Colorism and Its Effects on Self Perception

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"Who taught you, please, who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? Who taught you to hate the color of your skin? To such extent you bleach, to get like the white man. Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips? Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet? Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to so much so that you don't want to be around each other? No. Before you come asking Mr. Muhammad does he teach hate, you should ask yourself who taught you to hate being what God made you." - Malcolm X

INTRODUCTION

       I was born with brown skin. Throughout my life, I have experienced people both inside and outside my community perceive me differently because of my skin tone. Within my community, nicknames such as "India," "Morenita," or "Negrita" were shared. I was always advised not to be in the sun for long periods, and I would often see lightning and bleaching lotions in my local markets in case we got "too" dark. Outside of my community, I often felt ostracized because of my skin, especially in my early years in school. From getting picked last for group projects, getting called derogatory names, and constantly getting confronted by others with lighter skin and by some with similar skin tones as me as a way of obtaining validation or compensating for similar issues I was enduring. When trying to find comfort in my favorite movies or TV shows, I did not see myself in the characters I enjoyed watching. Instead, I longed to become them because I wished my skin looked lighter like theirs so I could feel seen, appreciated, and respected by those around me. If I ever did see a character with similar or darker skin tones as me, they were often depicted stereotypically or unfavorably, which usually resulted in further comments or comparisons from others. As a result of these experiences, my self-esteem began to decline over the years, and I developed severe anxieties regarding my

appearance and, precisely, my skin tone. I went through phases of attempting to change my appearance to look a certain way that might lessen the anxiety and insecurity. Straightening my thick, wavy hair every morning, using makeup that was shades lighter than my actual skin tone, using lighting lotions on my elbows and shoulders, attempting to wear colored contacts, and depriving myself of basking in the sun that would always bring me comfort and reassurance. As time passed, I attempted to overcome these insecurities, but they soon resurfaced as I began my higher education journey. Despite attending a community college and university with students from various backgrounds, many of whom were first-generation college students like myself, I quickly realized how much the university relied on students of color to promote diversity to avoid assumptions of not being an inclusive institution and to retain high enrollment rates. In theory, this is an attempt to encourage change and inclusivity. In reality, campus life as a student of color consisted of many obstacles such as heavy police presence, little access to student resources, and microaggressions from campus administration. Those further from that image are seen as infiltrators or tokenized students who are questioned about how they were accepted into the institution or if they have the potential to obtain a higher education. In many cases like mine, you were asked both of those things. Constantly.

I've come to understand that all these years, I was experiencing acts of *colorism*. Colorism is a subcategory of social concepts such as race, racism, and colonization (Dixon and Telles 2017). These concepts brought decades of violence and oppression amongst Indigenous and enslaved peoples, which ultimately, developed a complex form of social stratification based on one's proximity to those with Euro-centric features, specifically, lighter skin tones. This was established to ensure those within that proximity remain on top of the social ladder and reinforce oppressive concepts they uphold at macro and micro levels amongst people of color. It is crucial to recognize that colorism goes beyond influencing the individual's perceptions of those with darker skin tones and how they may internalize these perceptions. Colorism is embedded in various facets of social institutions that contribute to many systemic inequities, particularly in areas such as popular media, education,

employment, and the criminal justice system.

In this article, I discuss the relationship between colorism and the self-perception of people of color. Through an extensive literature review of interdisciplinary scholarship and semi-structured interviews, findings suggest that colorism holds a strong societal influence that can affect the self-perception of people of color in harmful and distorted forms that often intersect with other identity factors. Distorted self-perceptions can foster a range of negative views of oneself as well as receiving harmful attitudes and stigma from those inside and outside their community while simultaneously enduring larger systemic oppressions. Analysis of interviews with participants who identified as people of color reveals different perspectives of colorism, shows how media and popular culture influence colorist ideals, and calls for more awareness of the effects of colorism.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Concepts of Colorism

To fully understand the goals and effects of colorism, it is essential to distinguish it from related social constructs such as race and racism and understand how these constructs work simultaneously to sustain the preference for lighter skin tones within societies. Race is a social construct that categorizes people into groups based on physical appearance, such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. These categories are often associated with specific geographic regions or populations. Race is not a biological or genetic distinction but a product of social and historical factors. Consequently, racism is a belief system constructed to uphold the ideology of race by asserting the superiority of one racial group over others. This creates discriminatory behaviors, policies, and practices based on these beliefs and can be implemented at individual, institutional, and systemic levels that eventually lead to the development of colorism, which helps maintain racialized power and inequality. Although racism and colorism create structures of stratification (Keister and Southgate 2022), concepts of race vary within other regions–and what is considered a distinct race–can differ based on historical and cultural contexts. In the West, non-white persons tend to be ranked depending on their skin tone to justify if they

have the right to certain privileges or constant disadvantages.

