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Colorism: The Unspoken Preference to Skin Tone and Its Effect on African American Individuals in the 21st Century

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COLORISM: THE UNSPOKEN PREFERENCE TO SKIN TONE AND ITS EFFECT
ON AFRICAN AMERICAN INDIVIDUALS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

by

CAROLYN D. POWELL

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

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First of all, I acknowledge my Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. God is forever faithful and I have earnestly stood on His promise that He would never leave me nor forsake me. I thank Him for His grace and mercy and His hand of protection that He kept over my family and me throughout this entire process.

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I have to include a special note of acknowledgement to Dr. Richard Henderson and to Dr. Judith Beauford.

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”

(2 Timothy 4:7 KJV)

Carolyn D. Powell

DEDICATION

This dissertation is first of all dedicated to my Lord and Savior Christ Jesus.

To my wonderful husband who displayed such loving kindness and patience during this endeavor and to my beautiful three daughters, “my first editing board”. Daughters, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. I love you more than you will ever know.

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COLORISM: THE UNSPOKEN PREFERENCE TO SKIN TONE AND ITS EFFECT ON AFRICAN AMERICAN INDIVIDUALS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Carolyn D. Powell, Ph.D.

University of the Incarnate Word, 2013

This qualitative study explored the perception of colorism among Black American individuals born between the years of 1952 and 1972 of the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generations. Colorism has been defined as the privileging of light skin tone over dark skin tone. The stigma of colorism continues to produce discord, distrust, discrimination, and cultural disconnects between Black and White individuals as well as within the Black American family and community. The aim of the study was to explore the consciousness of colorism in the 21st century and its effect on Black Americans. Racial Identity Development was utilized as the conceptual framework for the study.

Through narrative interviews, participants openly shared stories in relation to their life experiences and situations concerning colorism in regard to interracial and/or intraracial discrimination. The findings of the study identified (a) the journey that an African American individual may take in acknowledging and personally accepting a racial identifier, (b) the emotional residue that an individual may sustain due to the subjection of interracial discrimination, and (c) the impact of intraracial discrimination in childhood and/or adolescent years and on adult development. Findings suggest that the concept of colorism continues to be an experience of the Black American culture in America 21st

century. Additionally, the findings suggest that adult educators must be knowledgeable of and sensitive to issues of racial identity development and that open and intelligent dialogue concerning interracial and intraracial issues needs to occur in order to dispel ethnic, racial, and societal separation and discord.

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Chapter I: Colorism

Context of the Study

According to Nassar-McMillan, McFall-Roberts, Flowers, and Garrett (2006), skin tone has been defined as the “shade of skin with which an individual has been genetically endowed” (p. 79). It is this shade of skin, as noted by Nassar-McMillan et al. that “has proved to be one of the most sensitive facets of life faced by many African Americans” (p. 79). This level of sensitivity is noted as being the result of colorism. *Colorism*, as defined by Glenn (2009), “is the privileging of light skin tone over dark skin tone” (p. 25). The concept of colorism has not only proven to be a core component of interracial discrimination but of “intraracial” discrimination as well; and as such, has been deemed as being “an embarrassing and controversial subject for African Americans” (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992, p. 1).

The prevalence of colorism as part of the African American experience has been discussed in such literary works as Marita Golden’s *Don’t Play in the Sun* (2004) in which she records a conversation between herself and a cultural historian on the subject of “gradual Europeanization” (p. 100) and colorism:

“But it’s more than a parody of Whiteness,” I tell Browder. “Michael Jackson is a parody of Black folks’ love affair with Whiteness, the desire, sometimes secret and unexpressed, other times obvious and acknowledged that lots of us still have to be lighter and whiter than we are. We were ashamed of him not just because he brought all the color neurosis straight out of the closet, but because he wanted to be White and he had enough money to actually turn into his vision of Whiteness.” (Golden, 2004, p. 101)

In Sharon Flake’s *The Skin I’m In* (1998), the main character, Maleeka Malcolm, experiences intraracial discrimination and taunting from one of her fellow African American classmates:

When she's far enough away, John-John says to me, "I don't see no pretty, just a whole lotta black." Before I can punch him good, he's singing a rap song. "Maleeka, Maleeka—boom, boom, we sure wanna keep her, baboom. Boom. Boom, but she so black, baboom, boom, boom, we just can't see her." Before I know it, three more boys is pointing at me and singing that song, too. Me, I'm wishing the building will collapse on top of me. (Flake, 1998, p. 3)

Another example can be found in Toni Morrison's, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), in which the concept of interracial discrimination in relation to the preference of European skin tone and features over African American skin tone and features is addressed:

Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. "Here", they said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it." (Morrison, 1970, pp. 20-21)

Toni Morrison's statement regarding skin-tone preference is echoed in Harrison and Thomas' (2009) explanation of skin tone stratification. The authors state, "skin color is stratified because in America, and in most western cultures, Whiteness is presumed to be representative of beauty and graciousness; and in contrast, Blackness signifies ugliness and incivility" (Harrison & Thomas, 2009, p. 135).

In accordance with American history, some have determined that skin-color bias in the United States originated from a history of slavery and racial oppression (Hill, 2002, p. 77). As noted, from the beginning of slavery African Americans "have experienced ostracism, neglect, assault, and slander perpetuated by European Americans as well as by other African Americans on the basis of skin color" (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2006, p. 79). Colorism, as relayed by Lobodziec (2010), developed its "origin in the antebellum South, where slave-owners held to the so-called mulatto hypothesis, which stated that an infusion of White blood would better the Black race" (p. 36). This concept of "Blacks needing the blood of Whites to become a better race of individuals," may have been

largely adapted from the French novelist and intellectual Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, who in the mid-19th century presented his racial theory and belief in the supremacy of the White race in his book entitled *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (Lobodziec, 2010, p. 37). Therefore, the concept of White supremacy as adapted from slavery crossed over into the African American race through the intermingling of the African and the European races; hence a Mulatto population was created within the African slave community (Hall, 2008; Lobodziec, 2010). The birth of the Mulatto children of African slave women and the European White males resulted in the development of lighter skin tones within the Black slave community.

With the development of lighter skinned Mulatto slaves, it soon became apparent that darker skinned Black slaves were deemed as being “less” in the eyes of the plantation masters. Unfortunately, on the plantations and in slave camps, lighter skin tones took preference. Therefore, a sense of privilege based on skin hues that started in slavery came to pass as a norm within African American communities. The preferential treatment of Mulattoes by slave owners resulted in distrust and dislike amongst African Americans within the slave camps. Therefore, the concept of the different shades of color which found its way in the Black African slave community, unfortunately, was one of the catalysts that caused dissension and distrust to rise amongst the Black slaves in America (Gullickson, 2005; Kerr, 2005). The notion that lighter skin tone was preferred by the slave master and thus the White European community, birthed both interracial and intraracial discord.

Reportedly, lighter skinned Blacks were given preference in relation to their assigned duties within the master’s house. With biracial children of African and

European descent being incorporated into the African slave community, these individuals, having the “blood of the Whites” in their veins, were, in many cases, assigned duties within the Master’s house, thereby allowing them to obtain and experience benefits and privileges that were not afforded to the darker skinned slaves (Hill, 2002). Research demonstrates that not only were the lighter skinned slaves provided with the less physically demanding duties by being assigned to the master’s house; they were assigned such duties under the belief that being of a lighter skin tone, they held a heightened level of intellectual superiority to that of the darker-skinned slave (Lobodziec, 2010). This unfounded perception of the lighter skinned Mulatto slave having a heightened intelligence quotient over the darker skinned slave resulted in the Mulatto slave being “sold at a higher price over the darker skinned slave” (Lobodziec, 2010, p. 36). This promoted the ugly concept of interracial and ultimately intraracial colorism.

As a result of the preference offered to lighter complexioned slaves, African American people developed a silently imposed “disconnect” amongst one another, demonstrating the depth of intraracial discord. Keith & Herring (1991) state that “skin tone played a significant role in shaping social and economic stratification patterns in the black community” (p. 760). As Bodenhorn (2002) noted, “leaders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century African-American community were more likely than the general population to be light-complected mulattoes” (pp. 21-22). Therefore, in relation to colorism, being dark-skinned undoubtedly carried psychological, economic, educational, and temporal costs to individuals of the African American community, both individually and collectively (Hochschild, 2006). It was this sense of superior status that

produced the “paper bag concept” that is more readily referred to as the “paper bag test.”

Als (as cited in Kerr, 2005) provides a summary of authoress Toni Morrison’s 2003

definition of the paper bag:

Toni Morrison defines the test as a “ranking...your skin gave you access to certain things.” More specifically, Morrison states, “There was something called “the paper bag test”—darker than the paper bag put you in one category, similar to the bag put you in another, and lighter was yet another and the most privileged category” (p. 272).

Therefore, in following the concept of the paper bag test, the darker the skin color of the African American individuals, the lower their status. Although this is a known concept in the African American race, it is generally an unspoken one. Colorism among the African American community has ashamedly become the dirty little cultural secret that is yet unspoken. The question asked is, “Are you lighter than a brown paper bag?” For many African Americans, that question literally meant “To be or Not to be” (Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1) that was the question of acceptance, privilege, and in some cases psychological survival.

It is no secret that the concept of colorism is alive and well in the United States, and unfortunately, in representing a historical view of America, undoubtedly may be consistently prevalent in some form or the other. For example, a study conducted by Kerr (2005) reports that the “complexion lore” in Black communities is seldom recorded (p. 271). Although a separatism whose roots were planted in slavery, Hill (2002) indicates in a recent study that lighter-skinned African Americans are more likely to have higher-status occupations, higher incomes, and more years of schooling than their darker-skinned counterparts, even when parental characteristics and other variables related to adult socioeconomical status are considered (Hill, 2002, p. 77). Despite the social,

cultural, and political transformation of the twentieth century, recent studies have demonstrated the continuing influence of skin tone in shaping social or economic outcomes among African Americans. The stigma of colorism continues to produce discord, distrust, discrimination and cultural disconnects between Black and White individuals. These factors are also experienced by Black American individuals within the African American family and community. A concept that began in the antebellum South has manifested itself from generation to generation as noted in the Russell et al.'s (1992), *The Color Complex*.

The Color Complex provides a clear picture of intraracial discrimination amongst African Americans in relation to color:

If a Black woman is light-skinned with good hair and good features, then she's the sh**. Even if she has short hair, but good features, she'll be all right. But a dark-skinned girl with short hair can forget it. And if she has a big nose, then she should just be a nun. But if she has long hair and good features, then her skin color can be overlooked. Long hair really helps out those black ugly girls. (Russell et al., 1992, p. 82)

Hunter (as cited in Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008) concurred with the above sentiments of intraracial discrimination:

Skin color and features associated with whites, such as light skin, straight noses, and long, straight hair, take on the meanings that they represent: civility, rationality, and beauty. Similarly, skin colors and features associated with Africans or Indians, such as dark skin, broad noses, and kinky hair, represent savagery, irrationality, and ugliness. The values associated with physical features set the stage for skin color stratification (p. 661).

The concept of acceptability in regard to skin tone that began in the antebellum South, would, unfortunately, be experienced by the researcher herself in the 20th century.

Personal Background

As a researcher, I utilized narrative inquiry with “the aim to understand how people structure the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (Schram, 2006, p. 104), and my own understanding came forth as a result of the reflections of the participants. Having developed an understanding of the concept of the qualitative paradigm, I came to know and assuredly understand that I was in search of the truths as expressed by the chosen individuals in this study. One of the greatest concepts that I came to embrace about qualitative research was that the truths of the participants may be totally different from my concept of the truth(s). The males and females who were interviewed experienced things I had been shielded from, such as verbal harshness from their immediate family members, something I had never personally experienced. The sharing of the other’s experiences had been the pivotal point in my realization and belief that the narrative methodology allowed me to view the participants’ truths as they perceived them to be. An individual’s perception is the individual’s reality and I not only acknowledge them as truths that may be different from my own, but also allowed the readers of the study to gain an insight into the participants’ lives as shared through their stories. To illustrate an understanding of the narrative process, I would like to provide the following account of a personal story:

A new season was coming upon us. The invitation specified that we were to dress in our “Sunday best” and to please be on time. “Early or timely arrival will be appreciated.” I, along with my hall mates, was determined to be one of those ladies that arrived slightly early. It was a wonderfully cool, fall Sunday afternoon. The breeze was somewhat crisp and the leaves were just beginning to fall. My steps started slowing down

as the auditorium came into view. “Hey, are you all sure we should even go to this?” I asked. “We’ve gotten this far. Might as well go the rest of the way, come on,” one of them replied. I picked up my pace and stayed in tune with the other girls.

Five of us had made the decision to attend the introduction luncheon for one of the most popular sororities on this college campus. We walked through the door and entered the hall area. Young women were everywhere. It was as if every female freshman on campus wanted to connect with this sorority. “Smile,” I said. The smiles became as instant as if someone shouted, “Cheese.” “Hello,” a young lady smiled at me. “Hello,” I replied. The first thing I took note of was her light brown hair that was styled in a feathered layered look. She introduced herself and informed me that she was the president of the chapter. “Wow,” I thought. The president of the sorority chapter was personally talking to me. Surely this was a “good sign.” After talking with her for a while, she thanked me for talking with her and went to mingle among the other young hopefuls. I took her cue and smiled and mingled with the other young ladies as well. My friends and I were careful not to huddle. After a while, we were asked to have a seat and the officers were formally introduced. They made the sorority sound so exciting that by the end of the luncheon, I along with my friends, wanted to join this sisterhood. Come on. Who would not want to join? Who would not want to belong to a group of young ladies who made college life and belonging to their sorority sound so wonderful and sincerely inviting? After all, it was one of the most popular sororities on campus. The pace on the way back to the dorm was considerably faster. The strides of our steps were elongated. We were elated and hopeful. We called each other “sister this and big sister that.” I did not think any one of us thought we would not be accepted. It took a few days for reality

to hit; and as inevitable as it was, my friends and I started hearing how some of the freshman had been accepted. I secretly started saying, “Well, surely I made it. The president of the chapter had a personal conversation with me.” Unfortunately my thought process was a demonstration of my naiveté. A few more days passed. I consoled myself by rationalizing that my last name was in the lower section of the alphabet and they had not gotten to my alpha yet. To my chagrin that rationale proved to be incorrect. It did not take long for me to see a sorority sister on campus who was very honest with me concerning my selection placement. I had not been chosen. Surprised, I found myself asking, “Why?” I thought through the conversations I had with the sorority sisters, as well as with the president of the chapter herself, that I had made a “good impression.” I had not said anything that could be misconstrued as rude or inappropriate. I was on my social “A” game, or so I thought. To this day, I can honestly state none of the thoughts running through my mind had anything to do with my not being selected. A member of another sorority approached me, and said,

You were cool and all, and they actually liked you, but, they would have not have picked you. It had nothing to do with you as a person. They have not heard anything negative about you around campus. It was this one thing.

With hesitancy, she said words that I had never heard spoken in my life, “You just didn’t pass the brown paper bag test.” “What?” was the only thing I remember saying. “I’m sorry,” the sorority said; and she walked away. The brown paper bag test? What was the brown paper bag test? I had never heard of it, so had no idea what it was. I called my father and he provided me with the first intraracial discord lesson I had ever received in my life. Admittedly, my feelings were hurt and I honestly did not like that kind of “education.” I have always thought it to be a very shallow and ugly concept and it

saddened me that it occurred within my own race. But on a lighter note, the young lady was correct in her statement, I am darker than a brown paper bag.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous studies have indicated that light-skinned Blacks, also referred to as Mulattoes, have experienced privileges over their darker-skinned counterparts simply based on the color of their skin hues/tones. Studies report “Blacks with lighter skin have historically had better educational, labor market and marital outcomes than blacks with darker skin” (Gullickson, 2005, p. 157). African American literature acknowledged the difference shades of color within the Black race. As noted by Bodenhorn (2002):

“Langston Hughes, the most prominent writer of the Harlem Renaissance emphasized skin color throughout his fiction. At different times, he referred to African-Americans as brown, light- brown, golden, yellow, high-yellow, almost white, blond, three- quarters pink, high-toned, coffee with cream, and cafe-au-lait” (p. 21).

Research indicates that in some areas of the South, light-complected African Americans were treated more generously than dark-complected people (Bodenhorn, 2002; Gullickson, 2005). Research confirms the discord that has grown between the Black communities as a result of colorism:

Inheritance of the initial mulatto advantage may partially explain the skin tone ierarch among later generations. Children inherited both lighter skin and a priviledged background from their mulatto parents, and in turn they passed these characteristics on to their own children” (Gullickson, 2005, p. 158).

It is due to this unspoken hierarchical inheritance of privilege that has silently affected the relationships that Blacks not only have between themselves but between other cultures as well.

