

WELCOME

Welcome to this month's bulletin about Colorism. In this bulletin you will find definitions of words relating to this issue as well as history, videos, articles/handouts, statistics and questions to ponder.

When discussing Colorism it is important to be aware that Colorism is referred to as only being an issue in the Black community and while it manifests there, it is more wide-spread and exists within all communities of color. Colorism is not something that White people experience.

DEFINITIONS

Colorism: A practice of discrimination by which those with lighter skin are treated more favorably than those with darker skin. This practice is a product of racism in the United States, in that it upholds the white standards of beauty and benefits white people in the institutions of oppression (media, medical world, etc.).

Discrimination: The mistreatment of an individual or group based on their social membership, regardless of their social power. Anyone can experience discrimination.

Social Power: Access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one needs in order to lead a comfortable, productive and safe life.

Privilege: Unearned access to resources (social power) that are only readily available to some people because of their social group membership; an advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by one societal group above and beyond the common advantage of all other groups. Privilege is often invisible to those who have it.

Target or Oppressed Identities: Social groups that are negatively valued, considered to be inferior, abnormal, or dependent and given limited access to resources and social power.

Agent or Privileged Identities: Social groups that are positively valued considered superior, independent, or "normal" and have access to resources and power.

Oppression: When an agent group, whether knowingly or unknowingly, abuses a target group. This pervasive system is rooted historically and maintained through individual and institutional/systematic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice, resulting in a condition of privilege for the agent group at the expense of the target group; reinforced by law, policy and cultural norms that allow for differential treatment on the basis of identity. Only people groups that do not have social power can experience oppression.
(Discrimination + Social Power = Oppression)

Internalization: Internalization is a process through which we come to identify parts of our culture as parts of ourselves, especially in relation to norms and values. This is a crucial process in maintaining social systems because it leads people to regulate their own behavior in accordance with accepted forms rather than having to be monitored and corrected by external authorities.

Internalized Domination: When members of the agent group accept their **group's socially superior status** as normal and deserved. Internalized dominance can have very negative results – dehumanization, ignorance, silence, confusion, distancing from others.

Internalized Oppression: When people are targeted, discriminated against, or oppressed over a period of time, they believe and make part of their self-image; their internal view of themselves, the myths and misinformation that society communicates to them about their group. Internalized oppression can have very negative results - self-hatred, depression, confusion of identity, disconnection to your culture, etc.

Racism: The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress people of color (Blacks, Latino/as, Native Americans, and Asians).

HISTORY

Commonly referred to as the "light versus dark skin issue," colorism within the Black race dates back to slavery in the U.S., when the skin color of slaves determined work chores assigned (Hunter, 2002). Dark-skinned slaves, who were likely of pure African ancestry, were given more physically demanding tasks in the fields, while lighter skinned slaves (who had lighter skin because of their biracial status, as it was common for slave masters to have

nonconsensual and consensual sexual relationships with their female slaves) were given more enviable and esteemed positions (Keith & Herring, 1991). This visible division created friction amongst slaves and reinforced the idea that one was better if one had a lighter complexion (Ross, 1997).

This mindset was ingrained in the minds of Blacks and after Emancipation Blacks began creating their own social divides based on skin tone. For example, Blacks created "blue vein" societies where other Blacks were admitted only if their skin tone was light enough that their veins were visible. In addition, the first Black schools, as well as fraternities and sororities, employed the "paper bag test" as a means of admission. If your skin tone was not equal to or lighter than a paper bag, admission would not be granted. These skin color-based assessments, created by Blacks themselves, help illustrate the power of prejudice and stereotypes and substantiate notions of colorism for the general public. The group starts to reflect that discrimination and apply it against themselves. If Blacks themselves were willing to openly convey their preference for light skin, why question whites who do the same?

