

Representations of Skin Tone, Colorism, and Reimagining Marginality for Black Women

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Abstract

Engaging intersectional analysis of the issues of colorism shows how participant interviews among Black women in the university systems in this research are viewed, how they view themselves, and the expectations they are held to. Consequently, the United States perspective of worldview expectations and assimilative practices yield contrasting viewpoints and frame a social construct of colorism within Black communities. Suppose one reimagines the representations of Black women to be centered on their experiences and standards of self-reliance. In that case, we can see beyond a colorist caste system in various spaces where Black women belong – everywhere. In discussing experiences from Black women’s standpoints, we are reimagining ideologies that shift narratives of assimilation praxis. Much research examines the effects of colorism and how race and representation stem from colonial thinking. We can discuss how we respond to the worldview of marginality, an informed epistemic response to how we participate. Participants of this study, shaped from various backgrounds and environments, are all members of a university or college or have been in higher education, offering perspectives of their own and other Black individuals. The social locations of Black women should not be dependent on the consequential marginality that oppression has placed them in. To consider a dynamic shift in centralizing the reimaginative process for Black marginality, we may construct a new theory for inclusion by representation.

Keywords: African American Women/ Black Women, Colorism, Representation, Co-cultural and Standpoint theories, Reimagine, Marginality.

Introduction

Many Black women are racially socialized to enlist in standards that provide them access and belonging to their racial identity. In *Everyday Colorism* (2019), Sarah Webb, looks to Alice Walker's essay, “If the Present Looks like the Past, What Does the Future Look Like”, (1983) in defining colorism as “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color” (p. 290). Most Americans are taught ideologies of light-skin superiority. Author of *One Drop* (2021), Yaba Blay, suggests that the unification of two races, “Black and White became a distorted line”. This distorted line is where misrepresentation engages with colorism and increases abuse between women. BreAnna Davis Tribble et al., (2019) explored gendered racial socialization among Black women in their research, no [Right] Way to Be a Black Woman, Davis Tribble denotes that colorism is a global ideology that has placed two physical traits on women: (1) darker skin and (2) coarse hair. bell hooks’ work in *Black Looks* (2015) challenges her readers to recognize that white

supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal culture is the leading system to which we justify the continued production of racist-driven media representations.

These worldviews force Black women into beliefs ignited by colorism, abuse through systemic white supremacy, deceptions of representations, assimilative tactics, messaging, media/visual art, ideologies, and institutions. Worldviews will continue to be centered on assimilation strategies that stimulate skin tone bias or colorism, there is a need to reimagine them from their perspectives. As a bi-racial Black (Mulatto) woman, I have been invited into spaces outside the weary walls of my perspective. I have looked back to see Black women and girls like me be given kinder eyes than those who have darker skin. The notion of being forced to accept social and mental invitations by white women instead of resisting them to stand with Black friends and family that do not include those dark-skinned women is how colorism persists. For example, I am biracial, and my skin tone is medium, and I have been chosen over other darker-skinned individuals at work, in classrooms, and other diverse situations. In light, I should have resisted it all, but to

understand and actualize opportunity was a desperate move. Inviting Black women into physical spaces for inclusion is not a viable solution. Asking them to build from their perspectives invites the reimagination of spaces while simultaneously developing self-reflective representations.

The objective of this project is to demolish perpetuating issues surrounding colorism such as (mis)representations of race, oppression, assimilation, microaggression/invalidation, and caste-like systems affecting Black women by reimagining the social location of their spaces. We do this by using existing research on standpoint and co-cultural theories as processes that discuss Black women's experiences. The process of reimagination is a multiple-perspective initiative that detaches from ideologies of white supremacy intending to engineer a resounding theoretical lens and comprehensive strategies to shift the idea of inclusion among Black women that expands by appropriate representation. The objective asks all other individuals to reimagine equity and equality from Black woman's perspectives.

This development embraces informed ways of thinking when considering how we marginalize many Black women. It asks us to reconceptualize progress that has been made for Black women and suggests we rewire ideologies that centralize Eurocentricity as a standard. To consider this, I examine standpoint theory and co-cultural theory. Sandra Harding's controversial standpoint theory is often utilized for research that is race-based according to her article, "Standpoint Theories: Productively Controversial," (2009). This theory intended to explain the trajectory of earlier feminist research organization, which called for a tiered methodology; first as sociological, then as political philosophical, and then finally, biological.

Here, in my research, I recognize the limits of the possibility that not all participants involved have similar Black experiences, and they do not. While the limited number of participants all come from a collegiate background, findings still showed a diverse frame of standpoints from each. In contrast, a quantitative study that examines standpoint theory by Catherine E. Harnois (2010) challenged the recent responses to standpoint theory by other academics, citing that there was not enough quantitative research to prove that Black women were far more subject to experience the issues within the theory, and that gender wasn't as important to her participants. However, her findings showed that most of her work enlisted at least 80 % of participants to admit to issues

surrounding feminist standpoint theory, along with race, class, and gender issues.