Research has indicated that lighter skinned African Americans have been offered better educational opportunities which have resulted in higher incomes (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2006). This study investigated the existence of intraracial discord among African American individuals of the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation in an attempt to analyze how the perception of colorism and the preferential opportunities as a result of colorism are viewed by these individuals of the 21st century.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perception of colorism among 12 African American individuals born between the years of 1952 and 1972 of the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation. I selected this specific generation to capture the essence of the Black in America pre-Civil Rights movement as well as post-Civil Rights movement in an effort to impart the living history and current perception of colorism through the lenses of the participants. Using narrative interviews, this study captured the participants' stories through the exploration of the brown paper bag concept as a metaphor. The aim of this study was to discuss the consciousness of colorism in the 21st century.

As African Americans who may have experienced interracial discrimination, this study addressed whether the males and females had collectively or individually experienced intraracial discrimination as well, and if so, to what extent? I addressed the following with the targeted population:

- In what way does skin tone ideology influence decisions in forming relationships for individuals within the African American community in the present day?

- In what way does colorism continue to exert an influence and/or be experienced in the African American community among the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation?
- In what way does racial identity development play into colorism?

Theoretical Frameworks—Racial Identity

The theoretical framework utilized in this study was Racial Identity. As reported by Helms (1990), Racial Identity serves as a reference “to a group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3). The African American has had a litany of ethnic labels which began in slavery up to Jesse Jackson’s 1989 proposal for the preset day politically correct label of African Americans (Waters, 1991). These labels were used not only as identifiers of a race of people of African ancestral lineage, but also as a theoretical framework which addresses the “various types of emotional states, social beliefs, and aspect of psychosocial competence” (Carter, Pieterse, & Smith 2008, p. 101). Middleton, Erguner-Tekinalp, Williams, Stadler, and Dow (2011) state, “the development of one’s racial identity has a bearing on the ability of the individual to modify and interpret messages received about race in light of one’s experiences” (p. 202). Racial Identity, as stated by Carter et al., (2008), is considered to be a well-known “construct within the psychological literature” (p. 101), which analyzes and provides insight into the “psychological implications of racial-group membership” (Hill & Thomas, 2000, p. 193).

One of the earliest study’s concerning racial identity was conducted in the late 1930s by African American psychologists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark. The Clark’s study, as stated by Jamison (2008) “brought attention to the psychological processes involved in

education (particularly issues of identity, self-hatred and self-esteem) of children of African descent, which in turn had a major impact on how the educational process was understood and perceived” (p. 98). Additionally, Black American psychologist Charles Thomas developed a Nigrescence model (Cross, 1991) based on “created social roles that were designed to sustain and maintain oppressive conditions, such as (1) hybrid or bad niggers; (2) conformists or good Negroes; (3) marginalists or white middle class Negroes and (4) rebels or Black militants” (Jamison, 2008, p. 99). In the 1970s, Cross (1991) began addressing the concept of “Nigrescence, or the psychology of becoming Black” (p. 41). Cross developed his theory “building on Erickson’s (1978) stages of child development that emphasized the contradictions and difficulties experienced when individuals or groups of people attempted to transition from one stage to the next stage of personal development...” (Jamison, 2008, p. 100). As a result, he developed the “model of psychological Nigrescence” (Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2007, p. 283). The stages of Black identity development are:

Pre-encounter (stage 1) depicts the identity to be changed; Encounter (stage 2) isolates the point at which the person feels compelled to change; Immersion-Emersion (stage 3) describes the vortex of identity change; and Internalization and Internalization-Commitment (stages 4 and 5) describe the habitation and internalization of the new identity (Cross, 1991, p. 190).

According to Hargrow (2001), Cross’ model of Nigrescence was “elaborated and expanded on by Janet Helms” (p. 223). As stated by Simons et al. (2011), “Helms reformulated Cross’s model to suggest each stage be considered a cognitive template that individuals use to organize racial information” (p. 72). Helms’ stages of racial identity are Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization (Carter, Pieterse & Smith, 2008, p. 103).

Theorists are noted as stating that for “Black Americans, racial identity includes four ego identity statuses: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization” (Carter et al., 2008, p. 103). The four stages are explained by Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross (2006) as follows: “The first stage, preencounter, depicts a mature, fully developed adult identity that is grounded in something other than race and Black culture or that is riddled by racial self-hatred” (p. 70). In the second stage, encounter, “the person is jolted into awareness that her or his current worldview does not accord enough importance to race and Black culture or is too negative” (Sneed et al., 2006, p. 70). The third stage, immersion-emersion, “captures the state of *identity-in-between-ness*, as the identity under attack resists and eventually gives way to the nascent “Black”-focused identity” (p.70). The fourth stage of Cross’ Nigrescence model is that of internalization in which “the new identity is crystallized and, unlike the previous pre-encounter identity, is free of hatred or negativity toward the in-group and provides a comfortable psychological platform on which rests a very Black-oriented ideology” (p. 71). Internalization-commitment, which is the fifth stage of the Nigrescence model “integrates the “We” and “I” aspects of the self as the person becomes committed to the long-term struggle for Black social justice through sustained collective action” (Sneed et al., 2006, p. 71).

Parham and Helms developed the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS) in 1981 which is “a 30-item self-report measure designed to assess the attitudes reflective of each of Cross’s stages of Black identity development” (Fischer, Tokar & Serna, 1998, p. 212). The RIAS has had multiple revisions (Fischer, et al, 1998) to include Helms’ updated scale, the BRIAS, a 60 item self report questionnaire which was copyrighted in 2011.

Psychologist Eric Erickson indicated that “one of life’s primary tasks is the development of a coherent sense of identity in occupation, sex roles, politics, and religion” (Scottham, Cooke, Sellers & Ford, 2010, p. 20). Although race is a noted omission from early identity development models (Sanchez, 2013), “Negro or Black identity” was addressed in empirical research beginning in the late 1930s (Cross, 1991, p. 40). The years of 1939-1960 are indicated as “the period during which the pejorative view about Negro identity was established, and 1968-1980, the years in which Black identity change was recorded” (Cross, 1991, pp. 40-41). The latter years are noted as the “Black Power” phrase in which “the concept *Black identity* had its origin” (Cross, 1991, p. 41). Hargrow (2001) indicates that “racial identity theories came out of the notion that African Americans go through stages when affirming their Blackness” (p. 223).

Fischer, Tokar, & Serna (1998) report the “links between the racial identity development and a number of personality and counseling-related variables, including coping, depression, general psychological functioning and well-being, self-actualization and affective states, self-esteem” (p. 212).

According to Carter et al., (2008), racial identity, through empirical research, has been validated as

a psychological construct and provides evidence of the role of racial identity status attitudes as a source of psychological variation within racial groups with respect to a range of psychosocial variables, such as coping, perceptions of discrimination, and attitudes toward social change (p. 103).

This framework was selected to add to the knowledge and understanding of the history of Black Americans in the 20th and 21st century regarding interracial and intraracial discrimination in relation to colorism. Through the use of racial identity as a theoretical framework, readers of this study may gain insight as well as an increased

knowledge base of the experiences of the African American individual's past, present, and future concerning the impact that slavery and societal stereotyping has had on the African American culture.

Definition of Terms

African American, the current politically-correct racial identifier for Black Americans.

Black American refers to Black and/or African American individuals in the United States. I use this term to pay homage to the Blacks in America who carried the past reference of Colored, Negro, and Afro-American.

Colorism has been defined as the privileging of light skin tone over dark skin tone (Glenn, 2009, p. 25).

Manumitted means to release from slavery; to liberate from personal bondage or servitude; to free, as a slave (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2013).

Paper Bag Test has traditionally been used liberally and with great frequency by African Americans throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, with references to paper bag parties, paper bag churches, brown bag clubs, or brown bag social circles that have resulted in a forbidden language of exclusion and exclusiveness (Kerr, 2005, p. 272).

Research Design

The methodology utilized in this study was that of the narrative inquiry. The following definition was found to be comprehensive: "Narrative research designs are qualitative procedures in which researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individual lives, and write narratives about their experiences"

(Creswell, 2005, p. 53). As a researcher in the qualitative paradigm, I selected narrative research as the chosen methodology. It is advised that one should utilize narrative research when, as the researcher, you “have individuals willing to tell their stories and you want to use their stories” (Creswell, 2005, p. 474).

The use of the narrative inquiry allowed the focus to be on the African American participants, of various skin tones, who had personally experienced discrimination based on the color of their skin. Some of the deepest emotional experiences shared by the participants were unexpected; but these were the real voices and actions from African American individuals. Schram (2006) states,

Narrative researchers’ storied data consider both how social actors order and tell their experiences and why they remember and retell what they do. . . . This is a key contribution of narratives; it lets the researcher analyze not only meanings and motives but also how those meanings and motives connect to the ways people structure their experience. (Schram, 2006, p. 104)

The interracial discord that has occurred within the African American culture has been coined by some Black communities as the “brown paper bag” test. How has this unspoken concept affected the individuals who have experienced it? Coffey & Atkinson (as cited in Schram, 2006, p. 54) note that “narrative researchers focus on the ways in which people produce, represent, and contextualize experience and personal knowledge through narratives.”

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in the sense that it addresses the importance of racial validation and social identification for Black Americans. This study provides insight into the emotional pain and hurt African Americans may silently carry from childhood or into and through adulthood, which may impact that individual academically, psychologically

and professionally. Therefore, this study addresses how the effect of interracial and intraracial discrimination may impact the fields of secondary and adult education, behavioral health, and organizational development.

Additionally, this study is significant in the sense that it allowed the participants of the study to develop an awareness of cross-generational interaction and understanding. The participants of the study provided disclosure that indicated a personal level of knowledge in relation to racism, thus allowing them to openly discuss and disclose their personal experiences. This study serves as a venue that will allow future cross-generational conversation and interaction to take place to aid younger generations in their quest for racial understanding and acceptance in spite of societal imposed colorism.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the time constraint. A measure of time had been agreed upon by each participant and me. As a result of the time constraint, the participants may have felt restricted to the pre-established time limit.

Summary

This chapter served as an introduction to the study and through the use of fictional and scholarly literature, addressed the concept of colorism and its prevalence in being a societal and culturally engrained aspect of the African American's experience—both past and present. Additionally, Chapter 1 presented the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, and definition of terms, the research design and the significance of the study to provide the reader with a thorough introduction to the concept of color consciousness in regard to skin tone preference.

This research is concerned with the lack of self-acceptance that plagues some of our African Americans today. Gaps of knowledge clearly exist concerning this subject. It is my hope that I can not only contribute to the increase of the knowledge base of this subject, but can also open up the line of discussion and bring about conversations between an older population of African Americans who have experienced interracial discord and African American young adults. It is my hope that the experiences of the older generation will ignite an inward healing and a sense of cultural pride in the knowing that the young generation, as African Americans, are a beautiful array of people who were wonderfully and fearfully created by God just as they are, in their God-given 9 to 11 pounds of natural covering—their beautiful various hues of color skin.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The review of literature was approached with the purpose of providing a foundation for the concept of colorism in the 21st century. This will aid me in laying a foundation for the promotion of open and honest cross-generational discussion among the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generations to discuss their personal views of colorism in present day. This review of literature will focus on (a) the history of slavery in the United States and the birth of the Mulatto individual; (b) the concept of African American passing for White for societal and economic success; (c) colorism in research; (d) the role of the media in relation to present-day colorism; and (e) racial identity in relation to Black Studies.

Slavery in the United States

Ronald E. Hall (2008) indicates that

human pigmentation is determined by a finite number of genes that affect one or more aspects of how melanin pigments are formed, the morphology of the organelles containing that pigment, and the transport of those organelles to the bulk of our skin cells (keratinocytes) resulting in the color of our hair and eyes. (p. 18)

In short, an individual's genes determine the amount of melanin produced, which in turn affects the amount of pigmentation that occurs in their skin. In addition, Hall points out that the "natural differences in pigmentation may be due to biological advantages of dark skin in habitats with extreme sun exposure, and advantages of diminished pigmentation in habitats of limited sun exposure" (p. 18); hence, the visual skin difference between African and European descendants which undoubtedly led to one of the most shameful atrocities of American history: Slavery.

According to scientists, as noted in Roebuck's *Anatomy 360 degrees: The Ultimate Visual Guide to the Human Body*, the covering of the average adult human body, the skin, weighs anywhere from 9 to 11 pounds (2011, p. 52). It is such a small component of an individual's make-up, yet, amazingly for centuries, mankind has used the natural human covering to pass judgment, segregate, denigrate, increase or decrease an individual's self-esteem, dictate educational and/or employment opportunities, and hinder the availability of quality health care, determine socioeconomic status and, in some cases, dictate an individual's place of worship. In looking in the mirror of American history, it has been demonstrated that 9 to 11 pounds of a human's birth born covering, comprising enzymes, cells and melanin, resulted in the enslavement of a race of people, divided a nation, gave rise to the bloodiest war on American soil to date, and produced a cultural and generational misnomer of stereotypical concepts concerning poverty and destruction. The judgment of an individual based on the level of melanin in one's skin has established a mindset which was birthed in the bowels of slavery and has continued to breathe and manifest discord, distrust, disapproval, hatred, and shame through generations of African Americans from the period of slavery to present day.

The Birth of the Mulatto Individual

History records that the human trade of Africans at the hands of Europeans began in 1619. In 2004, the television network, PBS, produced a documentary entitled *Slavery and the Making of America*. The following was used as a promotional caption for the documentary: "The first were bought in 1619. The last freed in 1865. In the intervening 250 years, slaves labored to make America what it is today" (PBS, 2004). Years before the 2004 PBS Documentary, Virginia Hamilton (1993), children's literary author,

provided an account of the beginning of slavery to her young readers in the following statement:

The system of human slavery came to the English colony of Virginia to America in 1619 . . . the "twenty Negars" . . . were Africans stolen from their homes by slave traders. . . . They were traded to the Virginia colony in exchange for food and other supplies. This trade in human beings took place one year before the Mayflower landed the Pilgrims at Plymouth, Massachusetts. (p. 5)

In essence, what began with the stealing of 20 African born individuals from their native homeland resulted in approximately 50,000 African individuals being shipped for the purpose of enslavement; thereby demonstrating that slavery occurred even before the birth of the Nation.

slavery is old in America, older by far than the United States . . . 157 years before slaveholder Thomas Jefferson wrote a ringing reveille in the Declaration of Independence; "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. . . . (Fenton, 2007, p. 53)

Although Thomas Jefferson and the founding fathers of the Constitution of the United States so eloquently acknowledged the concept of God's equality of mankind in His creation of man, they did not dispel or end slavery with the writing of the constitution. Hypocritically, Thomas Jefferson himself was a slave owner, and circumstantial evidence has led many to believe that he fathered at least five children with his slave, Sally Hemming. Not only did Thomas Jefferson physically have slaves, he himself believed that African Americans were inferior to Whites as stated in his *Notes on the States of Virginia*:

It will probably be asked, Why not retain and incorporate the blacks in the state? In response to that question, he advances 'as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances are inferior to whites in the endowments both of body and mind'. He (Jefferson) called for a 'scientific investigation' but urges that researchers use caution 'where our conclusion would degrade a whole race of men from the rank in the scale of beings which their Creator may perhaps have given them. (Facing History and Ourselves, 2002, p. 40)

Therefore, although it was written in the guidelines of this great nation that one man was not unequal to another, those guidelines, when written, clearly did not apply to African Americans. In 1857, Judge Roger B. Taney, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, summed up America's view of the African American during the Dred Scott case. He stated the following:

They (African Americans) had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect. (Fenton, 2007, p. 52)

African Americans were deemed as “an inferior order” from their first steps onto the new soil. Inferiority was bred into a race of people from the beginning. Even Frederick Douglass, a fugitive slave, who himself was the product of a master and slave union, was conscious of the difference of the races based on skin color. Although described by Otilie Assing, a female abolitionist of Gentile and Jewish decent, as “a light mulatto of unusually tall, slender, and powerful stature who has ‘a prominently domed forehead’ beckoning genius with ‘an aquiline nose’ and ‘narrow beautifully carved lips’” (Stauffer, 2008, p. 236), Frederick Douglass himself battled with inferiority. Honorably noted in the pages of American history as one of the greatest orators of our nation, Frederick Douglass made reference to his inferiority as it related to his “skin color.” This cognitive concept of inferiority was noted in his documentation of meeting President Abraham Lincoln. Douglass states, “and Lincoln did not act superior simply because he was white: ‘I was never in any way reminded of my humble origin or my unpopular color . . .’” (Stauffer, 2008, p. 23). What a great epithet for what history has deemed to be one of America's greatest presidents. Each of these two men knew that in essence, as stated by Frederick Douglass, that “color ‘was an artificial issue raised to justify . . . the

degradation' of blacks" (Stauffer, 2008, p. 313). Abraham Lincoln, and Frederick Douglass, two great men fought parallel for one great cause, the demise of slavery which would in turn diminish the "degradation of blacks." It was the effort and bravery of these two men and many unsung others, who made it possible for the Emancipation Proclamation to be signed in 1863 by President Lincoln, thereby freeing slaves. But, it would not be until the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that African Americans would truly begin to see the mechanism of centuries of injustice turning towards equality.