Dixon and Telles (2017:406) state that in the U.S., colonialism permitted one's proximity to whiteness in terms of ideology, culture, ancestry, and phenotype to determine who has access to social and economic privileges and opportunities. Slavery was a phenomenon justified by a colonial system that claimed whiteness to be superior, and anything other than it was deemed immoral and inferior. According to Mathews and Johnson (2015), skin tone plays a vital role in history and how it influences race relations in America. The legacy of slavery continues to have detrimental effects, and its harmful ideals are embedded in African American and Afro-Latine communities. Specifically, it hindered mental health, beauty standards, social and economic status, and the way relationships are formed within communities, especially for Black women. Inhumane levels of sexual abuse, advancements, and forced relations made by white slave owners with Black women led to generations of people with lighter skin tones known as "mulattos" who were often granted certain privileges due to their lighter complexions (Mathews and Johnson 2015:252), such as working in the homes of slave owners, being able to obtain an education, and possessing certain rights and materials. These privileges created the notion that having a lighter complexion made one desirable, seen as pure, attractive, gentle, and worthy of privilege, while people with darker complexions remained at a constant disadvantage as they were stereotyped as primitive, unintelligent, violent, and overall, less than.

This influence is embedded throughout American society in the form of colorism; its legacy is still seen throughout various social issues that impact minority groups, from employment, education, media representation, health care, gentrification, immigration, police brutality, and incarceration rates. Dixon and Telles (2017) show how views on skin tone in other regions hold an emphasis on ideals that trace back to concepts of colorism that are more than racial categories as seen within the U.S. These different views nonetheless create a globalized preference for lighter skin tones, making it a status symbol in many societies. East Asia is an example of another region's skin color preference, where whiteness is heavily associated with status and positive aesthetics. These preferences began with those with higher

nobility flaunting their fair complexions from being indoors while lower-class people worked in the sun for long hours in which their tanned skin reflected their status. This led to fair skin as a high-status indicator (2017:412) and lighter-skinned women being seen as more feminine and pure.

The association with lighter skin and positive attributes led to the skin-bleaching industry, a globalized phenomenon in recent decades that further encourages lightening one's skin. Due to globalization and better access to media outlets, it is widely accepted and accessible for those seeking a lighter complexion with the commodification of skin bleaching (2017:411). There has become a multi-billion-dollar industry that preys on those seeking ways to lighten their skin through makeup, soaps, lotions, and even cosmetic procedures. The need for one to lighten their skin is rooted in the desire to assimilate to the social norms of those in power and to appear by their standards of beauty, which are constantly promoted and advertised in popular media. These standards and norms center proximity to whiteness and ideologies of white supremacy (2017:412) since consumers of the skin-bleaching industry primarily consist of women from colonized regions, and the majority of them have relatively darker skin tones.

Latin America shares historical similarities with the U.S. (2017:409), given that European colonizers invaded and forced their ideologies on Indigenous communities within the Americas. This was accomplished through the implementation of veritable caste systems; or skin tone hierarchies that put Black and indigenous peoples at the bottom and white colonizers and their mixed counterparts at the top with more power and privilege (Telles and Dixon 2017). However, most of Latin America did not have direct or defined concepts of race, unlike the U.S. Along with Black, Indigenous, and white people reproducing within their different racial categories, it blurred racial boundaries. It promoted those to mix with others (2017:409) as a way to "embrace their race mixture (mestizaje) as a way to distinguish themselves from the United States and other explicitly racist societies and proclaim they were united and color-blind societies." Although most of Latin America claims not to hold racist ideologies within their regions (2017:409), colorism is central to

distinguishing people based on their skin tone and varies within national and class contexts.