Over time, we have seen an uptick in gender awareness, fluidity, and promise to even the playing field, but when it comes to positions of power and hierarchy, we still see a vast majority of those roles being upheld by men/white men. I argue that standpoint theory appreciates the alignment of reimagination for Black women because of its ability to be exclusive, while also accounting for many variables that could speak to a broad representation of Black women such as skin-tone differences, colorism, LGBT+, class identification, and several other outlining intersections. We can still use standpoints to frame the ideology of how we teach others to view, envision, and investigate.

Sarah Webb describes in *Everyday Colorism* (2019) colorism as being actualized by European colonialism and American Slavery, that it reflects class hierarchies in other countries and is implicated by White supremacy. Webb suggests racialization of physical traits, and an individual's outward appearance have long tended to be Eurocentric in preference and has associated with Western beauty standards. Webb looks to Alice Walker's essay, "If the Present Looks like the Past, What Does the Future Look Like" (1983) in defining colorism as "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" (p. 290).

Webb argues that colorism is not only a skin tone bias, but a physical appearance bias by saying that the more a Black individual looks "less archetypical," the closer their resemblance is to that of Eurocentric beauty standards. Webb's argument that physical traits affect the boundaries of colorism may also suggest that the levels of how Black women see themselves may vary depending on what they believe is an accepted standard. As a professor, Webb uses Walker's essay to bridge the conversation between students, asking them about the experiences they have had where they are reminded of how the "present looks like the past." Verifying these conversations with students offers an opportunity to further explore how fragments of our time are spent qualifying experiences with colorism. These notions can have adverse effects on individuals and make them believe they are unworthy of space if they genuinely believe that Eurocentric beauty standards are normative. Racializing physical traits promote worldviews that isolate individuals who do not meet beauty standards that were not written for their skin tones or hair types. However, if a Black woman is lighter skinned, and has fine or softer hair as

opposed to coarse hair, they are more closely able to resemble the proximity of Whiteness, a systematic divide between Black women, or freedom.

Walker describes her reality as being a mother who is brown skin, with a daughter who is a lighter complexion, and straighter hair. She mentions that her daughter had it easier than she did. She further explains that she understands the ingrained beliefs that she and her mother were programmed to know. She writes, "Escape the pain, the ridicule, escape the jokes, the lack of attention, respect, dates, even a job, any way you can" (291). This reminds us that we are still thinking about racial socialization, the upbringing tactics for children by parents to cope, blend, assimilative behavior or to simmer down, and find freedom by way of proximity to whiteness. Walker asks the question, is it freedom, or Whiteness?

Black women with lighter skin tones have been used more generously in commercial/media and marketing spaces, and the exposure of that is far more frequent than decades before. These are not representations of all Black women but are more largely accepted because of their proximity to whiteness. They are mostly Eurocentric versions of Black acceptance. Davis Tribble et al. explored gendered racial socialization among Black women in their research, "No [Right] Way to Be a Black Woman" (2019). Davis Tribble denotes that colorism is a global ideology that has placed two physical traits on women: (1) "darker skin" and (2) "coarse hair". They further explain the consequences of colorism in their research. The data has shown that women with darker skin have more disadvantages, such as physical and mental health issues and socio-economic problems. Such findings discern that in the beginning years of childhood, the familial discourse was the preliminary source of gendered racial socialization, and that attitude surrounding Black hair was the center of family messaging. Tribble et al. recognize that family was not the only factor in how hair/skin messaging prevailed, clarifying that outside relationships from the home took a large part in the "hair hierarchies' endemic to colorism."

Participants in Tribble's study discussed family issues that pertained to lightness as a high beauty standard. The article shares with us how the political journey with hair is a decision to be made dependent on whom they want to address in society whether it be at work, school, or in a place that is regulated by a strict dress code. In this case, hair is the medium, and it is the message that validates or invalidates a Black woman's purpose. The familial pursuit of racial

socialization serves to protect Black children and young adults as they develop into a mentally and physically divided nation. But it is this indoctrination that is additional to life lessons being already taught. It is information for survival. It is understood that colorism is a part of the entire social construct and does not only breed between single origins of race, but it cross-lists between races, too. It is saying that for Black women to survive, they must not only meet the expectations of a society that was not intended for them, but they must also be willing to go beyond within their communities to be accepted into one that does not feel welcome. This framework that excludes Black women more often than not can mean colorizing one another to achieve status, mobility, or power.

While Davis Tribble's noteworthy example of physical traits is a premise for colorism, we still see an opportunity to look at proximity in terms of skin tone, proximity to Whiteness, family/home life, and demographics that may shift what that narrative looks like for other Black women. Disadvantages that Davis Tribble points to are not issues that can be managed easily; instead, they require the attention of a global perspective. Without a global recognition of the issue, colorism will continue to implicate those disadvantages.

Colorism is not only the visual mode of categorizing one brown person against the next but also a set of ideologies, beliefs, and meanings that are attached to a negotiation of hegemony and hierarchy. In Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* (1990, p. 90), she identifies colorism in its operative mode, diving into the embedment of what is considered American. She states that it is a "distinctly American form of racism grounded in Black/White oppositional differences." She further explicates how this distinct form is in a U.S. context due to the nature of systems and institutionalization that attaches "color" to "hierarchy." She contends that there is a top and a bottom to the hierarchy of color, where White and Black are components holding significance because of their relationship to each other. This relationship was founded on Americanness in what Collins calls, "a by-product of U.S. racism."