As discussed, slavery produced a disconnect amongst European White Americans and African Americans. Reportedly, there was not just discontentment between Blacks and Whites as a result of slavery, there was also discontentment within the African American race itself. Hall (2008), provides the following insight in the "shades of skin hierarchy" that occurred as a result of slavery.

Slaves who were dark-skinned, or of pure African ancestry, typically worked in the fields and were viewed as having the more physically demanding tasks; while slaves who were lighter (due to mixed parentage—as it was common for slave masters to have nonconsensual and consensual sexual relationships with their slaves) were given the more "desirable" and prestigious positions within the chattel system. These work chore divisions not only engulfed a great deal of bitterness between slaves, but it also reinforced the notion that the lighter one's complexion," the better off he or she was in the eyes of the majority group members." (p. 49)

Reportedly, slaveholders perceived darker-skinned slaves to be stronger and thereby able to work harder and faster. This perception, which correlated with the slave's skin tone, generally resulted in the darker slave being assigned to work the fields "pickin' cotton." Kerr (2005) cites a portion of Walter Johnson's book *Soul to Soul: Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, which concurs with the aforementioned statement:

Skin color often served as a stand-in for acclimation. There is a litany of statements to the effect that the 'blackest' slaves were the healthiest. From the published writings of Samuel Cartwright ('all Negroes are not equally black—the

blacker the stronger') to the slave-market list sent by John Knight to his father-in-law ('I must have if possible the jet black Negroes; [they] stand this climate the best'), white men in the antebellum South talked to one another as if they could see slaves' constitution by looking at their complexion. (p. 273)

Lighter complexioned Blacks were therefore thought to be more intelligent and were consequently "better suited for intelligent tasks, such as craftsmanship, or lighter labor" (Kerr, 2005, p. 273). Lighter skinned blacks have been referred to as "mulatto" and research indicates that the lighter tones came about as a result of "sexual contact between white Europeans and black African slaves [that] was relatively common in the slavery period, and the result was a large number of mulatto offspring" (Gullickson, 2005, p. 158). The sexual relations that took place between black African slaves and white European masters were one of the perils women faced during slavery. Concerning the sexual intermingling of African ancestry slaves and Whites, Hunter (1998) states,

As one of the violent mechanisms of social control that Whites exercised against African Americans, this sexual violence, including rape, was part of the beginning of the skin color stratification process itself. This violent method of social control produced two important effects. The first and most obvious result was the creation of racially mixed children-by White fathers and Black mothers. (p. 518)

White slave-owners often preferred these mixed-race children and they were more than likely to be "manumitted" (Gullickson, 2005, p. 158). Although the children of the White slave owner and African slave were biracial, due to the "Rule of Hypodescent, which has been the prevailing definition of blackness in the U.S., stating that 'one drop of Black blood makes you Black'" (Hunter, 1998, p. 518), these offspring were legally termed as Black. Research demonstrates that although they were considered to be Black, many of these Mulatto children experienced certain privileges, "opportunities for manumission, less violent treatment by overseers, less stressful work tasks, and opportunities for skilled labor" (Hunter, 1998, p. 518).

In addition to the aforementioned privileges,

many of them were free and so enjoyed whatever advantages went with that superior status. They were considered by the white people to be superior in intelligence to the black Negroes and came to take great pride in the fact of their white blood” (Hill, 2000, p. 1437).

Kerr (2005) states, “Light-skinned women were often described in slavers’ records as gentler, kinder, more handsome, smarter and more delicate (in fact, the word ‘delicate’ was a term most often used to describe light-skin enslaved women)” (p. 273). Wallace Thurman, noted as being one of the first African American authors to address the unspoken concept of colorism within the Black community, acknowledged the preference of the mulatto slave which in essence produced a division of the Negro society as noted below:

The mulattoes as a rule were not ordered to work in the fields beneath the broiling sun at the urge of a Simon Legree lash. There were saved and trained for the more gentle jobs, saved and trained to be the ladies’ maids and butlers. Therefore let them continue this natural division of Negro society. Let them also guard against unwelcome and degenerating encroachments. Their motto must be “Whiter and whiter every generation,” until the grandchildren of the blue veins could easily go over into the white race and become assimilated so that problems of race would plague them no more. (Thurman, 1929, p. 7)

Thurman’s (1929) statement that the mulattoes had a motto to become whiter and whiter in an attempt to escape the perils of slavery and harsh cruelty demonstrated a survival of the fittest mindset. The Mulatto slave, although provided with certain “niceties”, undoubtedly knew they still held the title of *slave*. It was their quest to be viewed with a hint of societal acceptance in spite of the “one drop” rule. These lighter complexioned slaves desired to take advantage of the color of their skin hues and tones through their quest to achieve a societal placement where they and their future offspring would be free of the degradation and demise of slavery. They had a desire to produce a

line of offspring that would generationally become lighter and lighter in skin tone, hence resulting in their secret incorporation into white society.

In addition to being assigned positions within the master's house, the light skinned slave with

long hair and European features was a marker of wealth (such women went for extremely high prices on auction blocks), light skin was an indication of status for white communities long before light complexion became a mark of status in black communities. (Kerr, 2005, p. 273)

Not only were lighter skinned slaves manumitted over darker skinned slaves, they were also given authority over the darker slaves. As reported by Gullickson, "mulattoes were also privileged relative to free unmixed blacks off the plantation" (2005, p. 158). Not only were they allowed to free darker slaves, it has been recorded that during the Antebellum period, "lighter-skinned freeborn blacks in this region were taller than darker-skinned freeborn blacks, suggesting greater health resources in childhood for the lighter-skinned group" (Gullickson, 2005, p. 158).

Thus," by the end of the slavery period, mulattoes were highly overrepresented among skilled, free blacks in the United States and among skilled craftsmen on the plantation" (Gullickson, 2005, p. 158). Kerr reports a statement written in St. Dominique dated 1735 which states, "[the mulattoes] are the declared enemies of the blacks" (2005, p. 273). Slaves with darker skin were openly treated with less regard than lighter skinned slaves. Resentment, therefore, arose among the slave community and a portal for dissension not only gave a home to distrust and anger, but hatred as well. "It is no surprise that, in every nation that had contact with Africa slave trade, there is a version of color politics playing out in terms of economic, political, and social power" (Kerr, 2005, p. 273). As discussed, research states that, historically, Blacks with lighter skin tones

have been afforded a better education, better job opportunities, and even increased marital outcomes than Blacks of a darker skin tone (Gullickson, 2005).

Research has also shown that “skin tone is a predictor of educational attainment, occupational status, and personal as well as family income for Blacks” (Hunter, 1998, p. 521). In 1840, in Washington DC, it is recorded that “two mulatto-owned barbershops in West Washington and Capitol Hill had been criticized for refusing to have or cut the hair of darker-skinned black men, catering to only the fairest of black men and white men” (Kerr, 2005, p. 275). Kerr (2005) goes on to describe the disdain of darker skinned Blacks at this practice by their lighter skinned counterparts. Yet, their complaints were not taken to heart. “Because the owners of these establishments considered themselves to be of a ‘separate caste,’ the hostility of the black majority was not a significant deterrent, nor did it affect business” (p. 275).

Historically, it has been determined that skin-color bias (colorism) in the United States originated from a history of slavery and racial oppression (Hill, 2002). In research conducted concerning African Americans, it has been suggested that “skin tone played a significant role in shaping social and economic stratification patterns in the black community” (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 761). In addition, research continues to indicate that throughout the history of the African American people, an imposed disconnect has been placed upon them in the form of the unspoken, yet acknowledged, color line. The concept of the different shades of color which found its way into the Black African slave community, unfortunately, was one of the catalysts that caused dissension and distrust to rise between the Black slaves in America. With the mixing of the African race and the European races, a mulatto people were created among the slaves. This race of individuals

historically has experienced more benefits and privileges than those of their darker complexioned counterparts (Hill, 2002).

The Concept of Passing

In addition to the hostility that was mounting between Blacks over the advantages Mulatto individuals had over their darker skinned counter parts, a level of discontent was manifested among the African American people—the concept of *passing*. Although history has acknowledged that many individuals who had the *one drop* of Black blood but looked to be of European descent successfully passed for White, it does not provide us with an accurate account of individuals who engaged in the practice. The concept of passing is addressed in a publication by *Facing History and Ourselves* (2002) which provides a tongue-in-cheek account:

Hundreds of thousands of blacks passed for white, starting in the days of slavery and continuing into the present. Because of the secret nature of the transaction, no records were kept of the exact numbers who created new places for themselves in American society. Population experts tell us that large numbers of black people are "missing." I doubt that they were abducted by aliens. (p. 18)

Johnson (1912) addresses passing through the eyes of a mulatto male who, in his adult life, in order to find his perception of freedom and love, made the heartfelt decision to become an *ex-colored man*. Johnson provides an uncanny glimpse into this mulatto man's decision to *pass* as a result of his seeing a darker complexioned African American man lynched. Johnson writes:

I finally made up my mind that I would neither disclaim the black race nor claim the white race; but I would change my name, raise a mustache, and let the world take me for what it would; that it was not necessary for me to go about with a label of inferiority pasted across my forehead. All the while, I understood that it was not discouragement, or fear, or search for a larger field of actions and opportunity, which was driving me out of the Negro race. I knew that it was shame, unbearable shame. Shame at being identified with a people that could with

impunity be treated worse than an animal. For certainly the law would restrain and punish the malicious burning alive of animals. (p. 90)

Johnson (1912) opens the doors of this individual's life by informing the reader that the man successfully married the woman of his dreams, had two beautiful children, and achieved financial success. Yet, during a moment of self-reflection, after hearing individuals such as R. C. Ogden, Mark Twain and Booker T. Washington during a great meeting at Hampton Institute at Carnegie Hall (p. 99), the reader is able to see the internal anguish of this individual's decision. Through the eyes of this ex-colored man, Johnson writes,

I am an ordinarily successful white man who has made a little money. They are men who are making history and a race. I, too, might have taken part in a work so glorious. . . . I cannot repress the thought, that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage. (p. 100)

Although this gentleman successfully passed, he was forever locked in an internal room of self-denial and shame as a result of societal color preference.

As noted, hundreds and thousands of individuals passed to escape the harshness of society's cruelty as a result of colorism. Kerr (2005) states, "A growing source of discontent between blacks and whites was the 'passing of fair-skinned black children into white Washington schools'" (p. 276). It was also discovered that children of families identified socially as African Americans were also known to be passing for white. Kerr's study provides an explanation of why African American parents wanted their children to pass for white.

From the perspective of the fair-skinned, status-minded parents, attending all-white colleges and universities was quickly becoming a calling card of the black elite, and attending a white college preparatory school would secure entrance into Harvard, Yale, or Oberlin, the choice schools of the black elite. (Kerr, 2005, p. 276)

Post slavery, many freed slaves migrated towards the North and the West in an attempt to begin life anew. Although their elected geography was different, some of the old stereotypical mindsets and ways did not change location. Literature demonstrates that colorism continued to plague the African American community from coast to coast.

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) makes a very poignant statement in defining the problems of the 20th century as he saw it. “This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader, for the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line” (p. 3). In providing insight into the world of the African American male in the turn of the 20th century, Du Bois (1903) states:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in the flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellow, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (p. 9)

Although employment opportunities were provided to the African American race, many of the educational opportunities were specific in their preference that lighter to brown skinned males only need to apply. In a fictional literary work written by James Weldon Johnson (1912), he addressed the striving of the African American male’s desire for an opportunity to sufficiently provide for his family without the hurdle of colorism. He suggests,

so far as the racial differences go, the United States puts a greater premium on color, or better, lack of color, than upon anything else in the world. To paraphrase, “Have white skin, and all things else may be added unto you”(p. 72).

He further addresses the lack of employment opportunities available for darker complexioned African American men: “I have seen advertisements in newspapers for waiters, bell boys or elevator men, which read, ‘Light colored men wanted’” (Johnson, 1912, p. 72). With limitations placed on the darker complexioned African American male, it produced an effect on the individual’s self-worth. Johnson capitalizes this sentiment with the following quote from a darker complexioned African American male: “It’s no disgrace to be black but it’s often very inconvenient” (Johnson, 1912, p. 72). African American men were not the only ones plagued with colorism; African American women experienced the sting of colorism as well. Thurman (1929) writes, “wanted: light-colored girl to work as waitress in tearoom. . . . Wanted: Nurse girl, light-colored preferred (children are afraid of black folks)” (p. 75). Of course, we know that in this present day and age, it is illegal for such qualifications to be posted in a job announcement. With the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, legal recourse may now be used as an avenue to bring exposure to such racism. Yet, 50 years after the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, very appropriate questions to ponder are, “Does the colorism ideology continue to exist among the lighter and darker skinned African American community in present day? Has the cultural separation and acceptance that began in slavery continued to travel and prevail in present day?” It would appear that research and recent media suggest that it does.

Colorism in Research

Colorism was exposed and expressed through the fictional writings of Black Americans such as Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970), James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an ex-Colored Man* (1912), and Wallace Thurman’s, *The Blacker the*

Berry (1929). A concept that Black Americans expressed through the means of literary works has found a voice in empirical research. *Fears* (1998) discusses the concept of colorism in regard to research indicating that “colorism can influence several aspects of human life: mate-selection, life chances, perceived self-worth, and attractiveness, among others” (p. 30).

With colorism being a factor that may affect so many facets of the African American’s life, it is not surprising that colorism has found its way into empirical research. As stated by *Landor et al.* (2013), “decades of empirical research and popular press suggest that both factors (racism and colorism) represent forms of discrimination that continue to have significant effects on the lives of African American” (p. 817).

Robinson (2011) provides a view on the “creation” of colorism as follows:

creation of colorism is related to the combination of European colonialism, African slavery, and indigenous people. The combination of African, European, and Native mixing results in a variety of skin tones and unique hair textures among descendants of African slaves in the America (p. 362).

In as much as colorism is generally associated with Black Americans, the origin of colorism is unknown. Therefore, not all theorists are in agreement with *Robinson* that colorism is solely in relation to the combination of African and European intermingling. Theorist have demonstrated that colorism is not a North American concept as demonstrated by *Harris* (2008) who provides an indication that colorism is also a “global” concept due to:

ample evidence...that light skins are also preferred to dark ones in East and South Asia, regions where African slavery had little or no presence and where the valuation of light skin predates the slave trade. And in some regions, “whiteness” as an aesthetic ideal is not represented by a European body, but a Japanese or Chinese one. (p. 56)

Additionally, Robinson (2011) provides an explanation for the presence of colorism in regions beyond that of North America, introducing the concept that colorism is prevalent in regions where slavery was practiced:

Colorism is present everywhere African slavery and European colonialism have existed, including North and South America, and throughout the Caribbean. It is no surprise that in every nation that had contact with the African slave trade, there is a version of color politics playing out in terms of economic, political, and social power. (p. 362)

Although colorism has proven to be an unfortunate concept that is practiced in regions and countries that were populated by African slaves and European colonist, as well as regions and countries where slavery did not have a presence, for the purpose of this study colorism is being addressed as a result of African and European intermingling. Therefore, the concept of colorism, as stated by Harris (2008) is “inextricably intertwined with the history of slavery and indigenous conquest that gave birth to race thinking” (p. 56).

Charles (2011) provides an historical view of the “social power” that took place in the United States in regard to “blackness.” He states,

Historically, blackness has been devalued in the United States. The alteration of the black physicality is related to African-American subjugation during colonialism and slavery, the continued racial discrimination and segregation during Black Reconstruction, the Jim Crow and the Civil Rights eras (Hone, Hine & Harrold, 2006; Schaefer, 2009), and the manifestation of the contemporary discrimination faced by African-Americans driven by White racism and colorism (Dyson, 1997; Hunter 2007; Schaefer, 2009; West, 2001). (p. 118)

The “race thinking” that has produced a sense of separatism and human devaluation as addressed by Charles (2011) provides a historical concept of colorism. He also addresses the ideology and the prevalence of colorism in the United States as well as within the African American community.