EFFECTS ON SELF-PERCEPTION

Jenneil Charles (2021) investigates how colorism affects Afro-Latinx persons within Latin America, specifically Brazil, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Charles uses Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social-ecological model as a framework to conduct their literature review and explore how colorism affects Afro-Latinx persons in various aspects of life, such as their family, professional, and academic lives and how they are perceived within their communities. As mentioned earlier, the concepts of colorism vary within different regions. Within Latin America, specific historical periods contribute to how colorism is implemented in society today. From the European conquest and colonization to the postcolonial era, post-emancipation era, and post-independence era, all these historical periods, along with the development of racial bias, have created the mechanism of colorism but in a region that is one of the most ethnically diverse in the world due to the inter-mixing of various groups of people. This mixing led to the "browning" of Latin America, consisting of the majority skin tone within most regions. This created a norm of people having pride in their diverse ethnicities. However, Charles (2021:9) states that due to this racial fluidity, racial identification is usually attributed to phenotype versus the individual's actual ethnic and racial heritage within Latin America.

Charles' findings (2021:17) show that societal factors or "macrosystem factors" such as laws, cultural beliefs, and societal values, along with historical periods, allowed for colorism to be embedded within Latin American society and deeply ingrained within its peoples' mindsets. Surveys conducted on Afro-Latinx individuals show low levels of educational attainment that can affect their occupational choices, as well as their socioeconomic status, and finally, colorism can impact how those with darker complexions are raised and thought to navigate within their societies. Through a protective measure called "racial socialization," (2021:28) people of color teach each other how to deal with encounters with racism and other forms of discrimination, such as colorism; however, those who are not

trained in these protective measures have higher chances of enduring poor mental health issues as well as have less attachment with their community.

Researchers have also studied how skin tone discrimination impacts the psychological well-being of African American women (Wilson, Massey, Smith, and Soloman 2021:1). By explaining the interconnected set of propositions that contribute to the occurrence of colorism and where these theories originate from, as well as reviewing the findings of previous research studies, researchers (2021:2) hypothesize that aspects of colorism may or may not affect the self of esteem and self-perception of African American women. Analysis of 25 interviews with non-white women between the ages of 18-50 found low scores regarding self-esteem. Several participants expressed negative experiences with colorism and claimed the need to address the issue. When asked about their personal experiences with colorism, one person stated, "I think colorism affects brown and dark skin women the most because we've been trained for many years to think that darker skin is not beautiful." Another added, "I think colorism affects African/black American women the most. We quickly judge each other instead of lifting each other up." Most participants agreed that media outlets lack representation of darker skin tones, which reinforces colorism. Wilson et al. (2015:5) also found similar themes between skin tone bias within social settings such as school and work.

Kiang, Espino-Pérez, and Stein (2020) address how skin tone bias relates to racial prejudice and how Latinx youth and other minority groups are more likely to experience this form of discrimination. The authors extensively study how the effects of colorism continue to impact Latinx youth while adjusting to US society in times where xenophobia and racism are more prevalent due to high immigration rates within the US. These experiences may result in adverse outcomes regarding the development of Latinx youth that are directly associated with skin tone discrimination (2020:2047). After creating a questionnaire for a sample of 175 adolescents, results showed high depressive issues and participants showing little importance in their academic studies. Researchers describe it as "foreigner objectification," (2020:2055) which coincides with lower self-esteem levels.

METHODS

Qualitative interviews are well-suited for exploring subjective experiences and gathering in-depth insights into the impact of colorism on self-perception. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed participants to share their perspectives and personal experiences. The target population for this research was individuals who self-identified as people of color. The sampling strategy involved purposeful sampling, aiming to select individuals who could provide diverse perspectives on colorism and self-perception. Although only five interviews were conducted, the participant demographics comprised three women, one man, and one non-binary individual. Two participants identified as Latina/x, two participants identified as bi-racial with one being Asian and Black and the other Indigenous and White while the fifth participant preferred not to state their race. All five participants were asked several in-depth questions to capture various experiences and opinions regarding colorism within the population of interest.

Data was collected through face-to-face or virtual interviews, depending on the availability and preferences of the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) to ensure accurate documentation of participants' responses. The data analysis process involved several steps. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and then subjected to thematic analysis, where common themes, patterns, and codes were identified. The codes that emerged during the coding process included "colorist experiences," "beauty standards," "social interactions," "media influence," and "intersectionality."

In terms of strengths and limitations, the qualitative interview method allowed for nuanced insights into participants' experiences with colorism and self-perception. It provided an opportunity to explore personal narratives and emotions. However, the findings are subjective and specific to the participants interviewed, limiting the generalizability of the results. Additionally, relying on self-reporting may introduce multiple biases. Compared to other methods, qualitative interviews offer a deep understanding of individuals' experiences and perspectives, providing rich qualitative data. In contrast, other methods such as surveys may provide broader quantitative data

but may need more depth and contextual understanding than what qualitative interviews offer.

