignores and undermines the experiences of an entire group of people.



"All my life men have told me I wasn't pretty enough—even the men I was dating... It's always been men putting me down just like my dad. To this day when someone says I'm cute, I can't see it. I don't see it no matter what anybody says." -- Lil Kim. Newsweek. 2000.

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