Colorism is the ideology which privileges light skin people in the American society over dark skin people (Hunter, 2007). This complexion ideology is prevalent in racist post-colonial societies like the United States, where the White majority dominates African-Americans in particular and minority groups in general (Schaefer, 2009). The source of this complexion ideology is racism, which is the ideology of racial superiority whose adherents deny people they deem inferior their rights and opportunities because of their race (Hunter, 2007; Schaefer, 2007). Colorism is prevalent in the African-American community where there is Black-on-Black discrimination (Berry, 1988). (p. 121)

Further indication of colorism within the Black American community is provided by Breland (1998) who indicates that “color consciousnesses is the process by which African Americans, ‘differentially attend and respond to shades of Black skin’” (p. 294). “Therefore, the diversity of shades of black makes a social difference in the African-American community” (Charles, 2011, p. 121).

Lindberg-Seyersted (1992) additionally addresses the concept of skin tone in the African American community in the statement that, “throughout the history of African-Americans skin color has naturally been the sign that above all has indicated racial identity and the ambiguities arising out of its doubleness” (p. 51). As reported by Breland (1998),

...Keith and Herring stated that “darker skinned Blacks still face a greater degree of social and economic barriers, with darker skinned Blacks earning sometimes up to 50 percent less than lighter Blacks with similar educational backgrounds and occupational status” (“Why Skin Color,” 1992). In a contrary fashion, lighter skinned African Americans also face this stratification because they are often viewed as not being “Black enough” (i.e., not having strong ties to their ethnic identity) by their darker skinned peers. (p. 294)

Charles (2011) provides more recent findings in relation to the concept of social and economic status of lighter skinned and darker skinned African Americans. Charles (2011) reports the following in relation to the findings:

One study of African-American females finds that the majority believe that African-American men find light skin women most attractive (Bond & Cash,

1992). Light skin African-American women are more likely to marry high status partners, earn a higher income and attain higher levels of education than dark skin African-American women. These differences suggest that colorism stratifies the lives of African-American women (Hunter, 1998) and gives the light skinned women social capital (Hunter, 2002). (pp. 121-122)

Nance (2005) concurs with these findings as follows:

Early studies demonstrated, for example, that Blacks with lighter skin obtained higher socioeconomic status, that more light-skinned than dark-skinned black held high status managerial jobs, and that dark-skinned Blacks earned seventy cents for every dollar earned by a light-skinned Black. Interestingly, these data have remained stable over time. (p. 443)

Harris (2008) states that “light skin and European features are the gold standard for beauty and desirability, and individual and collective action has proceeded accordingly” (p. 56). Therefore, “skin bleaching, which is prevalent in the African-American community, has a long history in the United States” (Charles, 2011, p. 118).

Dadzie & Petit (2009) states, “skin bleaching is the practice by which depigmenting agents are used typically by people with skin phototypes IV to VI on a cosmetic basis, primarily to lighten normally dark skin” (p. 741). Dadzie & Petit further state that “a review of the scientific literature demonstrates that individuals from diverse communities around the world, including Africa, North America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East practice skin bleaching” (p. 742).

Additionally, Nance (2005) addresses the concept of intraracial colorism within the Black American culture demonstrating the correlation of colorism in regard to the dominate culture’s views being imposed upon and adopted by other cultures:

Intraracial colorism is thought to derive from the internalization of the views of the dominant culture. While much of this research has focused on the Black community, a significant body of work that demonstrates the “dark is bad concept” has been applied across different racial groups”. (p. 443)

The concept of “dark is bad” is a concept that has been adopted by Black Americans that may not only be prevalent in childhood, but in colleges and universities where, according to Watt (2006), “racial identity attitude and psychosocial development reports that greater internalization of positive racial identity attitudes is associated with greater psychological well-being” (p. 172).

The Role of the Media and Present Day Colorism

Gullickson (2005) provides findings of research that demonstrates “lighter skin tone preferences among black children, adolescents and college students” (p. 158). Additionally, Gullickson (2005) reports “that black interviewer evaluations of black respondent’s attractiveness were highly correlated with lighter skin tone for women and moderately for men” (Gullickson, 2005, p. 158). “Skin color, the shade of skin with which an individual has been genetically endowed, has proved to be one of the most sensitive facets of life faced by many African Americans” (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2006, p. 79). Because of the racial ideologies that African Americans came to adopt for themselves and about themselves, lighter skin became an aspiration among African American women.

For African Americans, the application of light skin as a point of reference for attractiveness is an obvious fact. Those who have light skin are believed to be most physically appealing to the eye . . . the effects of radicalized notion of black beauty are most obvious in public symbolic situations, such as Black beauty pageants, or the selection of a homecoming or campus queen at historically Black universities. Even on a Black college campus, the ideals of beauty remain focused on White traits such as light skin and long, naturally straight hair. (Hunter, 1998, p. 520)

As discussed earlier, European Americans as well as other African Americans have imposed “ostracism, neglect, assault and slander on other African Americans based on the color of their skin tone” (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2006, p. 79). Although research

has demonstrated that colorism continues to be a unrelenting thorn in the sides of African Americans, admittedly “little research has been completed on skin color and its affect on African American young adults” (Nassar-McMillan et al., 2006, p. 80). Golden (2004) sums up the ugliness of colorism as it relates to the African American community this way: “The color complex is a form of genocide, because it positions Blacks versus Blacks, the emotional toll it imposes are exhausting and demoralizing” (p. 47).

On March 4th 2005, John Stossel of ABC News *20/20* produced a broadcast segment entitled, “Skin Deep Discrimination.” Colorism, as termed by Stossel, is defined as being “the open secret in the Black community.” In the interview with students of the University of Maryland, of various skin tones, both male and female, Stossel addressed the concept of colorism within the African American community. During the interview, individuals recalled their memories of being provided “nicknames” which they were referred to as babies. One young lady of darker complexion stated that her mother informed her that she was referred to as “chocolate baby.” A young man, of darker complexion, stated how he, in his youth, considered it to be an insult to be referred to as “African” (because of his darker complexioned skin). In contrast, a young woman, who was considered to be of lighter complexion, stated that she herself had experienced some “privileges” in being light skinned and she jokily laughed as she stated, “and I just thought I was pretty.”

In addressing the college population, Stossel wanted to see if the concept of colorism was a part of the now younger generation of African American males. He interviewed young African American males who were of middle school to high school age. These young men discussed African American females who were featured in music

videos. The following statement demonstrated that color preference has continued to thread its way through the African American community:

They are all light skinned and they all look good. . . . There's a lot of dark-skinned girls that are pretty, with long hair, bad, but they're not in the videos though, "it's just the light-skinned ones that's in the videos." (ABC News 20/20, 2004)

Little did the young men know they had paraphrased statements of color preference that have hovered for centuries over the African American race as they echoed sentiments of African American men who were taught that "lighter is better." Thinner lips, slender noses, straight hair, and lighter skin. Marita Golden (2004) addressed these specified concepts in relation to colorism and the media. In meeting with an African American producer, Golden addresses the concept of colorism in reaction to film and television. Golden provides the reader with a glimpse of the media and its relationship with the African American:

Both Black and White directors cast according to European concepts of beauty. You will see dark-skinned women cast according to European concepts and beauty. . . . You will see dark-skinned women cast on television when it's an agenda item, when the show wants to be realistic. Like a cop show . . . or a show that deals with the inner city. But if it's a show where the beauty of the Black female character is important, where she has to be eye candy, you are more likely to see light and bright than dark and lovely. (Golden, 2004, p. 87)

Research demonstrates the color preference which has occurred in featured films in the United States in relation to African American women in Hollywood both past and present:

even when looking at Black women in films, the first African American woman to be nominated for the Oscar for the Best Actress award was Dorothy Dandridge, in 1954, and the first African American woman to win the award for best Actress was Halle Berry, in 2001; both women have light complexions and Eurocentric features. (Hall, 2008, p. 52)

Without question, African American males have historically been fed the mindset that “lighter is better” as demonstrated throughout the discussions of slavery. Graham (1999), states,

I recall summertime visits from my maternal great-grandmother, a well-educated, light-complexioned, straight-haired black southern woman who discouraged me and my brother from associating with darker-skinned children or from standing or playing for long periods in the July sunlight, which threatened to blacken our already too-dark skin. ‘You boys stay out of that terrible sun,’ Great grandmother Porter would say in a kindly, overprotective tone. ‘God knows you’re dark enough already.’ (pp. 1-2)

African American authoress, Marita Golden, also addressed the point of colorism introduced to her through the words of her mother. As a young girl, Golden reports she was provided with the following directive by her mother,

Come on in the house—it’s too hot to be playing out here. I’ve told you don’t play in the sun. You’re going to have to get a light skinned husband for the sake of your children as it is. (2004, p. 5)

Golden (2004) further reports how she perceived herself through the lens of her “olive-skinned white boy with raven dark hair” . . . not as “a girl, not his classmate, but a black and ugly and dirty thing” (p. 5). Research indicates that skin color has more bearing on the lives of African American women than of African American men as stated by Hill (2002) “compared to Black males, Black females have been more profoundly affected by the prejudicial fallout surrounding issues of skin color, facial features, and hair” (p. 78). Little did Golden’s mother realize that her preference to skin tone, as it related to her daughter, would have an effect on her daughter’s decision to steer away from historically Black colleges and universities, and from historically black sororities because she did not want to have “to worry about whether or not ‘she’ was light enough to be the homecoming queen or join the AKAs or date the head of student government” (Golden,

2004, p. 47). Thurman (1929) provides a look through the lens of a very dark complexioned young girl named Emma Lou, who like Golden had been introduced to the concept of colorism from her mother and grandmother:

She knew she hadn't been color-conscious during her early childhood days; that is, until she had had it called to her attention by her mother or some of her mother's friends, who had all seemed to take delight in marveling, 'What an extraordinarily black child! or 'Such beautiful hair on a black baby.' Her mother had even hidden her away on occasions when she was to have company. (p. 121)

In running away from the stigma of colorism in her hometown, Emma Lou found herself in a biracial college in California, where she unfortunately experienced intraracial discord due to being dark-complexioned. The following is a conversation between Emma Lou and her friend concerning their not being invited to join an all-Black sorority:

She didn't seem to be invited to the parties and dances, nor was she a member of the Greek letter sorority which the colored girls had organized. Emma Lou asked her why. "Have they pledged you" was Grace Giles' answer. "Why no." "And they won't either." "Why?" Emma Lou asked surprised. "Because you are not a high brown or half-white." Emma Lou had thought this, too, but she had been loath to believe it. (Thurman, 1929, p. 28)

Hunter states,

Racial ideologies were central to the justification of slavery in the U.S. . . . Black people and blackness were defined as barbaric, savage, heathen, and ugly. Through this racist ideology, "African-ness" came to be known as evil and "white-ness" came to be known as virtuous. (Hunter, 1998, p. 519)

Hunter (1998) openly discusses the "realness" of the concept of beauty between the races through the eyes of perceived Americans.

Now instead of blackness and whiteness as abstract concepts having representations, actual physical traits associated with each racial group began to take on these ideological meanings. Dark brown skin, kinky hair, and wide noses themselves started to represent barbarism and ugliness. Similarly, straight blond hair and white skin as physical traits began to represent civility and beauty. (p. 518)

The “ugliness” labels that had been wrongly and unfairly imposed upon a beautiful race of people had found a place in the minds of the people themselves as noted by Gullickson (2005), “The general consensus seems to be that there exists a universal distaste within the black population for particularly ‘black’ phenotypes (e.g., dark skin, kinky hair, etc.), due to ubiquitous and hegemonic white ideals of beauty” (p. 158).

Through Emma Lou’s eyes, Thurman (1929) demonstrated how one can develop such a sense of low self-esteem that it literally paralyzes that individual’s future due to the negative connotation that he or she may have about themselves due to colorism. Through Emma Lou’s perspective, Thurman demonstrated how one’s future can be literally paralyzed due to a sense of low self-esteem as a result of the negative connotation of colorism. Sadly, Emma Lou, who spent her young life trying to develop a level of comfort about herself, finds a negative place of inner peace as she recites the words to an old song, which she once heard in a play:

A yellow gal rides in a limousine,
A brown-skin rides a Ford
A black gal rides an old jackass
But she gets there, yes, my Lord. (Thurman, 1929, p. 113)

As she recalls the song and other negative statements that she has heard throughout her youth and adult life, the character, Emma Lou, comes to a self-conclusion and proclamation based on colorism: “There was no place for her in the world. She was too black, black is a portent of evil, black is a sign of bad luck” (Thurman, 1929, p. 141).

Thurman displays how Emma Lou had become a victim of low self-worth as a result of colorism that occurred in the African American community, her community. Although fictional in character, this sentiment is real in nature in the African American culture. Hall (2008) states, “more than any other minority group in the United States,

Blacks discriminate against one another” (p. 57). Russell et al. (1992) records the following statement made of a perception of dark-skinned African American women: “They’re always getting their hair processed or wearing hair weaves or colored contact lenses. . . . Black people don’t seem to like each other very much” (p. 69). Research shows that within the African American race,

medium-skinned Black women tended to idealize skin tones lighter than their own, perhaps because for them, being just a little lighter was still within their coloring, a full 70 percent of the Black women in their study believed that Black men preferred women whose skin was very light. (Russell et al., 1992, p. 69)

Hall (2008) suggests that:

African Americans’ with more Afro centric features (e.g., full lips, wide nose, kinky hair, darker skin) are usually more associated with negative and/or stereotypical evaluation than African Americans with more Eurocentric features (e.g., thinner lips, slender noses, straight hair, lighter skin. (Hall, 2008, p. 51)

Between the time periods of 1989 to 1994, Hall (2008) indicates that:

African Americans in advertisement had lighter skin and more Eurocentric features in ads compared to editorial photographs. Furthermore, African American women had lighter skin than African American men. Even in African American centered magazines such as Ebony, images of African American women continued to glorify and value light skin and White features over more Afrocentric features. (p. 52)

Hill (2002) indicates that “despite the color egalitarianism of the Civil Rights era and the pro-black rhetoric of the Black Power movement, the recent studies find that lighter Americans still maintain an advantaged place in American society compared with their darker counterparts” (p. 1438). A very through summation of the economic advantages that have been experienced by African American lighter complexioned female states:

Thus, because competency is linked with beauty and beauty is linked with lighter skin, it is common for lighter-skinned Black women to have higher salaries than Black women with darker skin who have very similar resumes. . . . It was even

found in a 2001 study that light-skinned Black women, who are deemed "less ethnic", were more likely to be satisfied with their pay and opportunities for advancement than darker-skinned ('more ethnic') Black females . . . therefore, dark-skinned Black woman (are described) as being in a "triple jeopardy situation" due to her race, gender, and skin tone, all of which have great potential of having negative and damaging effects on her self-esteem and feelings of capability. (Hall, 2008, p. 57)

Regarding African American men in the media, the concept of colorism does not appear as prominent in society's perception in the media as much as it is related to societal perception of violence and crime. John Stossel's 2005 piece on colorism includes the interview with a lighter complexioned African American male actor who stated that he would easily be cast in roles that required a "business executive . . . more successful or more articulate" (ABC News 20/20, 2005). Stossel reports that as a report of the "Black Power Movement" Hollywood has given leeway to darker complexioned African American males such as Richard Roundtree . . . and Denzel Washington being placed in the role of "the hero" (ABC News 20/20, 2005). Yet, in contrast, the darker complexioned African American male is generally portrayed as a "thug" in the media. Hall (2008) suggests that "Black men being portrayed as thugs, hoodlums, gangsters, and criminals have replaced these more overtly historic, racist images" (p. 53). Hall (2008) provides the example that in the case of O.J Simpson:

Time magazine displayed Simpson's "infamous mug-shot picture . . . darkened making Simpson appear more sinister, menacing, and violent. . . . The darkening of Simpson's face equated dark skin to criminality—essentially reflecting back to the image of the Black Buck and Brute . . . the darker-skinned males can be seen in several areas beyond criminality, such as socioeconomic status of African American males . . . lighter skinned African American males had a higher socioeconomic status than men with darker skin. Furthermore, researchers have found that lighter-skinned African Americans tended to have more schooling, more prestigious jobs, and earn more than African Americans with darker skin tones. These discrepancies in attainment amongst African Americans may be a reflection of the privileges and advantages lighter-skin tone Blacks receive over darker-skin tone Blacks. (Hall, 2008, p. 53)

Colorism. Color presence. Color complex. However one wishes to term it; it equates to one thing, separation and discord. Separation and discord between races, separation and discord amongst the race. Separation and discord that continues to rear its ugly head from the past generation of slavery to the present generation of today. Unfortunately, this ugly concept, colorism, whether consciously or subconsciously, continues to be infectious to yet another generation of African Americans. Little research has been conducted as to whether or not there has been generational transference from the Black community onto our youth of today. It would appear that it has, with the current television, movie, and music personalities undergoing cosmetic alterations for more European features.