My positionality as a researcher, including my background, experiences, and biases, could have influenced the research process and interpretation of data. However, my reflexivity and self-awareness of positionality were crucial in acknowledging and managing potential biases. This helped ensure that participants' voices were prioritized and their experiences were represented authentically in the analysis and reporting of the findings.

Lastly, ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood their participation's purpose, risks, and benefits. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms and securely storing the data. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Pseudonyms are used throughout this text.

FINDINGS

Personal Experiences and Self-Perception

Many of the participants shared personal experiences of encountering colorism, whether by people in their families or by others inside and outside of their community. Participants highlighted instances where they were subjected to biases and negative associations with their skin color or those who were deemed darker. One example of these instances is a participant recalling a family member comparing them to their sibling:

> They would always compliment my sister for being so fair-skinned but proceed to tell me "if you weren't in the sun too much, maybe you'll look just as pretty as your sister" and that only made me feel worse about my looks.

This participant along with the other four expressed to some degree that specific comments, remarks, and experiences regarding their skin tone had distorted how they perceived themselves, with participants reporting feelings of self-doubt and lowered self-esteem because of colorist attitudes and standards. Another participant recalled their experience,

> Compared to my family members, I have the darkest skin. I got it from my dad, who's Indigenous, but I grew up around a family who was lighter-skinned, which was hard. I would get called names like *India* a lot, which wasn't seen as a good thing. It made me hate my skin over time. I think I barely started to love myself again only a few years ago, so it's been a journey.

Although many of the participants expressed colorist remarks from family members and those within their community, they also recalled instances where those outside their community expressed colorist views as well. One interviewee shared how their white teacher would project stereotypes onto them frequently:

> I had this teacher and she said that if we didn't do well in that class we would end up like a vendor, illegally selling oranges and flowers. She would only say this to kids who were Latino and in front of the whole class and it would lead the other kids to call me names like "Beaner vendor" And it was all because of the nasty remarks that she just had to say.

Racial stereotypes such as associating Latinos with "unskilled" labor along with other racialized stereotypes allow for colorist attitudes to continue amongst people of color until it is normalized and seen as harmless to comment, even amongst students such as the participant at the time.

With participants experiencing negative emotions from the comments and associations from others, they also expressed feeling an immense pressure to change their appearance to conform to beauty standards and avoid further ridicule. One participant recalled multiple encounters with their Filipino grandmother, who would encourage them to use skin-bleaching products: "Sometimes they'll suggest to me, 'Oh, do you want stuff for your skin? It'll brighten and help your skin.' Even though it wouldn't necessarily treat my skin issues, it just bleaches my skin; it didn't make me feel better about myself either." The instance of an individual feeling pressured to use bleaching products reflects the ingrained association of whiteness with

goodness that many people of color continue to uphold for generations despite the negative effects it can inflict on those with darker skin tones. Another participant mentioned,

> Those comments about my skin affected me and led me to feel ugly and self-conscious over time. I remember when I was in middle school, I was told that I was too dark to be pretty. After that, I wore hoodies every day to avoid getting darker in the sun, and I would try to straighten my hair because I have curly hair…I remember feeling like I was brought down upon because I looked a certain way, And it made me feel like I "looked too Latina," and it made me feel like really disgusted with myself and even with my culture.

Although the participant mentioned wanting to change their hair along with avoiding the sun, it is common for people of color to feel additional pressure to adjust other aspects of their physical appearance such as hair texture, facial structure, and even body type to further conform to beauty standards. This further demonstrates how colorism is considered a subcategory of racism, which categorizes people into groups based on physical appearance. In sum, all five participants expressed at different levels that colorism has contributed to how they perceive themselves in often negative forms that can lead to feeling pressured to change their appearance. Many shared that it is still an ongoing process to overcome these emotions.

Intersectionality with Other Identities

Interviews highlighted the intersectional nature of colorism, which consisted of analyzing the social and political aspects that contribute to a person's identity and can determine one's inequalities and privileges such as gender, socioeconomic status, and culture. Participants noted that the impact of colorism can vary across different ethnic groups and communities and is emphasized when combined with other forms of discrimination, leading to additional insecurities and inequalities. One participant mentions that one's socioeconomic status can merge with colorism:

> I think [colorism] can intersect because when it comes down to the way people are treated in this

> country, it's usually governed by money... It's not an accident that people with the lowest socio-economic status have darker skin complexions. It doesn't matter if you are of low income; they'll still try to go buy bleaching whitening creams.