According to a 1990 study conducted by Hughes and Hertel lighter skinned Blacks were more likely to have greater years of education, higher salaries and more prominent jobs than their darker skinned counterparts. They even found that the gap in educational attainment and socioeconomic status between light- and dark-skinned Blacks is equivalent to the gap between Whites and all Blacks in general. These findings alone illustrate the importance and prevalence of colorism and further depict the pervasiveness of color-based preference in our society (Hill, 2000). In other words, light skinned Blacks are at an advantage when it comes to educational and occupational opportunities, and are more likely to experience discrimination to a lesser degree than those who have darker skin (Seltzer & Smith, 1991; Udry, Bauman, & Chase, 1971). These social advantages afforded to lighter skinned Blacks represent a preferential system in our society that favors light skin over dark skin (Hunter, 2002).

The purpose of this article is to emphasize the need for greater discussion and research examining within-race selection preference—an area that most discrimination literature has overlooked due to typical dichotomous comparisons of Blacks and Whites as homogenous groups. The ever-growing population of bi- and multi-racial Americans is reason alone for more research of this nature to be performed, so individuals can be made more aware of the prevalence of skin color bias. Far too often in America privilege is automatically linked to race and Whiteness. Results from studies pertaining to colorism seem

to suggest that possibly privilege extends beyond race and into skin color, where lighter skin equals a greater number of privileges.

ARTICLES

- What is Colorism? | [Race Relations](#)
- Black Actresses Speak Out About Colorism | [Race Relations](#)
- Plastic Surgery Common Among Minority Groups | [Race Relations](#)
- 5 Truths About Colorism | [Bustle](#)
- Colorism is a Big Problem | [Onyx Truth](#)
- Teaching Kids About Colorism | [Colorism Healing](#)
- The Lighter the Skin, the Shorter the Prison Term? | [The Root](#)

VIDEOS



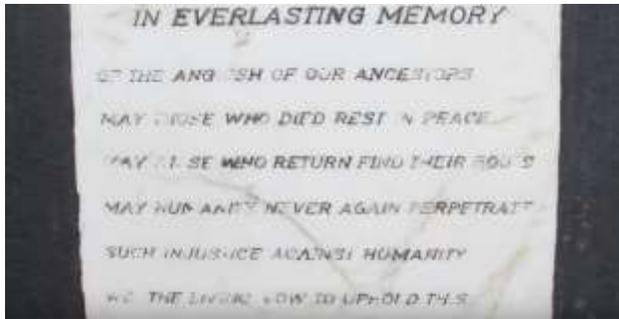
Colorism in the Black Community | [Click On Detroit](#)



'Dark Girls' Documentary | [Huffington Post](#)



Shades of Black – Colorism, Skin Color Discrimination | [The Black Hour](#)



Colorism in the Media | [Free Spirit Media](#)



Light Girls | [Huffington Post](#)



Colorism PSA | [Free Spirit Media](#)

STATISTICS

- The researchers found that light-skinned women were sentenced to approximately 12% less time behind bars than their darker-skinned counterparts. | [The Root](#)
- Women with light skin served 11% less time in prison than darker women | [The Root](#)
- A 2006 University of Georgia study showed that employers prefer light skinned black men to dark skinned men, regardless of their qualifications. | [The Inclusion Solution](#)
- **A light skinned black male with a Bachelor's degree and typical work experience** was preferred over a dark skinned black male with an MBA and past managerial positions. | [The Inclusion Solution](#)
- A law professor at Vanderbilt University conducted a study of over 2,000 immigrants from around the world and found that those with the lightest skin earned on average 8-15% more than similarly qualified immigrants of darker hues. | [The Inclusion Solution](#)
- Dark skinned defendants are more likely to be convicted and receive the death penalty than lighter skinned ones. | [MS Magazine](#)
- **India's skin lightening cream, Fair and Lovely, (Fair and Lovely promises an even tone of glowing skin with skin lightening)** boasts 38 million users worldwide. | [MS Magazine](#)
- Dark skinned Brazilians make up 63% of the poorest sectors of Brazil. | [MS Magazine](#)

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- How is colorism harmful?
- Why is colorism so widespread but not often talked about?
- How does colorism impact your community?
- What are the standards of beauty according to colorism? Where and how is this learned?
- How are socialized to perpetuate colorism?
- Why does colorism exist?
- How does colorism support white supremacy?
- What are some actions to take around challenging and ending colorism?

RESOURCES

- Toolkit for "What is Colorism?" | [Tolerance](#)
- A presentation on Colorism | [Colorism Healing](#)