Golden (2004) concluded her concept of colorism with a letter she wrote to a young lady in her family. With the written permission of the author (Appendix D), Marita Golden's letter is quoted in its entirety as follows:

Look in the mirror. Really look at your skin. It is deep dark. It is almost black. Do you know how many wondrous, amazing, beautiful things in the world are the color of you? The night sky. Think of its depth. Its breadth. How mysterious and seductive it is. How when you are sitting on the front stoop on a summer night, staring into its eternity, you feel sheltered, you feel safe. Black is a regal color. If no one has ever told you this before, I am telling you now: Black is the color of queens. It is the color of kings.

I want you to look at yourself. See the beauty of your face, really see it, until you clear your mind. Not with your eyes, anyway. You will see it with your longings and your fears. You will see your face through the prism of I wish I was, why I can't be, if only I was, maybe one day. . . . And sweeping out the clutter, the clatter, the noise, is a thing that you can do. You are not too young. You are not too weak. You can look at yourself and see who you are and love what you see.

Get rid of the hair fixation. Pack it up and seal the box and throw it away. You have the kind of hair that people in your mother's and father's families have had for generation. Strong. Tight. Coiled. It is the kind of hair that you are supposed to have. Hair that's in your genes. In your DNA .

And, my dear, you have short hair. Short hair, that most terrible of curses for a Black woman. I remember the press-and-curl rituals of my youth. I remember praying for long hair. For straight hair. But you are more than your hair. So much more.

You straighten your hair, and sometimes you lengthen it with extensions that give you shoulder-length braids. Those are options. But please believe me. You do not have to have braids down to your hips to be a pretty girl. I see how different you are, how you walk with so much energy and confidence when your hair is braided, when you have extensions in your hair. I see how you are slumped, how you hardly want to look people in the face, when you don't have the braids in, when your hair, your short hair, is pressed and combed back from your face. I can feel how you feel naked, exposed, and ashamed.

And of course family and friends reinforce your doubts. I was there the day Nanna brutally scolded you because your hair was not braided. It was neat but it was not braided, and Nanna scolded you as though your short hair, gleaming with a shimmering layer of Ultra Sheen, were a crime. As though you sat before her unclothed, stark and awful. Writing this, I recall our conversation about the girl in your class who wore a natural hairstyle to school, who wore her hair cut close like mine and how your classmates teased her and said she looked like a monkey. And I remember your telling me that you thought the girl looked cute but you did not have the courage to tell her that or to say it to the girls teasing her. Your classmates are afraid. Terrified, actually, of anything that reminds them of who they are. And they are afraid because their parents and so many of the people in their lives are afraid too. I never want you to be afraid of what you are. Or what you look like. There will be enough other terrors awaiting you, terrors that are justified, terrors that you can't control.

I am asking a lot of you. Like everyone in the family, I want you to make good grades, go to college, love your neighbor, contribute to the community, and I want you to love yourself. But loving your Black self is a task that you will have to achieve sometimes alone. On your own, blotting out the contradictory messages of kin, questioning the assertions of friends. I am asking a lot of you. That's what I am supposed to do. And I ask if knowing that you can rise to the heights I affirm for you. Even if you cannot do it now, it is my job, my mission, to whisper the words in your ear. Even if you don't 'hear' and understand the words for several years, you will never answer their call unless they summon you.

The day I stood in front of the mirror and saw and loved my face and my hair for the first time in my life I was alone—completely, utterly alone. We are always alone when we find the truth. The fact that we are alone makes the taste of affirmation no less sweet.

I guess I am worrying about the hair issue because for so many Black girls getting braids and cornrows has less to do with having an African-inspired style than with 'getting some hair.' I guess I worry because I know that our African sister

ancestors wove their hair and dyed it, and created amazing styles within the context of an African standard of beauty. But we have no African American standard of beauty, only a White-influenced standard. I care less about what you do with your hair than what you think of yourself. And I worry when I see four- and five-year old girls insisting on extensions because already at that tender age they know, because we have told them, that unless they have thick, long hair they are not beloved.

Maybe one day I will take you to the Smithsonian Museum of African Art. We'll stroll through the museum and look at the variety of images of Africa, of African women and men created by ancient, anonymous, and contemporary famous artisans. I have a wonderful photography book with pictures of Black women from different parts of the world. We can sit and look at the pictures. Talk about them. No, I won't make it a test (smile), and I promise I won't judge your responses. I want you to know that there is a universe of Black women, past and present, that you are related to, and many of them reflect your specific black beauty.

And you will have to find your voice. You will have to respond if you are teased because you are dark. Because your hair is short. You have to challenge ignorant, self-hating remarks. You have to assert your value and your pride. Even if you don't always feel valuable and your pride. Even if you don't always feel valuable and proud, and there will be days like that, assert it anyway. That assertions, honored regularly, will turn the words into reality.

You have to forgive people with colorist attitudes. You can't change everyone. And what's most important is how you see yourself. That you see your own beauty and worth. We have to stop believing in the color complex and passing it from generation to generation. You have to help us make the world a safe and loving place for girls who look like you. And women who look like me.

I write you this letter to begin a conversation, not to lay down the law. I am your elder, but I expect you to show me the way. When I was four years older than you and believed anything was possible, I believed that black is beautiful. I still do. (pp. 190-195)

Golden (2004) concludes her letter with reminisces of her younger self. She recalls a previous period in her life when she, herself, had to take a personal stance against colorism and learn to love herself as she was with the colored skin that she had been born into. She makes a personal proclamation that as a young African American woman in the 1960s and 1970s she came to embrace the concept and belief that Black was

beautiful, a concept that she openly continues to embrace present day (Golden, 2004, p. 195). I concurred with Golden's sentiments and embraced her realization of the concept of colorism in the African American race as passed down through the cords of societal and cultural discrimination. Having had the experience of colorism in previous years, I was able to embrace the sentiments of Golden's letter in relation to skin tone preference as presented through both interracial and intraracial discrimination. Golden, through her letter, addresses the ugliness of colorism and how it can produce an adverse reaction to the younger generation. A younger generation that is not only far removed from the period of slavery, but one that also may not have an awareness of the Black Power and Black Pride era of the late 1960s and 1970s that served as a venue for Black Studies in America's colleges and universities.

Racial Identity in Relation to Black Studies

Akoma and Johnson (2010) stated that Black Studies "emerged from the expressed desires and frustrations of Black college students in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s in conjunction with the demands of larger communities" (p. 283). As noted in American history, the 1960s was a period of change in the lives of Blacks in America. With the emergence of such organizations and events as the Freedom Riders, the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power movement and growth of the Black Panther Party, to include the assassinations of both Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Blacks in America were seeking to be accepted and heard. As noted by Taylor (2010), the 1960s were turbulent times and it was thus "hard to ignore the political demonstrations led by activists against institutional racism and policy brutality" (p. 256). Taylor (2010) also reports that it was due to this unsettlement in the United States, that

over 3,000 students at the University of California-Berkley protested for 32 hours in support for a fellow Berkley graduate student, John Weinberg, a Black American, who in 1964 was “sitting at a Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) table near the intersection refused to show his identification to campus police and was arrested” (p. 256). As a result of that incident, students concerned with free speech and racial equality formed organizations to bring their concerns to the forefront. Taylor (2010) notes that one group in particular, the Afro-American Student Union (AASU) at Berkley in 1968, “gave substance to the concept of Black Studies by proposing an academic department” (p. 257).

We demand a program of ‘BLACK STUDIES,’ a program that will be of and for black people. We demand to be educated realistically and that no form of education which attempts to lie to us, or otherwise mis-educate us will be accepted. (Taylor, 2010, p. 257)

Taylor (2010) further records the stated rationale for the development of Black Studies as noted by the ASSU,

The young black people of America are inheritors of what is undoubtedly one of the most challenging, gravest, and threatening set of social circumstances that has ever fallen upon a generation of young people anywhere in history. We have been born into a hostile and alien society which loathes us on condition of our skin color. . . . Sentenced to inanity, subservience, and death, from our beginning, many of us came to regard our beautiful pigmentation as a plague. (p. 257)

In the 1960s, these outspoken and concerned *young black people* were not only located at the University of California-Berkley. Carroll (2009) records students at such academic institutions to include “San Francisco State College, Howard University, University of Louisville, Hunter College and many other academic institutions within the United States” (p. 1) also joined the fight for demands of racial equality for Blacks in America. It appeared that the young people in the 1960s were seeking the history of

Blacks in America to be told to have a voice. The thirst for the development of Black Studies may have contributed to such statements made in 1934 by historian Arnold Toynbee, who said, “of all races of human beings, only the black race ‘had made no productive contributions to civilization’” (King, Crowley, & Brown, 2010, p. 212). In addition, King et al. (2010), also record U.B. Phillips’ argument “that the institution of slavery filled a necessary role by ‘civilizing’ African Americans” (p. 212). With such teaching it was no wonder African American individuals were looked upon in an inaccurate, demeaning, and demoralizing manner. The young people of the 1960s were looking for correction and appreciation of their history. They were looking for acknowledgment of who they were as Blacks in America.

Sylvia Nyana (2010) cites Walter’s (2002) summation of Black Studies as follows:

The content of African American Studies explains and responds to much in our history and our present-day struggles to realize our democratic aspirations. While examining the cultural, social, economic, and political realities of the African American people, it simultaneously analyzes the black/white paradigm, the paradigm in which in the United States the racialization of other groups, domestic and international, is based. Thus, it provides a necessary touchstone in scholarship and pedagogy for similar study of all ethnic groups—most of whom have been racialized in opposition to whiteness at some point. (p. 32)

The statements made by both Arnold Toynbee and U. B. Phillips, did not provide a true representation of cultural, social, economic, and political realities of the African American people. On the contrary, statements such as theirs gave life to the hatred and ignorance that had become a part of America’s fiber of racial divide. Teachings of such statements and many others were undoubtedly being challenged by the young people of the 1960s on America’s colleges and universities. The birth of Black studies had taken root in the field of higher education. Although on the forefront in the 1960s, Black

studies has been noted as finding its beginnings before the origins of slavery. Nyana (2010) tells us, “the field of study does not begin with the enslavement in America, but with their heritage and ancestral roots in Africa . . . and their relationship with white America as well as with other racial-ethnic groups” (p. 32). Gordon (2010) records in relation to Black history, “what was being taught throughout most of the educational system from prekindergarten through the Ph.D. was a kind of false consciousness” (p. 135). In relation to the aforementioned statement, the achievements and contributions of African Americans were minimized in United States history in spite of Mather’s (1915/2010) publication of *Who’s Who of the Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent*, which demonstrated the success of African Americans of the 19th and 20th century. Therefore, individuals seeking a more accurate account of the history and contributions of Blacks in America sought and fought for the introduction of Black Studies in America’s colleges and universities to acknowledge and teach the struggles and success of the Black in America and to also to dispel the falsehoods and misconceptions that had been generationally passed down and woven into and through the fiber of America. Therefore, it was the conceptual aim of Black Studies “to challenge and dislodge these so that reality and truth might emerge” (Gordon, 2010, p. 135).

Black Studies taught in higher educational settings during the 1960s and 1970s provided an avenue for Blacks in America not only to gain knowledge of the reality that cultural “truth might emerge,” but also as a mode of gaining a sense of ethnic and cultural identity. With African Americans of the 1960s seeking truth, Black Studies opened the door to African Americans developing a strong sense of racial identity. One of the first

models in relation to racial identity is that of the Nigrescence model developed by William Cross in 1971. Cross (1991) indicates that it was “during the Black Power phase that the concept *Black identity* had its origin” (p. 41). The Nigrescence theory, as noted by Sneed, Schwartz, and Cross (2006),

originally tracked the identity development stages that Black American adults traverse in movement away from an identity that places low or even negative salience on Black identity toward the achievement of an identity that places positive emphasis on race and Black culture. (p. 70).

The Nigrescence model is noted as being “the first to articulate the process of how a Black individual developed a positive Black identity in a society in which negative messages about being Black were prevalent” (Cokely & Helms, 2007, p. 144). Cross is noted as being the first to present “the progression of African Americans from a non-African American identity to an African-American identity” (Hargrow, 2001, p. 223). Cross’ model, according to Hargrow (2001), was further developed by Janet Helms who addressed the “importance of significant emotional events that are typically related to deep-seated racial biases and stereotypes as well as tensions and emotions between Blacks and Whites” (p. 223).

According to Hill and Thomas (2000), “social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (p. 194). Therefore social constructionism looks at the external societal influences on the individual’s internal perception, and thus, the individual’s reality (Hill & Thomas, 2000) serving as a venue for the individual through narrative to provide an insight into the concept of colorism in relation to societal externally placed values which have been individually internalized and thus, accepted.

Summary

A strong and thorough review of literature was presented in Chapter II for the purpose of providing a foundation of the concept of colorism and its role in the lives of African Americans from slavery to the present day. Chapter II addressed and focused on the birth of colorism in the United States which began in slavery, as well as the birth of the mulatto individual which perpetuated the concept of colorism among the African American community. Additionally, the review of literature addressed the concept of colorism in relation to the lighter toned African American and the physical and economical benefits that individuals experienced as a result of *passing* but also described the emotional aspect that African Americans, who made the decision to pass may have experienced as a result of denying an intricate ancestral part making up their cultural completeness.

Chapter II also provided a review of literature that addressed the concept of colorism that has been explored in empirical research as well as the role of the media and its influence in promoting the concept of colorism to a younger generation of African Americans. Additionally, the chapter also provided a review of literature to address the racial identity of the African American in relation to the subject of Black Studies and the Black Pride and Black Power movements that served as a venue for such topics to be taught in America's colleges and universities.

Chapter III: Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perception of colorism among 12 African American individuals of the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation. Using narrative interviews, this study captured the stories of the participants through the exploration of the “brown paper bag” concept as a metaphor. The aim of this study was to discuss the consciousness of colorism in the 21st century. “The focus of a qualitative study unfolds naturally in that it has no predetermined course established or manipulated by the researcher” (Schram, 2006, p. 8). Qualitative research has been defined as “a tool that allows researchers to investigate the depth, patterns, and understanding of an issue” (McLean, Jensen, & Hurd, 2007, p. 304).

Qualitative research, broadly defined, means “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17) and instead, the kind of research that produces findings arrived from real-world settings where the “phenomenon of interest unfold naturally” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600)

Narrative inquiry was chosen as the methodology in order to relay the life stories of the participants as expressed through the lens by which they individually viewed society. The participants openly shared a part of their lives in relation to their life experiences, and situations concerning colorism, interracial discrimination, as well as intraracial discrimination and discord. The life stories expressed by the participants who disclosed individual intraracial discrimination were experienced by each individual separately throughout their life span. In providing a point of reference to the participants, I discussed the concept of colorism utilizing the “brown paper bag” concept in order to

gauge whether each individual had a knowledge base of the intraracial discord that had historically taken place within the African American male and female populations.

Merriam and Associates (2002) provided several key distinctive characteristics that “cut across the various interpretive qualitative research designs” (p. 4). The characteristics are as noted:

1. Researchers have to strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences; that is, how do people make sense of their experiences?
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

Narrative inquiry is a methodology that “assumes that people construct their realities through narrating their stories” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 117).

The following is a comprehensive definition of the narrative methodology:

“Narrative research designs are qualitative procedures in which researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individual lives, and write narratives about their experiences” (Creswell, 2005, p. 53).

Participants

The life experiences of 12 African American individuals of the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation were explored in this research. The individuals were asked to share their experiences and tell their stories. The participants had completed at least their high school educational years, were born in the United States of America, and were of African American descent.

In order to participate in the study, the 12 participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- African American individuals within the age range of 40 to 60 years of age demonstrating two generations,
- have knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and
- lived in at least one state other than their birth state.

The participants were selected through the process of purposeful sampling. As noted by Creswell (2005), “in purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 204). With this definition in mind, purposeful sampling was used in the selecting of African American individuals of the pre-Civil Rights Movement as well as the post-Civil Rights Movement who had experienced the concept of colorism through interracial and/or intraracial discrimination. Homogeneous sampling, which as noted by Creswell (2005) is where “the researcher purposefully samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics” (p. 206), was used in the selection of the participants. Within the purposeful sampling group of African Americans, selected individuals of the African American race of various skin tones had African and/or European facial characteristics, as well as different textures of hair. Participants were selected through social associations. The concept of snowball sampling was also used in which petitioned participants in the study were asked to recommend individuals known to them who might fit the criteria of the study (Creswell, 2005, p. 206). In order to inquire if potential participants had experienced interracial and/or intraracial discrimination in regard to colorism, each individual was provided with a survey questionnaire to assess the potential participants’ interaction and/or experiences with interracial and intraracial discrimination. As a result of the survey questionnaire, the

participants met the aforementioned criteria. The participants were asked to bring family photos as a measure of promoting an atmosphere of generational and personal connectedness; additionally the photographs served as a venue promoting each individual to openly express their life experiences, thoughts, and views concerning interracial and intraracial discrimination in relation to colorism and discord, and its effect on them as well as the effect it had on family members. By openly discussing the experience of societal interracial, as well as intraracial, discrimination within the African American race, the participants were engaged in openly expressing their life stories and experiences with their biological children and grandchildren as well as with co-workers, peers, spouses, and other individuals. This contributed to the preserving of African American history and cultural experiences through oral and historical communication.