This participant emphasizes that in their experience, they notice women often face the most pressures to abide by beauty standards, thus making them susceptible to skin tone insecurities and becoming the biggest consumers of bleaching products. It is also important to note what the participant stated regarding those who fall below the poverty line tend to be people of color. This statement reflects how people of color have historically endured not only poverty but also environmental racism, systematic racism, imperialism, colonialism, and countless acts of violence and genocide that often go unrecognized to continue these cruel acts amongst communities of color in the name of white supremacy.

Another participant discussed the intersectionality between colorism and a person's sexual and gender identity. They expressed their experiences as a non-binary individual that although queerness is slowly being represented and becoming acceptable in many societies, queer people of color continue to struggle with being represented along with facing continuous acts of discrimination, stigmas, and violence. "You already get looked at differently if you're brown or black or are just not white presenting, but if you're also queer, you also deal with things like homophobia and transphobia." They proceed by mentioning,

> You don't really see that much queer or trans representation from people of color in the media; it usually focuses on white, cis-gendered forms of queerness. That can make you feel like an outcast within outcasts or like you still need to hide your identity even though you see more representation.

Having a non-binary participant highlight the intersections of being a person of color and identifying with the LGBTQ+ community was an informative and insightful experience given that the unique experiences of those within this community are often disregarded and erased. Analyzing the multifaceted aspects that create the unique identities of people of color demonstrates

the importance of including intersectionality in research regarding colorism. Intersectionality is a crucial sociological framework that allows one to form an understanding of what contributes to the forms of oppression one may endure while simultaneously observing the levels of privileges one may obtain from one's identity.

Media and Widespread Cultural Influence

Participants recognized the role of media and popular culture in emphasizing colorist attitudes and beauty standards. They pointed out examples where the press portrayed lighter skin tones as the epitome of beauty, reinforcing societal biases. When discussing the music industry, a participant gave one example:

> I noticed that even though mostly Black artists pioneered a lot of music genres, it is usually stolen or copied by other artists like Elvis. And if an artist of color does get fame or recognition, they are or are encouraged to have a lighter complexion. Artists with lighter skin usually skyrocket into fame when they come out with hits. But then you have just as equally talented Black artists with darker complexions; they don't get the same praise or fame.

Artists of color often have talent undermined while simultaneously having their creative ideas stolen and rebranded by white artists to be more palatable to societal norms that essentially abide by standards of white supremacy. Such as the example they gave of Elvis Presley, who sought out the talent of Black artists who pioneered the rock and roll genre and essentially imitated their work to gain fame and wealth while becoming the face of the genre he appropriated like many artists to come.

When discussing other forms of popular media, participants would recall many instances where "I remember wanting to look a certain way other than how I looked because all I saw in magazines and TV were skinny white women. I wanted to be like Hannah Montana and be able to switch up my appearance." Another participant also recalled, "In Hispanic or Latino Media, like soap operas, the protagonists were always white-passing Latinos. But characters who look like me? They

were always servants, farmers, or villains. Anyone with dark skin like mine was always shown negatively." One participant emphasized the need for better representation and diversity to challenge colorism and promote a more inclusive perception of beauty:

> When you start bringing on actors or actresses of color and stuff and putting them in these positions, these beautified positions…I think that is going to help combat colorism because people will start to see that they're represented and that having a darker complexion is okay.

An example a different participant gave was when they discussed the impact of the remake of *The Little Mermaid* (2023) on children. They state,

> I think it's great because you have representation for children of color who don't see themselves in media; they see themselves in this person, and then they don't have to think of the notion of "oh, I wish I can be them or I don't see myself in Disney princesses" you know?

A second participant also mentioned the impact of the remake of the Disney film; they stated,

> We saw a lot of people mad about Ariel being a Black woman. But I'm sure a lot of little Black girls finally saw themselves in this new version of Ariel, and it challenged the status quo. It allowed girlies to be seen.

Call for Education and Awareness

The various themes that emerged from interviewing these five participants emphasized the need for education and awareness to address colorism effectively to eliminate colorist ideals within communities of color. Although participants expressed that the representation of different skin tones is important, it does not fully combat colorist ideologies that continue to affect people of color. They highlighted the importance of teaching about colorism and its impact from an early age, both within families and educational institutions. They also expressed the importance of creating platforms for open discussions and promoting positive role

models of different skin tones to challenge colorist norms.