In *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent* (2020), Isabel Wilkerson metaphors the inner workings of a theatrical play, and the roles within them to be mirrored images of the roles we play in society. Everyone has a part. Regardless of the part and role they play, it is not their own, but given to them, and they are to play that role, without a miss. You are not to be yourself. Wilkerson illustrates that the "social

pyramid” known as the caste system (p. 40) is not like a cast in a play, yet we are racially socialized to imagine we have a role outside our own. This is thought to be how we learn to keep our place in that society. If you did not look like those who were colonizing, you were at the bottom of the hierarchy. Wilkerson reminds us that we know this is the oldest recount of shipped Africans based on a letter from the early English Colonizer, John Rolfe in 1619. This is how the caste unfolded, categorizing humans by religion, then race (p. 41-42).

The American caste system is a social stratification that places membership on people based on their appearances. In an interview with NPR (2020), Wilkerson asserts without reservation that the caste system is a more appropriate term than racism. She claims that the term racism itself cannot carry meaning for the entirety of the systemic oppression that Black people continue to endure. The relationship between Black and White as Collins suggests is a consequence of the first trials of segregation by what Wilkerson notes were religious. It was the look of a person that caused immediate segregation because profiling was the first assumption to be processed. Once it was established that a Black person was in a White space, it stuck, and that became far more dangerous than religious. We can further examine the nature of light skin on Black women versus dark skin and infer that lighter-skinned Black women are more likely to represent Black women as a whole because of the proximity to Whiteness they physically feature.

Historically, the “one-drop rule” was the most actualized term that is used to describe Black individuals who are comprised of any length of Black ancestry. It is a drop away from purity or Whiteness. Yaba Blay, the author of *One Drop* (2021), depicts how in the United States, a person who holds any Black ancestry is Black and therefore held to this term. She presses, “If you were White, you were free; if you were Black, you were enslaved. Simple” (p. 6) The miscegenation or unification of two races complicated it further, and the ideas of Black or White became a distorted line. This distorted line is where misrepresentation engages with colorism and increases abuse between women. This is a worldview that establishes expectations for Black women, indicating that Eurocentric standards, mostly imaged-based and in visual culture are the itinerary for success, health, and accessibility to resources. The oppression that continues to carry Black women is in part due to the hierarchy of time and skin tone. Representations of Black women that challenge hierarchy will continue to

challenge the Americanness of worldview expectations within White supremacy. In acknowledging how our country views Black women as the other, we can imagine and access equality through a measure of providing equity.

In *Biracial American Colorism: Passing for White* (2018), Keshia L. Harris expands on the importance of discussing the reality that those who are Black, are Black by default. Whatever the otherness of their race is no longer supersedes their Blackness, regardless of the amount. Therefore, biracial African American individuals are expected to identify as Black when possible. That is unless they live in affluent neighborhoods and can pass as White, then they can experience the embrace of White affiliation. Blay shares the narratives of several Black individuals in her book who are white-passing but identify with their Blackness. A good portion of these individuals lives in cities and towns where Black identity is shaped and accepted fluidly among all other races.

We know that this battle is dependent on the person, and one’s environment. As a child, I was forced to change my choice of bubbling in a scantron test sheet from “Caucasian” to “African American” by my teacher, because of my hair and skin. I had entered “White” because I had felt as if I was not giving any credit to my “white” mother who was recently single and divorcing my Black father. In church, I could identify as white, because it was all around me, but I would feel guilty about my belief because I knew I was Black, that my family was Black, and that there should be nothing holding me back from expressing that. When children are pressed to believe that the American dream is represented by an industrious white family, what types of indoctrinating ideologies are carrying their hopes?

In qualifying worldviews as a specific means to pace hierarchical standards and expectations, we can look at several intersectional lenses that scope the authority of behavior, communication, and theoretical analysis to further discuss the possibility of reimagining representations of Black women, by Black women, and all women.

Methodology

Procedure

Participant selection was based on individuals being in higher education and by personal solicitation among peers or existing relationships. All participants were to meet the criteria of identifying as Black

women. Eleven women were administered a semi-structured interview and asked questions directed from Dr. Sarah L. Webb's work on 100+ Colorism Questions (2015). Data collection followed the completion of the IRB process (proposal and consent forms) for approval.

In interviewing participants, I asked questions on colorism and responded by discussing their personal life experiences and the representations of their lives in the Black culture. Colorism has served as a vector for worldviews, such as light-skin superiority, capitalizing on standards within a patriarchal culture that embraces sameness of dominancy by assigning accessibility and freedoms constructed by skin tone predilection in American culture. Social mobility is misled by Black (mis)representation in media by using skin tone classifications and political/systemic structures. Colorism stemmed from colonialization and slavery and continues to narrate expectations of Eurocentric standards. Because of these intersectionalities, the continuance of Black women's autonomy being challenged has forced Black women to be subjected to the paradoxical consequences of skin tone stratification.