The participants in the study were of various educational and professional backgrounds. Each participant of the study expressed a measure of personal fulfillment or professional success in their lives. The participants measured their level of fulfillment and/or success in relation to their accomplishment of academic and/or professional goals, achieving entrepreneur endeavors, successfully transitioning into new found careers, and having strong healthy and positive relationships within their family unit. Eleven of the participants were between the ages of 40 to 60 years. One participant was outside of the stated age demographic. This participant was over the age of 60 and was granted an allowance to participate in the study because of the life experience presented. Upon hearing this participant's story and experiencing the openness and sincerity of her reflections, I was personally inspired by the "graceful tenacity" that the participant displayed in her reflections of her life experiences. Therefore, I felt it imperative for this

participant's reflections to be shared as an example of what could be accomplished "in spite of" societal perception and expectations. Participants were asked to select a pseudonym which would be utilized as their identifier for the purpose of the study. In addition, just prior to the discussion portion of the interview, the participants were asked to complete Janet Helms' (BRIAS) Social Attitude Inventory.

Research Instrument

Janet Helms' Black Racial Identity Assessment Scale (BRIAS) Social Attitude Inventory was utilized to assess the participant's racial and ethnic attitude and placed in Helms's (1990) four stages of development of (a) Pre-encounter, (b) Encounter, (c) Immersion/Emersion, and (d) Internalization. The BRIAS, a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, consists of 60 statements designed to measure an individual's racial and political attitudes. The BRIAS was provided to each participant prior to the verbal interview. Each participant completed the BRIAS questionnaire within an approximate time of 15 minutes. The researcher served as an instrument in collecting data for this qualitative study. Interview questions were presented to each participant upon completion of the BRIAS. Each interview began with the question, "What does it mean to you, as an African American, to be Black in 21st century America?" Follow up questions were asked for clarification of the participant responses. The narrative portion of the interviews lasted approximately 60 to 70 minutes and was audio taped to assure accuracy in the transcribing process. The narrative interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure that the voices of the participants in regard to their life stories were presented accurately.

Protection of Human Subjects

To be in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of the Incarnate Word, the approval to conduct research in relation to the study prior to contacting the potential human participants was done. The potential participants were provided with a letter (Appendix B) offering an in-depth explanation of the purpose and aim of the study, providing the participants with an opportunity to ask questions, and ensuring a complete understanding of the study and their role as participants.

Authorization from each participant to tape the interview was requested to ensure accuracy. The interviews were transcribed and the recorded interviews are locked in a secure location and will be destroyed after a reasonable period of time, not to exceed five years.

Other pertinent information included in the prospective participant's letter was information about me as the researcher, contact information for the advisor of the study, as well as the statement acknowledging the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants in relation to the study. The participants were asked to provide their consent (Appendix B). This form served as the participants' confirmation to participate in the study. Participants were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they might choose to opt out of the study at any time and for any reason. In addition, the participants were informed that the decision to withdraw from the study would not affect their present or future relationship with the University of the Incarnate Word.

Data Collection

In the spring of 2010 I was encouraged by a professor in the Doctoral program to conduct a pilot study to determine, as stated by Merriam and Associates (2002), "if the

topic was appropriate for qualitative inquiry and whether it is important enough to spend time, money, and other resources in answering” (p. 30). The pilot interviews were conducted with three Black American couples 60-65 years of age. Neither the data collected during the pilot study nor any of the participants were used in this study. The pilot study was conducted to determine if colorism was a concept that warranted further exploration. The feedback from the participants as well as scholarly literature indicated that further research would add to the body of literature concerning the concept of skin tone preference in the United States as perceived by Black Americans in the 21st century.

The assessment questionnaire (Appendix C) was used as a measuring tool to ensure that each participant met the noted criteria. The assessments were handed to each individual personally. The assessment questionnaire was used to ensure that only qualified participants were to be included in the qualitative study. The results of this questionnaire were used as a venue in addressing the concept of colorism with each participant and its relation to them personally. Each question presented to the participants served to allow the individual to provide a self-assessment of his or her personal experience with colorism. I ensured that the participants had a clear understanding of the terms colorism, interracial discrimination, and intraracial discrimination. The semi-structured interview was a guide to capture the information needed as well as allow the participants opportunities to relay their experiences of interracial and intraracial discrimination. Each participant’s interview was captured on audiotape. A time period for the interviews was established and agreed upon by both the participant and me.

All interviews were conducted individually and in person. At the beginning of each interview, each participant was provided with the statement that they, in their

responses, could elaborate as little or as much as they wished. The interview questions (Appendix A) were then presented to the participant. On the same day of the scheduled interview, each participant was provided with the BRIAS. The participants were asked to complete the BRIAS prior to sharing their stories. The BRIAS was completed by each participant. Once I had collected the BRIAS (the scores were calculated at a later time) I proceeded to conduct the interview with the participant.

The first interview question I asked each of the participants, was, “What does it mean to you to be Black in American today in the 21st century?” A total of 15 original interview questions plus an additional question concerning a racial identifier preference were presented to the participants. The additional question was added as a part of the semi-structured interview as a result of an interview with one of the participants. In adding the additional question, I addressed the question to the participants who had been interviewed prior to the additional question being added. The added question was posed to each participant. In addressing all of the questions, each participant was provided the opportunity to respond to each question. The participants agreed to a time limit of approximately one hour. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 60-70 minutes. Prior to the interview, I provided a brief synopsis of my background in a time length of approximately 2-3 minutes. A tape recorder was used in an effort to ensure the accuracy of the participants’ responses as well as serve as a measure of maintaining the data. The stories that the participants presented in the pre-set time frame were deep and rich. The participants demonstrated a level of trust in me that was clearly demonstrated in their reflections and their emotions.

The participants were asked if they had questions prior to the interview and I offered the opportunity to ask questions. During the interview, I provided clarification of the questions if needed. I also asked the participants for clarification if the answer was not fully addressed or the response lacked clarity. For example, one of the participants used the term “Niglet” and I asked the participant to clarify the term as it was unfamiliar to me.

At the end of the interview, I asked each participant if they had any additional comments they wished to share or if they needed any further clarification of the interview questions. Each participant was thanked for their participation.

Please note that although a time frame of 60 minutes had been agreed upon, I did revisit two participants concerning the racial identifier question. Additionally, I feel it important to note that one participant followed up with me concerning a question concerning his validation as an African American man. This indicates that some of the interviews took more than the agreed upon time.

Data Analysis

The narrative inquiry was utilized in this qualitative study as a measure of “gaining an in-depth understanding of people’s lives” (Larsson & Sjoblom, 2010, p. 272) and to ensure an understanding the participant’s presented stories in relation to colorism. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. In transcribing the interviews, I transcribed the verbal and non-verbal language of the participants. I listened to the participants’ interviews multiple times in order to capture the accuracy of the participants’ responses. I was careful to note the pauses, the finger tapping, the points in

which a participant repositioned his or her self, the laughs, the flowing of tears, etc. The researcher “saturated” herself with the collected data.

The data analysis actually began during my interviews with the participants. As the participants were sharing their reflections, I was able to reconstruct the participants’ stories and responses in my mind and analyzed each in regard to their experiences being a result of interracial and/or interracial discrimination. Merriam and Associates (2002) provides a suggestion that the data received from the interviews should be subjected to a preliminary analysis. Therefore, social constructionism was used as a means of providing a thorough framework to address not only the psychological component of colorism, but the social aspect of colorism as well. Rubin and Rubin (1995) state that the researcher should “pull out the concepts and themes that describe the world of the interviewers, and decide which area should be examined in more detail” (p. 226). As a result of a preliminary analysis of the interviews, a search for common threads or themes was made that manifested itself as a result of coding and recoding the information received (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 70). Therefore at the end of the participant’s interviews, I placed the participants’ expressed experiences into two primary categories, interracial and intraracial discrimination. The data was processed and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

Larsson and Sjoblom (2010) indicate that “the narrative truth tries to construct an account of events and emotional reactions to those events that is coherent and consistent” (p. 277).

In order to ensure that I had constructed the “narrative truths” of the participants in a concise and adequate manner, I used a narrative analysis. The transcribed semi-

structured interviews were analyzed and reread multiple times looking for similar patterns and words used by the participants in accordance with Rubin & Rubin's (1995) statement that the researcher should conduct a "fine-grained analysis" of the participant's interviews (p. 226). I searched for the themes and patterns that emerged as a result of the participants addressing interracial and intraracial discrimination in the pre-Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights Movements using the brown paper bag as a metaphor. This was in conjunction with Lai (2010) who stated that "narrative approaches can employ literary tools (such as metaphors), linguistic devices or cultural conventions (such as time) for insights in analysis" (p. 80). Data was therefore coded in accordance with the patterns that emerged and placed into two primary categories. A third category, acknowledgment and acceptance of a racial identifier, emerged as a result of a participant's interview. I continued to analyze and code and recode the data, placing words, phrases, and emotional expressions in the margins. I continued searching for themes, patterns or phrases. The data was narrowed down and multiple subthemes began to emerge within the three categories. This allowed an analysis of the importance of the participants' life events to ensure that the information presented in the study was reflective of the topic of colorism and skin tone preference in relation to interracial and intraracial discrimination. This was accomplished by effectively reviewing the interviews thoroughly, and organizing the patterns or themes similar in content accordingly. During this process, the narratives of the participants were analyzed in terms of gender differences in relation to validation and its importance in the lives of Black Americans. I also utilized the BRIAS scores in order to look for connections in regard to the participants' narratives and the statuses of their racial attitudes. Lai (2010) indicates that the process of "narrative analysis is a

synthesizing of the data rather than a separation into its constituent parts” (p. 80).

Therefore, I continued the process of coding and recoding the content of the interviews looking for themes to code in relation to phrasing, similar life experiences, and other patterns resulting in the emergence of subthemes within the major discovered themes.

As suggested by Merriam and Associates (2002), I presented portions of the transcribed interviews to the participants for a member check to ensure accuracy as well as ensure that the essence of the participants had been fully captured. Only the portions which needed clarification of content were presented to the participants for member check. In addition, as a result of member check, the writer ensured that she did not project “herself and her experiences” which is termed as “writing against others” into the stories of the participants (Merriam & Associates (2002), p. 70).

The three research questions were analyzed through the participants’ responses and recorded in the Findings section. The racial identity attitudes subscales (Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, and Internalization) were analyzed per the participants’ responses. The subscale scores were not calculated to identify the participants’ racial identity. The subscales were scored as a means of demonstrating that although an individual may reach a level of internalization, depending on the situation or experience, he or she may also express attitudes that are derivative of the four previous stages.

As the instrument, I received these instructions from D. Ettling (personal communication, September 2010); which were to be careful to keep in mind the goal of the study, to develop an understanding and acceptance, to become immersed in the environment where I was, to retrieve the data through specific instruments, organize the

data, provide a thick description, and arrive at a cultural interpretation of said data

Concerning the researcher as the instrument in qualitative research, Merriam and

Associates (2002) stated:

We retell our respondent's accounts through our analytic redescriptions. We, too are storytellers and through our concepts and methods—our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedure, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives—we construct the story and its meanings. (p. 287)

This proved to be a very important role because it allowed me, the researcher, to conduct a self-analysis in which my bias, as the researcher, was openly stated. Therefore, in relation to the above quote, it became imperative for me to identify myself as an African American when conducting the qualitative study addressing an inquiry related to race or culture. Consequently, I was careful to demonstrate a measure of caution in the language used in the dissertation as to ensure bias was not transferred to individuals who were interested in the study. My role as the researcher was a very important aspect of this qualitative study.

Role of the Researcher

One of the things I was seeking to learn concerning qualitative research was that the truths of the participants might prove to be totally different from my concept of the truth(s). As previously stated, narrative methodology will allow the readers of the study to gain an insight into the lives of the participants as shared through their life stories concerning their experiences as African Americans.

As an African American woman, I was a member of the in-group to the participants on a number of levels. In addition to being an African American, and having children of adult age, I had also lived in states other than my birth state. Additionally, I

have personally experienced both interracial and intraracial discrimination. In serving as the instrument for this research, I was both an outsider and an insider; I was outside the age range for experiencing and understanding the Civil Rights Movement but inside the group that had experienced both interracial and intraracial discrimination.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

As stated by Merriam and Associates (2002), “a ‘good’ qualitative study is one that has been conducted in an ethical manner” (p. 29). Therefore, in order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, I employed several strategies as noted by Merriam and Associates (2002) to demonstrate the credibility of the study. In addition to the strategies listed below, I utilized the strategies of peer review, audit trails, and adequate engagement in the collection of data (Merriam & Associates, 2002) of the participants’ stories. This ensured that the study was presented in an ethical manner and demonstrated that I had relayed the essence of the participants’ experiences of interracial and intraracial discrimination in relation to colorism through narrative inquiry and collaboration. As stated by Marshall and Rossman (2006):

Narrative inquiry requires a great deal of openness and trust between participant and researcher. The inquiry should involve a mutual and sincere collaboration, a caring relationship akin to friendship that is established over time for full participation in the storytelling, retelling and reliving of personal experiences. It demands intense and active listening and giving the narrator full voice. Because it is collaboration, it is imperative that both voices be heard. (p. 118)

Thus, in order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, the following steps were employed as strategies of validity as discussed by Creswell (2009):

- Triangulated different data sources to demonstrate the discovery and validity of themes.
- Used member checking to ensure that the researcher has provided an accurate account of the participants’ narrative and accounts.

- Used thick rich descriptions to demonstrate the participants' detailed descriptions.
- Was sure to clarify the researcher's bias. (Creswell, 2009, pp. 192-193)

To ensure the validity of the study, I utilized several measures of triangulation.

The methods of data collection that I used to accomplish triangulation were the individual interviews, the BRIAS, the self-reported questionnaire, as well as peer review. Audio tapes were utilized to provide accuracy of the participant's stories narrated as demonstrated by the transcription verbatim. Appropriate measures were taken to ensure that the participants were ensured autonomy and were therefore encouraged to openly communicate their life stories, concerns, fears, etc. The interviews, as previously noted, were transcribed verbatim along with noted non-verbal observations to ensure the accuracy of the retelling of the participant's narratives. Care was taken to record the essence of the individual interviews to ensure that the participants were represented in an accurate and appropriate manner. In addition, I openly discussed being an African American female as it related to the concept of colorism.

Summary

Chapter III introduced the instruments used to gather the data for the study. I used the Helms BRIAS Social Attitude Inventory as a means of measuring the attitudes of the participants in relation to race and ethnicity. The participant's stages of their attitudes in relation to race and ethnicity are reported in Chapter IV: Twelve African Americans' Reflections: Their thoughts, their words, their voices. Through the use of narrative inquiry as the chosen methodology, the participants' life stories in relation to interracial and intraracial discrimination and the effect it has had on them as individuals came forth resulting in rich thick data. An audio recorder was utilized by me to not only collect the

data from the participants, but to ensure accuracy of the participants' reflection as well.

The data was then transcribed and analyzed. Through coding and recoding of the transcribed data, patterns, themes, and subthemes emerged and were presented in a collaborative and concise manner.

Therefore, it is my hope that the narrative methodology utilized in the study will bridge the gap of knowledge within the African American culture, and in doing so, promote cultural unity, and self-awareness along with cultural and self-appreciation.

Chapter IV: Twelve African Americans' Reflections: Their Thoughts, Their Words, Their Voices

I have a dream this evening that one day we will recognize the words of Jefferson that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." I have a dream this afternoon. [Applause] (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Freedom Rally in Cobo Hall delivered in Detroit, MI, 23 June 1963)

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of colorism in the 21st century among 12 African American individuals. Each individual was provided an opportunity through narrative interviews to present his or her perception of colorism as reflected through personal life experiences. The participants' age range, as well as their educational level and current career status, has been provided in Table 1 to provide the reader with an overview of the diversity of the participants. Each participant's story, with each person relaying their heartfelt encounters and reflections in their own words in order to display the essence of their individual experiences, will be presented. Their stories are as follows:

Air Defender. The participant Air Defender is a mild natured light brown complexioned man in his early to mid-50s from Tennessee, who is married to the love of his youth and is the father of a special needs adult son, for whom he and his wife provide continued care. They also have an adult daughter who has blessed them with grandchildren. His posture straightened and his smile widened and was as bright as the Saturday afternoon sun as he spoke with pride in being a grandfather. Air Defender continued to share a little about himself as an individual and expressed that he is retired from the United States Air Force and is currently working in corporate America where he states he basically "created a position" for himself utilizing the skills he obtained in the

military. At the onset of the interview, Air Defender expressed that he was not sure if he would have much to contribute to the research of colorism and discrimination from the reflections of his life. Yet he stated that he would help in any way possible. After ensuring that I was comfortable, he sat upright in his chair, completed the BRIAS, and stated he was ready for whatever questions that were to be asked. In addressing the concept of interracial discrimination, he shared that he had lived in the South during the time that Dr. Martin Luther King came to his childhood city in his quest to dispel racism and bring about equality for all. Air Defender smiled slightly as he began his reflection:

Um, I was in my . . . I guess I can remember as far back to my pre-teens; teen years growing up. You know, actually growing up in the south in () Tennessee, so, I saw really first hand, you know, how my parents were treated. At least I grew up during that era in which, you know, the racial riots and also the sanitation strike that occurred in Tennessee. I was in my teens at that time when Dr. Martin Luther King came down and I saw that. I saw the racial, you know, the racial tension there and I saw even some of the looting going on and even the verbal attacks using the “N” word. So yeah, I’ve seen that.