In an article written by Marilyn Grell-Brisk (2022:242), the debate arises surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement becoming a phenomenon that allows for discussion and actions against acts of police brutality and the systems of racial capitalism to reject the systems and concepts that promote anti-Blackness which negatively affects African American communities and other communities of color. To be able to define important definitions such as anti-Blackness allows us to adequately address the social systems that directly promote racist concepts onto social institutions and norms that directly affect those in Black communities. To support this compelling argument, Grell-Brisk (2022:244) created an analytical framework to discuss levels of world systems that produce three forms of inequality within societies: world system analysis, anti-Blackness, and coloniality. As the author (2022:252) further implies,

> The structural location of antiblackness informs the disposability that is levied against black people across the globe. This coloniality embedded within the world-system structures means that disposability is at the structural level too, thinking in terms of disposability provides a way to organize and resist antiblackness across borders and through new logics of solidarity.

Forms of resistance towards oppressive racial ideologies are necessary to counter this coloniality and may offer insight into the societal structures that are rooted in racist ideologies and cause different levels of inequality, such as police brutality, which the Black Lives Matter movement highlights. These movements can be a starting point for many to hold meaningful discussions surrounding the roots of these oppressive systems including aspects of colorism such as anti-Blackness, which can begin restorative transformations.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Although the five participants do not encompass the experiences of all people of color, their specific findings demonstrate how detrimental the effects of colorism can be on a person of color's self-perception including how it intersects with

other factors of one's identity, and how colorist views hold widespread influence around various cultures. The key findings of this research provide compelling evidence that colorism can significantly impact self-perception among people of color, revealing the pervasive influence of colorist attitudes and standards on beauty. This influence can lead to distorted self-perception, and lowered self-esteem, ultimately affecting social interactions, access to opportunities, and higher levels of discrimination within people of color and in their communities. The intersectionality of colorism with other aspects of identity further adds to its impact, highlighting the need for further education, awareness, and media representation to challenge colorist norms and promote inclusive environments that celebrate the diversity of skin tones and foster self-acceptance. In addition to psychological consequences, colorism can manifest in systemic inequalities, perpetuating disparities in areas such as education, popular media, employment, incarceration rates, and healthcare among people of color. These structural imbalances create a cycle of disadvantage, where individuals facing colorist biases endure not only internal struggles but also external challenges that limit their opportunities and overall well-being. Consequently, addressing colorism requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes the voices of those impacted, while combining individual empowerment with broader societal changes to dismantle this internal form of oppression among people of color.

By examining previous literature and personal experiences, beauty standards, social interactions, and the intersectionality of colorism, this study reveals the urgent need for reform. Future research can expand our understanding of the longitudinal effects of colorism, its cross-cultural variations, and the efficacy of interventions. Addressing colorism requires broad societal changes, including exploring educational programs' effectiveness at challenging colorism, promoting self-acceptance, community-driven initiatives, and giving those facing this issue first-hand a platform to challenge oppressive norms and foster inclusivity. By taking these steps, we can strive toward a society that values and celebrates the diverse beauty of every individual.

To conclude, I want to share a poem I found during my extensive literature review. Although this research resurfaced

many negative and painful emotions that so many others like myself have endured, I've discovered to reclaim my power through this research and wish to share this knowledge with others so that they too can reclaim their power. I want to emphasize what great resilience and beauty we each carry that is skin deep, that our ancestors passed down to us for generations. Know that you have legacies behind you to help navigate the world with your unique presence, and never forget that it is no one's right to diminish that power you hold that is skin deep.

Ode to Dark (Skinned) Girls by Robin M. Boylorn (2012)
She waited Patiently
And in silence
Never admitting Out loud
That she secretly wanted to be
Light skinned
Brown but in a lighter shade
She would say it out loud
But in whispered tones
"Make me white-like
Damn near transparent
So that these people can see through me
Instead of just past me…
Make me Beautiful!"
Like the color of the earth I already was
But this skin
This house to my soul
Is only almost pretty, they say
And if I weren't so dark
I might be worth
Lovingwantingfuckingstayingbeing
But instead I am just tolerated
In the dark or in secret
Or worn on your shoulder
Like an unnecessary accessory
Creating your celebrity
Because
I Am Darker Than You
Teach me how to love myself
The color of fire
In the middle of its escape
Skin and eyes round

And regal at once
You are beautiful
The color of coffee with no cream
Dark like the bittersweet chocolate of my dreams Caramel-coated coquette, Honey dipped and full of vigor Full lipped and full bodied
Full
Dark-skinned and exquisite
Majestic even
With my brown-black self!

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