I ask participants ($n = 11$) to explore ways in which they have been directly affected by colorism and to discuss triggers, obstacles, and challenges that have maintained these effects in various living spaces. Ways they have been affected may include situations on a college campus regarding the environment or climate, the workplace, within their family and friends, or anywhere else where they may feel their lived experiences have shaped their outcomes. For example, some of the women discuss workplace situations where lighter-skinned women have been chosen over them or are talked to more often, and so on. From this data, we suggest that feminist standpoint theory is one vector for how we could reimagine Black women's experiences from the outside by soliciting their perspectives (Allen, 1998). We ought to imagine the important paradigms and rich contributions of Black women from a central socialized location as key to the process (Orbe, 2021). It encourages a unique and emboldened togetherness that aims to envision new theoretical standpoints of Black inclusion of women, steers away from preferential/colorist treatment, and embraces a methodology for representations that invite progress.

Webb's questions are a comprehensive, not exhaustive list of questions to consider when discussing colorism (Appendix A). Some questions furthered discussion in sub-topic scaffolding.

Questions that were selected and answered were copied into a raw data table for Figures 1, 2, and 3 of the research paper. Not all questions were used in the interview process. Table 1 presents a pie chart showing the thematic analysis percentage of responses that exhibited characteristics per the theme. Code words emerged directly from questions and were then assigned to responses. Code words of the thematic analysis include "attitudes, think, manifest, perpetuating, play, affect, and impact".

Data

Participants were either students in higher education, faculty, or staff. The interviews were scheduled to be one participant at a time, over Zoom, with no time limitations. There was one participant who submitted written responses. I contacted Dr. Sarah L. Webb, a public speaker, corporate trainer, and professor who has worked in Illinois and Louisiana. Her website, Colorism Healing, is dedicated to education on colorism in the African American/Black communities across the U.S. With her consent, Dr. Webb gave written permission for me to utilize her public questions within the scope of my research. All interviewees were given a mixed set of questions from Dr. Sarah L. Webb's, 100+ Colorism Questions. These questions were entered in the chat text box and were to be answered in/out of order. Participants were allowed the opportunity to answer or not answer any questions. Some interviews consisted of fewer or more questions and lasted between one and three hours.

Once the interview process was complete, all interview transcripts were copied and pasted into a Word document formatted, and saved to an external hard drive. All participants were randomized by number and labeled "P1-P11". All interviews were read and organized by questions and answers, highlighted for expanded conversations, edited to preserve confidentiality, and then summarized and numbered for the final tables and figures.

Analysis

Questions and answers were organized into three themes for thematic analysis. These themes include: (1) Experiencing Attitudes, Assumptions, and Stereotypes Concerning Skin Tone, (2) Social, Environmental Experiences, and (3) Workplace, Educational, and Judicial Experiences. In the final research, each result discussed will be cross-

referenced to identify as F1:3, figure 1, number 3 (Appendix B).

Themes were used to establish the analysis basis to further discuss the experiences of the participants and to begin curating the process of reimaginative shifting within the thoughts on race, representation, colorism, and how we perceive Black women's experiences to be their own, and not fragmented justifications of white supremacist standpoints as an educational discussion. The opportunity that thematic analysis bridges create a scope of thought processing for the reader that is analytical in nature, but also proposes a consideration for thinking processes outside of a normative framework and works to include varied theories of thought. The result magnifies a pattern for disrupting constructs, to validate the process of reimagining what marginality is among Black women.

Results

In explicating preliminary results, we looked at what themes held significant weight in the interviews/data. Theme 1: Experiencing Attitudes held a great range of attitude and thought in responses that shaped the significance of experiences in colorism for Black women. Theme 2: signified a great deal of social and environmental situations and exchanges participants shared, and finally, Theme 3: validated the rampant issues of colorism in professional and institutional/judicial settings.

Experimental considerations consider the vast differences between the origin stories of African Women who moved to the U.S., refugees, descendants of slaves, multiracial, bi-racial, interracial, religious Black women, skin tone differences, and responses to different variations of skin tone, and ideologies of intersectionality. Limitations to this study include a small sample size, all participants being in higher education, the primary residence of California, and other characteristics or demographics. The next steps would include further expanding thematic analysis within standpoint and co-cultural theories in an additional table. This will further exploration within theoretical praxis for designing a proposal for reimagination ideology or theory in furthering this research. This research has shown that Black women's experiences are largely shaped by the themes I analyzed, and could potentially include a significant amount more upon further research and discussion, and could be further examined in different interdisciplinary studies.

Theme 1: Experiencing Attitudes, Assumptions, and Stereotypes Concerning Skin Tone

F:1, 18. Why do you think some people have negative attitudes about light skin? Feelings of superiority over dark skin are ingrained.