He continued his reflection, providing a recollection of an unprovoked racial assault that he experienced in his teen years; little did he realize that through his expressions of his life experiences in relation to colorism and discrimination, he provided a glimpse of who he has chosen to be as an African American male in the 21st century — a man who made a choice in his teens that has carried him from that point to the present.

When we moved from Tennessee to New Jersey, I saw that (racism). Not as blatant but it was there. You can see just by some little baby racial overtones, how people, the Caucasians would hush when people of color, a Black person would come around them or in the store or something like that. Also, in my senior year of high school actually I was assaulted but did not know who did it because I was walking home and someone came up from behind me and hit me in the head actually. We were living in Trenton, New Jersey, at the time and so a lot of riots were going on in high school and everything like that. Blacks against Whites and so (he clears his throat) walking home one day through a mostly White neighborhood and so someone came up from behind me and I didn’t see it and really it knocked me out; and then a White gentleman, you know, saw it and then came to assist me. I saw the bad and I saw the good in people overall.

Table 1

Table of Participants

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Educational Level	Occupational Field
Air Defender	Male	56-58	Master's	Human Resources
Dianne	Female	58-60	Some College	Administrative
Etienne	Male	55-57	Bachelor's	Criminal Justice
Anna Marie	Female	56-58	Master's	Education
Lawrence Green	Male	51-53	Master's	Information Technology
Black Princess	Female	40-42	Bachelor's	Banking
Sylvester Drake	Male	52-54	Bachelor's	Billing and Collections
Cinderella	Female	52-54	*	Management
Neil	Male	55-57	Bachelor's	Information Technology
Joy	Female	48-51	*	Tele Communications
Bob Cat	Male	50-52	Some College	Real Estate
Traveler	Female	61-63	Doctorate	Education

Note. * Indicates that the participant did not select a level of educational completion beyond that of high school.

His story demonstrated a woven picture of him as an individual. A man who, in spite of a violent act from ignorance and hatred, made a decision to grasp the concepts of forgiveness and hope and appreciate the good in some as opposed to the bad in all.

In discussing the concept of interracial and intraracial discrimination, Air Defender presented the following:

Yes. It is prevalent (laugh). It is on both. You know White on Black and Black on White. Same opposites. Same thing. Two way street there. Yes. It exists today. Yes it does. It may be you know, covert in some cases but yeah it does exist today. And also Black on Black. Yes. It does exist today. Yeah. In elaborating on Black on Black discrimination, I would say the Black on Black, say for instance, I am going in for an interview, and I'm meeting with an African American hiring manager that's interviewing me. As a Black person and that hiring manager may not like maybe my hairstyle, or you know, I may have a southern drawl or something like that and they might, based on that, you know but it, it would be difficult to really say it but then unless they just come out and say you know he's Black or you know he's in the hood or you know, he's too Black or something like that. So yeah, it can happen today.

In being presented with a follow-up question for clarification of his phrase, "he may be too Black," Air Defender provided a situation by which he has a speculation of colorism occurring within a work environment. He stated:

Just had an email come across my desk in regard to how HR Reps specially recruiters, managers, during the recruiting process and, you know typically, rather its conscious or unconsciously, will typically tend to hire someone of like. For instance, a dark complected male comes in to you know interview them and so I'm also interviewing a light complected you know person, you know, same skill set. You know, both light complected so typically because I am the interviewer I'm light complected, I might subconsciously tend to go with the light complected over the dark complected. So, it could work out that way and vise versa; a dark complected interviewer, interviewee, same thing. They would tend maybe subconsciously to do that and you know when all of the qualifications are there, you know both meet the qualifications for the same job and that can happen.

Air Defender addressed the importance of the awareness of colorism being addressed in organizations and businesses among supervisors and management in relation to employees.

Dianne. The participant Dianne is a tall beautiful fair skinned woman with reddish hues in her skin tone. Her long thick hair complements the shape of her face. She is 59 years of age and reported that she was both excited and "honored" to be a participant of the study. She smiled nervously as she expressed her excitement at having the opportunity to share her story and talk about events that had occurred in her earlier

years of life. Dianne had invited me to conduct the interview at her place of employment; therefore, I arrived at the close of Dianne's work day and the interview was conducted in a very comfortable area. I was humbled as Dianne, who refers to herself as a person who likes to make people laugh, shared some extremely hurtful pains and emotional wounds that she continues to carry due to experiences that had taken place in her life. Dianne cried through much of her interview. She shared a particular incident which displayed her victimization of intraracial discrimination and the harshness that she experienced from her fellow African Americans which she acknowledges as having made a lasting negative impression on her. The sadness in her eyes, and the tears that flowed down her face, as she reflected back to her teen years symbolized her internal pain. Her reflection is as follows:

Being light skinned with long hair, I was discriminated against by my own people. Because of that. . . . Because you are light skinned, you didn't fit in and you had long hair and so my Blacks didn't accept me and Whites felt like because I was lighter complexioned I could fit in, but it was very uncomfortable. As a kid because, you know, I can't help it because I am tall and light skinned and have long hair; but big discrimination with the hair and the skin color. All my life.

Dianne continued expressing how she did not feel accepted by her fellow African Americans as a young teen. She acknowledged that she was not immune to racial discrimination from Whites during that period of her life; but due to intraracial discrimination, the sting of discrimination was more intense coming from her own cultural group than her racial counterparts:

(Concerning racism) Not as much as my own Blacks . . . Whites seemed to accept me more and the Black girls would tease me because of my color, or if I didn't talk a certain way or didn't want to hang out. Uh, so, I was more harassed by my own people (sniffle).

Concerning the concept of interracial discrimination, Dianne provided a reflection which impacted her as a teen and continues to impact her today. Dianne shared how through the discrimination experienced by her father, she too suffered his pain. Her reflection is as follows:

My Dad was in the military and uh, my Father was a cartoonist. And in that day and age that was just unheard of with a Black man. . . . He was just a brilliant man in that he drew a cartoon character and under his teacher; His teacher stole the cartoon character. It is a famous cartoon today and it was my Dad's and we have no way of proving it. But, when that happened to him, like it really did something to him outside of going to the war; and that probably had a lot to do with what he said to us and how he said it to us. When he was in the military, he talked about being in Europe, and he would smile and say, "I wish I could have showed you guys Europe." He would say, "It was just a wonderful place to be" and talk of how they treated the Black men in Europe and like so many Black men that were in service then, they stayed there and married European women because of how they were treated. . . . We found out after my dad died that he had drawn two maps for his division and he never talked about those things. He earned two Bronze Stars and we didn't know that until he died. He never told us those things.

Dianne's statement, "He never told us those things" demonstrates the pain that one can experience at the hand of intraracial discrimination; a hurt so deep that it can rob an individual of sharing personal and professional accomplishments with loved ones.

Etienne. Etienne volunteered to be a participant of the study because of his personal experiences in relation to skin tone preference which he had experienced in his youth as well as in his adult life. Etienne, a light complexioned man with grey eyes in his early to mid-50s, wanted to provide an insight into his past as an encouragement for future generations. Originally, I had approached Etienne's wife and asked her to participate in the study. She declined stating she felt she would not have much to contribute. In discussing the research study with her husband, Etienne, he stated that being from Louisiana he had firsthand experience of discrimination both interracial and as well as intraracial. Etienne and his wife invited me to their beautiful home on a bright

and sunny Saturday afternoon. The interview was conducted in their library. Etienne told me that he had previously served in the military and was currently employed as a probation officer working with adolescents. As he spoke, I took note of the concern he had for the youth who came across his path. At the start of the interview when addressing the concept of racism, he went back to an incident that occurred in his youth that impacted his life and thus has become a part of him. In discussing his first encounter with racism, he did not hesitate to provide the following response:

Oh absolutely. (Pause) Growing up. Well not growing up but 1966 through 68 in Louisiana. Integration. Bussing to the school. Um, the riots. You know, when you go to school . . . and, um, before you get off the bus there is a riot on the bus and when you get off the bus there is a riot on the school ground and then the school day is over. () High School. School was supposed to start and then school is over for the whole day. 9th grade is freshman year in high school; is that right? Now, freshman year you start your day and your day has ended before school even starts. That was something that stuck with me and it had an impact on my life because it had an impact on my learning. Plain and simple and from the perspective of a 9th grader, 14 years old, growing up where I grew up I could never understand that . . . but here is what I understood. Nobody learned anything that day. (Laughs). Black or White. Brown or Yellow. (Laughs) Nobody learned anything that day. So, was the playing field any less for me as a Black American than it would have been for anyone else that day? I can't image that it would be because (he takes his voice into a whisper) nobody learned anything that day (hard definitive tap with his forefinger on the table).

Concerning the concept of colorism and whether or not it played a role in his selection of a mate, Etienne provided a remembrance that started in his childhood and played into his adult life:

Yes and no. And this is a complex, it's a complex answer to what I think is a complex question. Because I think when we talk about attraction, you know, it's unique to each individual. In 4th grade this dark skinned girl, her name was Connie, I almost loved that girl, dark skinned and all. But then Alice came along and Alice was light skinned. I loved me some Alice (laugh). So, I think it is uniquely one's own perspective. And to be honest, uh, as I as I grew up, I tended to find myself attracted to women, young women . . . women of my own complexion or lighter. Yes. Not to say I did not, or would not have been with someone of a dark complexion. "We close." (Holding his arm next to his wife's

arm). But, yeah, I tended to pick the lighter skinned preference and I think it was because of my own (pause) belief; that in my belief of what I thought the offspring would be like as far as I'm concerned. I will leave it at that. That way it will stay decent at that point.

Etienne's concern "of what I thought the offspring would look like" perpetuates the societal misconception that individuals of a darker skin tone are "less attractive" than individuals of a lighter skin tone and would thereby produce "offspring" which would be considered as being physically unattractive.

Anna Marie. The participant Anna Marie arrived at my home in the early evening. She presented in an excited, yet controlled manner, much akin to her personality. Anna Marie, a beautiful petite woman between 58 and 60 years of age is soft spoken with kind eyes, a bright captivating smile, and a beautiful dark hued skin. In getting ready to conduct the interview, Anna Marie shared that she had been experiencing back trouble but stated that she did not wish to reschedule the interview because she was excited to talk about her life experiences. Upon selecting a comfortable chair, she was ready to reflect on her life. She proceeded to disclose her personal experiences in relation to colorism in both her past and her present. Upon completion of the BRIAS analysis, she smiled and stated that she was ready for the first question of the interview.

I selected the opening question of the interview as an introduction for the participant to express and reflect on the core of her perception and identification concerning the state of African Americans in present day. Therefore, the interview began with the question of what it meant to her to be African American in America in the 21st century.

In hearing this question, Anna Marie smiled, and after a long pause began to answer the question in a slow and thoughtful manner. Her voice, although soft in nature,

had a sense of heaviness and sadness in it as she began to speak. I took note that Anna Marie took slight pauses in between her words and phrases as she provided the following answer. “To me, today in America, being Black, is like a struggle; a struggle without the actual chains around my ankles, and my arms, and my neck.”

Admittedly, the way in which Anna Marie presented the answer took me aback. The depth in which she presented the answer appeared heartfelt. Due to the intricate undertones of her answer, I presented a follow-up question seeking an explanation for the pain that was so clearly in Anna Marie’s voice. I asked Anna Marie why she felt it was a struggle to be Black in America in present day.

I feel it’s a struggle because it’s invisible. I still feel today especially African American or Black females specifically, that there’s still a struggle. We still have to (pause) demonstrate or we still have to reveal that we are three times better than our counterparts, and you may ask me why. I will give an example . . . um, I am a retired military medical service Corps Officer as well as an educator and throughout my experiences, every time we (African Americans) apply for or I apply for employment, there are so many things we have to indicate. We have to give so much information before we are accepted for that job or that position. So, it’s like a constant proving that I’m good whereas I’ve watched counterparts and they can immediately (finger snap) be accepted for positions and they are i.e., not even military, or they i.e., are not certified but they get the position. So when you ask that question, to be honest, it almost reminds me of the days of slavery but the chains are invisible. You can’t see them but there’re there.

Concerning the concept of intraracial discrimination, Anna Marie provided a reflection that she remembers vividly to this day. She shared that her mother and father had shielded her and her siblings from external occurrences of racism. Unfortunately, she experienced the pains of racism within her own family unit. As she shared her reflection, her soft voice became softer.

My father was an extremely dark skinned man and from my understanding my grandmother, his mother, was a dark skinned Bible teaching, Sunday School teaching lady but my grandfather was very fair skinned; more of the mulatto. That’s who he was. So, it wasn’t what my father spoke, it was what we observed

and he didn't have to speak it. So, yes, we felt that because our skin was darker than our first cousins. We felt it every time we would go to their home. He would always make us just sit. We couldn't move. (Pause) And we had a cousin that lived with them and uh, when that cousin would do something or maybe knock over a little figurine or whatever, my grandfather would always blame us and so we would see that sort of anger and that retaliation against my father's dark skin and his children, the ones, basically all of us, but more so the ones that were skinned a little darker than the brown paper bag as we can say and so eventually, the last scenario, I remember it so well. I was probably around seven, we (were) sitting on the couch, little feet dangling and our little cousin, (), he ran through and he knocked over a figurine and my step grandmother came in and she (pause). That was the end. I remember my father taking us out and I heard I guess my grandfather had a hand and a little bop bop and we all packed up and that was it.

In seeing the hurt in her eyes, I asked if she or her siblings had ever returned to her grandfather's home. She replied:

I never remember going back, my father taking us back, and that was, used to be on Sundays. We would go and visit but on the other side; my mother, very fair skinned, a very fair skinned lady, i.e., the Cherokee; But her parents so sweet, both her mother and father, their mother, Cherokee, so it was a totally different atmosphere. We could go to, as we called them, Poppa and Grandma. We could go to them anytime and they always loved.

Anna Marie's heartfelt reflection demonstrated how the concept of intraracial discrimination can produce separation and discord within the family unit. Additionally, Anna Marie's reflection demonstrates the security a child experiences in being loved by those whom they themselves love and trust as well as the confusion and disappointment a child may experience in being treated differently by individuals within the family.

Lawrence Green. The participant Lawrence Green is a medium brown complexioned man who presents with a joyful smile on his face. Mr. Green is a good natured gentleman who shares that he is married to the joy of his life, his beautiful wife, with whom he has two adorable children, a son and a daughter. Mr. Green shared that he is in an interracial marriage and has been married for over 15 years. In addition, he shared that he grew up in the Air Force, stating that his father had served for 30 years. He took

pride in that. He further shared that he himself had served in the Air Force and upon being retired, has obtained a position with the government as a civilian employee. In relation to the subject of racism, Mr. Green stated that he had never really encountered racism until being assigned to his first duty station in North Carolina. It was in North Carolina that Mr. Green realized that racism was a real concept. He provides a reflection of his first encounter with racial discrimination:

Being in the Air Force, we traveled around to other countries and we were always exposed to other cultures and with different mixes of people. So, growing up all the way through high school, I never experienced what I thought to be racism. The first time I experienced it, I was in the Air Force and I was stationed in North Carolina . . . I hadn't been there two days and I had already seen on the news the Ku Klux Klan. I knew his name because he was on the news a couple of times and I remember vividly. I was in a dry cleaner, actually a Laundromat and I was in there to wash my clothes and I didn't have any change. So I went next door to the convenience store to get some change and I came back; and there was a lady, a White woman, and she was sitting on my laundry bag and she was a rather large woman so she extended beyond one seat into two seats and part of her was on my bag and she was talking to two Black ladies. The Black ladies were standing and the way they addressed her, you could tell she felt that she was above them and they felt the same way. And so, I was trying to be courteous and not interrupt so I waited for a very long time for there to be a lull in the conversation so I could get my bag, and finally, I saw that they weren't going to make any move toward me. They saw that I was standing there but nobody wanted to meet me to do anything. So, I made the move, I said, "Excuse me ma'am. You are sitting on my bag." And the look that I got from everybody in the dry cleaners, you would think I like shot their parents or something. I mean it was unbelievable. It was almost a gasp the fact that I was so uppity to the point that I could ask this lady to please move off from my bag and she kind of looked around and lifted one cheek off. It was just enough for me (chuckle) to get it and I picked it up, and for the rest of the time I was in there washing my clothes, Black and White people looked at me as if what, who do you think you are and I mean, it was just outrageous to me, you know. And, it just felt different in North Carolina.