Attitudes and assumptive thoughts stem from and also give birth to stereotyping Black women and their experiences, and how that makes a white person feel. In my research, the experiences of Black women are central to the reimagination process, but there is an opportunity to see "White Fragility" beyond recent studies. Participant Nine (P9) discussed an antagonistic perspective in discussing how white women and girls must feel by saying:

"I can remember people saying things about other light skin women, other Black/brown skin women saying things about light-skinned women... when we were girls or something oh, she thinks she's cute, you know, and you know everybody always almost assumed that if you were light skinned then life was better for you. We never thought about it like... Is it rough for the light skin girls? What struggle are they going through that we don't recognize and do not acknowledge? And if a light skin girl did say she was going through something ... would we find a way to dismiss that and act like it, wasn't it a big deal? (P9, 2022)"

What P9 is referencing is summarized as "White Fragility". DiAngelo (2011) states that "White Fragility is a state in which a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. She utilizes the words "white" and "whiteness" to describe processes and practices.

Ford et al. (2022) discuss "White Fragility" as a negative emotional response that causes discomfort. They suggest it can include anger, anxiety, and guilt. Contextually, Ford explains that it is associated with a historical theory of white privilege. P9 challenges the preconceived notion of assuming privilege in a modern light, when we may not be accessing acknowledgment of a white struggle. In the reimagination process, Black women are not centered on superiority, instead, they may dominate their own mental and physical spaces, where concern for the other normalizes by acknowledgment of equality.

Theme 2: Social, and Environmental Experiences

F:2, 30: How are children affected by colorism? Parents comparing skin tones.

As social scientists, we attribute foundational learning as a means to transfer learning that ultimately drives how we make decisions (Hattie et al., 2017). Within this scope, I envision the opportunity for representation to be a topic of priority conversation as a mother, a daughter of a white mother, and a Black woman to her Afro-Latino son. How we begin to shape what representation looks like at the earliest stages will transfer that at-home learning to the school, and outside environment for children. Without these teachings, we are part of the perpetuation that colorism prevails. “Showing our children and our youth that real, rough representation matters, and that we have to have fair equal fair representation. It will make them make better decisions further down the line (P1, 2022).”

F:2, 31: How are children affected by colorism? Teaching how representation and equality matter.

Kimberly Moffit (2020) conducted a study that examined “Women, Gender, and Families of Color”. In her exploration of colorism, she discusses the skin-tone differences between her and her darker-skin daughter. She argues that the “historical perpetuation of white skin as the epitome of beauty and purity” distinguishes it from the darker shades of skin that are often depicted as unfavorable and are often cast on TV as the more difficult individual than that of lighter skin Black women. These thought processes, she explains, are maintained by institutions, and as we know – media. Is it as easy as teaching and instilling representation as a reimaginative process for equality that will transfer the progress from our children out into the world? P1 shares how she views recent representations, and how they affected her experience.

“Well, now, they have more representation than we'd ever have. I've seen more black baby dolls and things of that nature, characters on TV and in cartoons. It's a lot more representation, it is a positive representation. But it depends upon that parent and that child. How much they pour into the beauty of that child and that individual to love each part of themselves. As a woman of a particular age, I loved to do that when I worked for this school – to pour into our little brown children and to show them a positive image of a black woman that maybe they don't see in their family. Oh, they don't see it on TV because they're not exposed to that, they

watch ratchet TV where it's “Real Housewives” or someone cussing, fussing, and throwing a glass (P1, 2022).”

We ought to disable systems and institutions that latch these stereotypes. Children have a cascaded assortment of media they have to choose from. It starts at home, and the racial socialization that affords Black girls the scale to envision their skin color, their sister’s skin color, and their mother’s skin color, as a related lens to their Blackness should only be a viable key for social care and responsibility for the other in ways that have no colorist system of hierarchy.

Theme 3: Participant Responses on WORKPLACE, EDUCATIONAL, AND JUDICIAL EXPERIENCES (29%)

F:3, 9: What role does colorism play in education in school? Feelings of having to prove intelligence.

Griffith et al. (2019) produced a qualitative study that discussed “race-related stressors” and “coping responses” that Black students have experienced at predominately white institutions (PWI). Griffith acknowledges that the stressors Black students must endure are additional challenges to already existing college issues that all students experience. They discuss the hardships of being a “numerical minority” and the “psychologically distressing” ways they may feel isolated and excluded. Results indicated that Black students who undergo race-related stressors are seeking ways to implement behavioral strategies as a means to cope.

“I've had to work harder in school to prove myself, and people would be very surprised at the level of intelligence that I do have. I think it's really in terms of race, like a black person having to prove themselves more in school. I've even had an instance with a teacher who thought that I cheated on a test because I got an “A” and I was like, I didn't cheat on it, but I had to fight for my grade in that instance. But it was a shock to me to see that I had to go through that experience at such a young age, too, where excellence isn't expected of me in school, and I have to show that I can do it on my own. You know, I literally study all day, every day, I have to. If I do work, I have to be able to defend it. I put a lot more time into my academics than most other people would just ‘cause I'm trying to prove myself, especially at a school where it's not a place where excellence is expected of me. So, I have to go that extra mile (P9, 2022).”

In recent generations, Griffin suggests that these coping strategies among others have played a significant role in Black communities. In Griffin's research, the most highly regarded coping strategy was to "disprove negative stereotypes". In our case, P9 chooses to study all day to ensure her intelligence is proof her grade reflects her work. While this may seem to be normative, the excruciation of having to "disprove" others' stereotypical belief systems, in this case, cheating and beliefs on intelligence – is not only disruptive to her educational environment but also shows us the continued issues surrounding a real lack of representation. With more adequate representation, the color of her skin wouldn't stimulate this response so gravely, and the continuance of proximity to whiteness would be less prevalent.

Discussion

This project is important because it looks at skin-tone biases from within the in-group of Black women and asks them to discuss their perspectives. It examines what Eurocentric worldviews expressed in the United States ask of Black women and how they have been socialized to interpret the ideologies behind them (Blay, 2021). These women are asking themselves to envision their lives through a coloristic lens, which is different from overt racism. They are recalling circumstantial evidence of in-group abuse, how they have seen and resisted the limitations of colorism, and how it has affected how others perceive them.

As we learn how paradoxical the consequences are of colorism and the misrepresentation of Black women, we can broaden the scope of work to dismantle systemic colorism by including theories and strategies that decolonize Eurocentric preferences. We must explore the areas of marginalization that Black women must navigate and have direct, primary resources to gather firsthand information and perspective. If we participate in Eurocentric media expectations for Black women, we neglect acknowledgment of the issue of colorism. We must not only recommit to building spaces that are inclusive to Black women but look to them to see that these spaces mark representative natures both culturally and competently and written by them as well.

This project has asked Black women within the U.S. to discuss their experiences concerning colorism and representation and compare personal ideas and definitions of marginality. The women in this research have come from varied backgrounds, lending an

extensive array of results to analyze, but the sample size can grow to meet the needs of the many voices who were not asked to participate in this research. I examined attitude, social/environmental factors, workspace, and institutional and judicial settings through thematic analysis, and the amount of intelligence received from the participants far surpasses this paper's parameters and calls for significant development in the reimaginative process within and for our community of Black women.

Because of the limitation of time, several points addressed here in question were only expanded on lightly, leaving room for other probing concerns as addressed by participants that I will continue to develop in my graduate studies and research. This work does not validate the entire Black experience nor function as a liaison between structural differences. It is important to note that not all Black women share the same background and developmental styles or familial, cultural, or otherwise views. It is important to recognize the alterity in this conversation as we develop in current conversations around otherness, sameness, and assimilative environments that embrace white supremacy.

Black women are socialized to center themselves on varied parts of a colorist scale ranging from light to dark skin on a visual and image-obsessed basis that not only plays a role in stereotyping skin tones but creates social mobility standards and statuses that decry Black women ontologically. The reimagination process asks Black women to envision themselves from a central space if they do not already and challenges others to reconceptualize their standpoint.

How can we reimagine spaces as/for Black women? Representations of Black women are centered on their experiences, and standards of self-reliance, allowing us to see beyond a colorist caste system in a variety of spaces where Black women belong – everywhere. The social locations of Black women should not be dependent on the consequential marginality that oppression has placed them in. Consider a dynamic shift in centralizing the reimaginative process of Black marginalization and assumptions. Construct a new ideological theory for inclusion by way of representation and let Black women speak for ourselves/themselves. Reimagine Black women from the center of the spaces we marginalize their existence: i.e., workplaces, institutions, communities, justice, and judicial spaces. Repeat these action items, and continue to develop operational strategies that center Black women until they are not marginalized or othered as secondary to

others, can redefine their narratives, and are likely to attain and achieve equitably.

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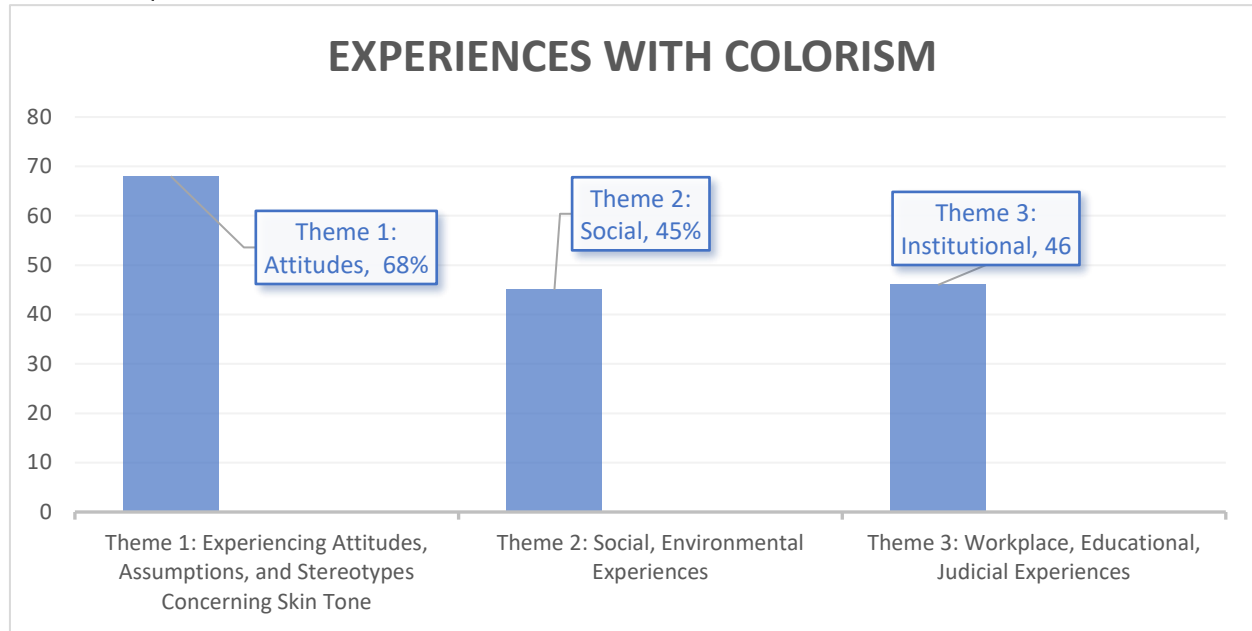
Appendix A

Key terms

- Colorism: an act of prejudice or discrimination against individuals with darker skin, typically within the same racial or ethnic group
- Eurocentric: a regard of focus on European history/culture that excludes otherwise.
- Standpoint theory- a post-modern approach to people's perception created by Sandra Harding and Nancy Hartsock
- Co-cultural theory- a framework that provides insight into communication behaviors from typically marginalized individuals or groups, written by Mark Orbe
- Representation for our terms and purposes is a discussion around same race and skin-tone color representation that appropriately depict an individual in media and the community or may also coincide with how we view one another based on the allotment of skin-tone preference in determining how to represent a person.

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview, Thematic Analysis of Experiences by response rate with Colorism as Reported by Participants, using Dr. Sarah Webb’s “100+ Colorism Questions”.



This table represents the responses to Experiences with Colorism of participants in the semi-structured portion of each interview. Each individual had the opportunity to expand their thoughts, and experiences, and share the experiences of others. The thematic analysis includes three themes: Theme 1: Experiencing Attitudes, Assumptions, and Stereotypes Concerning Skin Tone, Theme 2: Social, Environmental Experiences, and Theme 3: Social, Environmental Experiences. Code words for the thematic analysis include attitudes, think, manifest, perpetuating, play, affect, and impact.

Figure 1

Semi-Structured Interview, Thematic Analysis - Theme 1: Experiencing Attitudes, Assumptions, and Stereotypes Concerning Skin Tone (43% of responses) using Dr. Sarah Webb’s “100+ Colorism Questions.”

THEME 1: PARTICIPANT RESPONSES ON EXPERIENCING ATTITUDES, ASSUMPTIONS, AND STEREOTYPES CONCERNING SKIN TONE (43% OF RESPONSES)	
Why do you think some people have negative attitudes about darker skin?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People associate darker skin with violence 2. Over-sexualization 3. Being seen as human is less likely 4. Blackface made to appear ugly/unattractive 5. Media portrayal of Blacks being in poverty 6. Social structures/equity 7. Historical attribution in socialization 8. Dark skin as a license 9. Dark skin committed to staying dark (not trying to lighten) 10. Treatment of individuals with darker skin is standard 11. Feelings of having more opportunity because of European features/ light skin 12. Representations on TV/media 13. A belief that European features are more appealing 14. Insecurity 15. How whiteness factors into – expectations 16. Slavery – dark complexion being looked down upon, dark skin slaves work outside
Why do you think some people have negative attitudes about light skin?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Eurocentric belief systems 18. Feelings of superiority over dark skin ingrained 19. More beauty choices that link to whiteness 20. More opportunities for light-skinned women 21. Historical treatment 22. Feelings of neglect, extreme emotional response

	23. Light skin slaves working indoors
What do you think about light-skin and dark-skin privileges?	24. The perception of articulation 25. Treatment from other races 26. Exclusion of dark skin when lighter skin is available 27. Light skin representation 28. Light skin assumptions on health 29. Confidence among light skin is a privilege 30. Presumptions of darkness as erotic 31. How dark or light skin is portrayed in the media in terms of representation 32. Light skin favoritism 33. Exclusion for darkness 34. Proximity to whiteness equals more invitations to events associated with/led by whites 35. Other's comfort around you 36. Associating dark skin with comfort 37. Brown versus Black or darker, treatment 38. Education level associated with privilege
How does colorism manifest in predominantly white media?	39. They are gatekeepers 40. Competing with oneself 41. Tv shows have little representation 42. Children watching kids shows that limit Blackness 43. <i>You're so pretty for a Black girl!</i> 44. Stereotyping Blackness and Culture 45. One-drop rule 46. Cultural appropriation 47. Not being able to wear certain clothing 48. Perpetuating criminality
What are some examples of colorism?	49. In the family – being the darkest and therefore treated differently or being excused as the dark one, not the cute one 50. Lighter Family members are closer to the opportunities that whiteness lends (e.g. educationally, socially, economically) 51. Compensation for work or services is often higher for lighter skin Black women 52. Having family members who are lighter skin 53. Feelings of inadequacy in dark skin 54. Being a child who is darker among light children who are being praised for the beauty 55. Paper bag testing for skin tone 56. Assumptions of Black Life and Culture
How does colorism influence or impact friendships?	57. When one friend gets different attention because of their lighter skin 58. When families have extreme socio-economical disadvantages

Note: Items are numbered to reference from results and discussion sections (ex. F1:3, figure 1, number 3)

Figure 2
Semi-Structured Interview, Thematic Analysis - Theme 2: Social, Environmental Experiences (28%) using Dr. Sarah Webb's "100+ Colorism Questions"

THEME 2:	PARTICIPANT RESPONSES ON SOCIAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERIENCES (28%)
What role does social media play in perpetrating colorism?	1. Not using a platform built off your preference (if you're not plotting African American info) 2. Entering information into a search, the result will not adapt to your preference 3. Sponsorships for Black influencers 4. Whiteness in social media as a baseline, every other color is secondary 5. Images of very objectified and sexualized Black women 6. Black creators have to do more work to get viewers, (e.g. <i>Black Tick Tok</i>) 7. Intersectional preference (e.g. LGBT and white versus LGBT and Black) 8. Limited representation 9. Over-sexualization of Black women and men 10. Objectification 11. Intersectionality between race and gender 12. Content creators stealing intellect and ideas

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Black women have more responsibility in how they represent themselves/ difficulty in breaking myths and stereotypes 14. Lack of accountability for behavior 15. The feeling of living behind a façade 16. The ability to engage online solely among a Black community 17. Micro/macroaggression 18. Black content creators and influencers have to do more work to be recognized
What role does colorism play in dating in marriage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Only with Black men, because they understand me 20. Black entitlement – Black men who feel they can have me/obtain me 21. Lighter skin loving darker skin, and feeling inferior 22. Thoughts on why a light-skinned Black man would choose a dark-skinned woman 23. Light men are viewed as more attractive 24. Dark men being viewed as more recently as attractive 25. Objectification 26. Different relationship issues dependent on the color scale 27. Being open in conversation with significant other about color differences and issues that arise between one another 28. A sense of safety in dating Black men 29. The ability to have a preference
How are children affected by colorism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30. Parents comparing skin tones 31. Teaching how representation and equality matter 32. Guiding decisions 33. Children are often more harshly disciplined at school by security and faculty, not given as many chances
What are some examples of colorism and traditional media?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 34. Mainstream colorism is a hot topic on social media 35. Key role in the perpetuation of colorism 36. Minstrel shows 37. Depicted and stereotyped as enjoying slavery, visuals 38. Prone to violence 39. Assumptions of a lack of control 40. Marketing 41. Post-war images of Black men/treated as animalistic 42. Black rap artists using light skin or white women in music videos 43. White women who use Black-fishing to identify as Black or being ethnically ambiguous 44. Media and film

Note: Items are numbered to reference from results and discussion sections (ex. F1:3, figure 1, number 3)

Figure 3
 Semi-Structured Interview, Thematic Analysis - Theme 3: WORKPLACE, EDUCATIONAL, AND JUDICIAL EXPERIENCES (29%) using Dr. Sarah Webb’s “100+ Colorism Questions”

THEME 3:	PARTICIPANT RESPONSES ON WORKPLACE, EDUCATIONAL, AND JUDICIAL EXPERIENCES (29%)
What role does colorism play in education in school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers pushing students to be assimilative, not having culturally responsive tact 2. Assumptions that Black means strong, less soft skills among teachers/faculty 3. Nicknaming/butchering Black names to feminize 4. Ratios of diversity between students and teachers/faculty being disproportionate 5. Indoctrination of cultural differences that negate a student’s sense of self 6. Pre-existing racial discriminatory behavior 7. How it’s discussed at home 8. Black people have to work much harder than others 9. Feelings of having to prove intelligence 10. Telling children they can do better at a different school that has more white students 11. Harsher discipline for darker students 12. Light skin students typically have more chances to learn from behavior/mistakes
What role does colorism play in the judicial system?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Lack of police representation 14. Being taught to fear police 15. Predisposal of Blackness 16. Higher rates of Black incarceration in the U.S. 17. Heavier penalties for the same crimes committed as whites

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18. No prioritization for reforming from the government 19. Centuries-old 20. Automatically targeted 21. More discipline 22. Darker skins are in more danger 23. Lack of Black representation 24. Same offenses, different races getting different sentencing 25. Automatically being stereotyped and targeted
What are some examples of colorism in (PLACE)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 26. Depending on where you came from, your confidence in Blackness shifts 27. Larger cities have stronger bonds with in-group Blacks 28. Generationally- being told to <i>marry lighter</i> by an older family member 29. Being hired because of looking like an <i>unproblematic</i> Black woman 30. Being told that they were the <i>right</i> shade of Black 31. Not being cared for or taken seriously in the doctor's office 32. Wearing straight hair/wig to the office and being treated differently than when wearing braids
How does colorism affect employment and career opportunities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 33. Microaggressions in the workplace 34. Feelings of not being taken seriously by peers and colleagues 35. Passive-aggressive communication 36. Hair and <i>texturism</i> 37. Being told you're being hired deliberately to meet a quota 38. Significantly greater access to social mobility if lighter skin toned 39. Corporations/executive positionality

Note: Items are numbered to reference from results and discussion sections (ex. F1:3, figure 1, number 3).