Mr. Green shared that he had celebrated his 52nd birthday one week prior and his mood was one of elation. He expressed his excitement in having the opportunity to discuss the concept of colorism and although the majority of his interview was presented in an uplifted mood, he shared a personal reflection of intraracial discrimination that

occurred within his family. As he shared this reflection, he became visibly sorrowful and he had difficulty in completing his account without crying. His reflection is as follows:

I do have a story to relate and it's very emotional for me. It's relating to my younger brother. My younger brother was much darker than the rest of us. We had five in my family. I was the oldest of four boys and my sister was the youngest and you know, boys, you always found a way to kind of dig at each other. The one thing we used to use against him was his color and I don't know where that came from but we did. And the reason it's emotional for me now is I found out how much that we hurt him (choked up). And I found out from his wife and this wasn't until, my brother is 48 now, I probably found that out I want to say maybe five years ago talking to her and it just hurt him to his heart and even now he still carries that (choked up) because of what we used to (choked up) do to him (sniffle). It's just amazing to me that in all this time and like I say, I was the oldest, probably a senior in high school and that was the last time we'd done it but you know, his whole life we would always use that as a joke and he would joke with us about different things but then we found that was something that really affected him and I really didn't know how much, even into his 40s; even now, I mean it, it affects him.

Lawrence Green's reflection demonstrated how the voices of family members that speak negativity may result in emotional scarring. His reflection demonstrates the emotional pain that an individual may silently carry from adolescence into adulthood.

Black Princess. The participant Black Princess is a beautiful dark skinned African American woman who exudes a strong and confident presence. Her long hair is straight and fashionably styled. Her smile is bright and she presents and carries herself in a professional manner. I met Black Princess for the scheduled interview in a Mexican restaurant for dinner. In talking with Black Princess, she shared that she was 40 years of age, loves and adores her husband, and cherishes her two children who are in their teen years, a tall handsome son and a beautiful and shy daughter. In discussing her career, she stated that she has worked for a major company for approximately 15 years and enjoys her career as well as her work environment. She proudly shared that she is a "military brat" and as such has had the wonderful opportunity to travel and live amongst various

cultures. She credits this exposure and upbringing influencing her cultural acceptance of herself as well as others. But more importantly, she credits the life lessons taught to her by her parents and her relationship with God as helping her become the woman she is today. Black Princess presented straightforward answers throughout the interview and her manner of response was no different in her thoughts concerning the portrayal of African Americans in today's media.

I think the way that they (the media) portray Black people, especially Black women, is that Black women are angry. Black women are quick to get an attitude. Black women are rude. Black women are disrespectful. That's what I see when I turn on the media and there are Black women on typical programs; on reality TV shows, on news shows. It's always somebody either waving a finger in somebody's face or being disrespectful to her man whether it's her husband or boyfriend. They don't have time for the kids and it's all about me. A very selfish attitude. It's about me. I need to get mine. I need to get my hair done. I need to get my nails done. I need. It's me, me, me. I think that is what I see as how Black women are being portrayed today. As far as Blacks as a whole, the way I think the media portrays us is we're a joke. I still see that. I mean you have that Sweet Brown video that went viral. That was a news interview with a woman whose apartment caught on fire and out of all the people that were there, that is what we got out of it. That (video) went viral and that's the thing that really amazes me. That it went viral and that someone is making millions of dollars and they made her look ignorant; just like she had no education and no common sense. It was just a big joke; and that's how I see the media portraying us. As if we are just jokes.

In addressing the concept of intraracial discrimination, Black Princess discussed her viewpoint of its existence today within the African American community.

Oh absolutely! Definitely! When it comes to colorism there are situations where we as a Black people won't deal with other Blacks because they are too dark . . . I have judged people based on their skin tone. I admit I have made comments like, "He's darker than a grape soda" (laughter). I have also passed judgment, "I don't want to know that person because they are too dark" and, yes, I have done that.

She also provided a reflection of a conversation she recently had where she was introduced to a term that an individual of like culture had used in their description of African American children.

I've heard the term "Niglet" used. That's a new one used by our people referring to ourselves, and I had asked, "Okay, what does that mean?" Because I don't know what a "Niglet" is. They were referring to the younger Black kids and when I say younger Black kids, I mean maybe middle school age Black children. So, yes, I have heard of our people using derogatory terms for us as far as colorism goes.

In discussing with Black Princess her take on the term, "being Black enough," Black Princess smiled before she answered this question. She then provided a reply that was personal, candid, and insightful. Her response is as noted:

Being Black enough. When I hear that term I think it is not about the color of your skin, it has a lot to do with your attitude; a lot of how you see and how you carry yourself. It is about the people you interact with. Do you interact with more Black people? Do you have some White friends? Because when I hear "black enough" (pause) and when I heard that this term used is usually referred to people who are in situations to do things with White friends and they do interact with White people, and they are in situations where they deal with White people, and they are comfortable with White people and they actually came up with that term "are you black enough" is because somebody has decided, you know, that I'm going to explore outside of my race. It's okay to have White friends, Asian friends. It is okay to do that but a lot of times when we do those things a lot of time our own people will put it back in your face as like, "you're not black enough" or "you've forgotten where you came from" as you have decided, okay I can. It's okay. It's okay to deal with White people. It's okay to deal with Asians. It's okay to deal with Hispanics. But as soon as you step out of that and want to deal with more people than the people that are inside of my culture is when that term gets thrown around. "You're not black enough" or "you need to be Black," "you need to act Black," "You need to talk Black." I've personally been told that, "you need to talk Black" and please educate me on what Black talk is because I'm still trying to figure that one out. Because you see Ebonics in the urban dictionary, that's not the way to go. That's not the way to go.

Black Princess discussed a concept of intraracial discrimination that produces separation within the African American culture based on the perception that stems from cultural and societal stereotypes. The statements, "you need to be Black", "you need to act Black", "you need to talk Black" demonstrate of how an African American expects another African American to present based on stereotypical views.

Sylvester Drake. Sylvester Drake is a dark complexioned African American man in his mid 50s. I met Sylvester Drake on a Saturday morning in a selected coffee house to conduct the interview. He was a little guarded for his interview. I thanked Mr. Drake for meeting with me as well as for his willingness to conduct the interview. Mr. Drake stated that he had been looking forward to conducting the interview because he had “life experiences” that directly related to colorism and discrimination both within the Black culture as well as from Whites. Mr. Drake, a soft spoken gentleman, leaned down into the recorder so he could be heard. I positioned the recorder closer to him so that he could speak in a tone that was comfortable for him. As the interview took place, Mr. Drake shared the experience of how his mother in the 40s had to “sneak away from the plantation where she had to pick cotton for the landowner.” Mr. Drake became more relaxed as he spoke of his mother. He demonstrated a sense of pride as he spoke of the sacrifices that his mother had made for her children in order to provide them with a better quality of life. As the interview progressed, the concept of racism was presented and Mr. Drake provided a personal reflection of racism. He shared that his experience was not openly directed at him but rather the incident was relayed to him by a peer that he cared for. It affected him deeply.

The first time I realized it I was in high school. I was the only Black male in a predominately White school and I was a basketball star and one of the Caucasian or White female classmates had a crush on me. She didn't come right out and say it and tell me she had a crush on me but she did. So one day, I was a junior in high school, she pulled me aside and I had no problems in the school racially at all; But, she came to me and she was crying and I asked her why she was crying and she said, “I can't talk to you no more” and I asked her why, She said “because they told me I'm a nigger lover.” So, she couldn't talk to me anymore and she was crying. She was hurt. No one ever said anything to me about it but she pulled me aside and told me that she couldn't talk to me because other people were calling her a nigger lover and she couldn't talk to me and had a crush on me; And that is when I first realized that racism was real. This was 1975 in Michigan.

In relation to the concept of colorism, Sylvester Drake shared the derogatory names of which fellow African Americans within his own community would call him.

His reflection is as noted:

Uh. Well. Growing up. Because of my skin complexion, I was being made fun of. By my own people, uh, it was all kind of different names that I was called. You know. Uh. Crispy critter. Uh, let's see. Burnt bacon. Uh, let's see. Charcoal. You know, just all different names referring to my skin color, uh, my color as I was growing up. Yeah, by my people . . . African Americans in the community.

“Yeah, by my people” demonstrates the hurt Sylvester Drake experienced through the voices of individuals of his culture – his people in regard to the hurtful names that were placed upon him.

Cinderella. The participant Cinderella arrived unexpectedly at my home for the interview. Upon welcoming her in, she expressed that she was extremely excited. She shared that she had worked later than anticipated and apologized for her tardiness. In fact, I was not expecting her to arrive due to the voicemail that Cinderella had left me in the earlier part of the evening apologizing that she would have to reschedule the interview. The smile on her face was tremendous as she excitedly stated that her husband had encouraged her to keep her scheduled appointment and conduct the interview. Cinderella is a light brown complexioned woman in her early 50s. She is a beautiful woman with soft short curly hair displaying whispers of gray. She selected a chair and stated that she was ready for the interview. Her enthusiasm was priceless and she openly shared the instances and reflections of which she experienced discrimination. She provided a particular situation where her husband shielded her from the harshness of racial discrimination in their decision to marry. Her account of her reflection and the resiliency of her and her husband's relationship are as follows:

What is that saying? All that doesn't make you strong, I don't know how, but in other words you weather the storm because it will only make you stronger. As you go through it. For me being in a special marriage and I love my husband; but society and some areas of our country, they don't embrace interracial marriages and we had to make some tough decisions. Um, we were married in Missouri because being stationed in Fort () and when he went to the Chaplains Office and the Chaplain gathered the facts, he told my husband, I'm sorry, I don't believe in that (interracial marriages).

Cinderella continued with her account by informing me of the year in which her noted encounter of racism took place. She continued:

This was in '85 and my husband goes, "Oh," and he [the chaplain] says, "If you want to get me in trouble you can report me; and my husband said, "No. You will have to deal with that." I never found out about that until we were here married and in San Antonio. And we were married many years. But, I kind of, when I look back, I think about where we did go to get married; A city called Independence. And that, that town spoke a lot now as I can apply it to that experience. Perhaps it was meant for us to go to get married in Independence because truly we had the right to marry who we wanted to marry and be all that we could be as a couple and not have to worry about what others felt about it. So, I was sheltered from that until after we were married. I did not find out for many years, but we, we've endured a lot.

In discussing the concept of whether 21st century African Americans felt inferior to Whites in reference to economic progress, Cinderella provided the following response:

(Sigh) . . . let's see. Well partially. And I say that because as a society, we as a people know there are some differences and not because they truly exist . . . sometimes we don't truly apply ourselves. Um, my husband has often said, "When a Black person does well, White people really rejoice because they are not expecting it" and he says, "For me I just sit back and marvel over the fact that they even think that way." "But they do get happy because they can say, that persons on my team. That persons on my team." And yes, we still do have some people who still do believe we can't be achievers but they just haven't seen anything yet. They just don't know.

Concerning the concept of intraracial discrimination and colorism, Cinderella provided recollection from her childhood.

No. Although, I was a little prejudiced as a child. Okay. This is a little funny. I was very, very yellow when I was born and I had some really, really dark skinned cousins and I bit them. I didn't bite the lighter ones; but I bit the darker ones

(laughs); and they are all family and I love them but no one knew what that was all about but I obviously saw something as a child now everyone's family so, (laughs again) not a problem.

Cinderella's statement that "this is a little funny" demonstrates how the concept of colorism may not only be accepted within the family unit but also used as a humorous story that is shared and passed down through the generations.

Neil. The participant Neil, a light brown man in his mid to late 50s presented with a professional demeanor for the interview. I met Neil at his workplace early on a scheduled Saturday morning. Upon being presented with the BRIAS, Neil asked questions for clarification and sat down in a separate area to complete the attitude inventory. Upon completion, he rejoined the researcher and stated that the questions were truly thought-provoking. I thanked him for his participation and began the discussion portion of the interview. Neil stated that he had prior experience in the Air Force and that he was currently serving in the computer industry. Neil reported that he was divorced but was a proud father of an adult bi-racial daughter who had given him beautiful grandchildren who he adored. Neil presented his reflections in an open and thoughtful manner. He reflected on an encounter of racism that took place when he was a young child. The memory has stayed with him:

I doubt this is my first experience. This is the most prominent experience I remember as a child. We were, uh, I was with my family and my uncle's family; and we were taking a vacation. We were going to Canada and my Dad and my uncle had rented campers trailers RV basically to go on that trip. We had left Ohio and we were in Pennsylvania and we got stopped by the highway patrolmen. Now I don't know why we were stopped because as far as I recall everything was legal; but I do remember very vividly that Dad rolled down the window of the car; oh, my Dad was a sheriff by the way. So he is stopped. We get stopped by the highway sheriff and he rolls down the window and he has his license and registration and all the stuff you're supposed to have and the highway patrolmen calls him a "boy" and I remember how upset, you know, scared and upset all at the same time; and Dad was very cool calm and collected which is good

(laughter); you know, and we went on our way without any issues and it was just the tone of the officer's voice and what he said was obviously a racist discriminatory act. I think I was probably eight or nine.

In relation to the concept of colorism, Neil provided a story that had been shared by his aunt and his grandmother as they traveled from the North to the South. He also provided insight into his Native American side of his family that experienced certain freedoms due their skin tone. His recollections are as follows:

My grandmother and my aunt on my mother's side liked to travel. She was a person who kind of did what she wanted to do and she went and lived in New York and lived in California and came back to Ohio . . . she took my grandmother with her sometimes and I remember them telling me about them going to Atlanta Georgia and this was probably, I think probably before I was born and so it was then the early 50s, and they went by train; and the trains were still segregated of course. And they got off the train in Atlanta and they walked in the wrong direction and went to the White side of the railroad station and, uh, one of the Black conductors; this is related to me from my grandmother, one of the Black conductors came and grabbed them and told them they were in the wrong place and my aunt was very, very upset because she felt she could do whatever she wanted to do and she was very light skinned, very light skinned. My grandmother was a little darker than my aunt so there was this thing that my aunt could go places pretty much freely where darker skinned people could not go. It was very, very clear; and then the other I was gonna say; the other thought that occurred to me was all my father's side of the family. My father side of the family has more Indian, American Indian features and so there are again light skinned people in my family who have more Indian, American Indian features than African American features and they could go places where other people in my family could not go.

Neil's story is a wonderful reflection that addresses the concept of passing and the privileges granted to Blacks with a lighter tone were allowed to engage in and partake of. His reflection also addresses the different skin tones that may occur within the Black American family.

Joy. The participant Joy is a petite light brown complexioned beautiful woman with yellow undertones in her skin. She is between the age of 49 and 50 with short curly hair. Joy presents with a beautiful smile. In being asked to be a participant in the study,

Joy stated that she did not feel as if she would have anything to contribute admitting that she did not have any personal experiences with colorism. She however indicated that her “family” had such occurrences. I stated that I would be interested in hearing how intraracial discrimination and colorism had played a part in her family unit. Joy invited me to conduct the interview in her home on a Friday evening. Upon arriving at her home, Joy and her mother opened the door with wonderful and warm smiles which complemented the warmth of their beautiful home. When I was settled in the designated area, Joy shared that she had been thinking about the subject matter and enthusiastically stated that she was ready for the interview. Joy smiled throughout the interview and her “the glass is half full” personality was demonstrated even when reflecting on her experiences of intraracial discrimination and colorism. Her reflections are as follows:

Uh, intraracial discrimination was my sister and I. I have two sisters and all three of us are different colors. So, I have a sister that is dark, a sister that is medium brown which we called pretty and then there’s me. I’m not as light now, but I was the color of light brown with light blonde brown sandy hair. So my middle sister, who was the darker one, would have her slang words for me and we fought regularly . . . she would call me “high yellow” and anything else she could think of so I started calling her “darkie.” You know, so internally, in our family, we have intraracial issues.

Joy continued her reflection of colorism within her family disclosing how colorism unfortunately came from her grandmother and had played a part in her mother’s upbringing:

My great grandmother was White and so her daughter (my grandmother) tended to be racial against her own dark children; and so, Mom, who would help her grandmother, who was White, cross the street or around town or on the bus or whatever she asked, she was “that colored child helping that old White lady”; and Grandma Mary, she had a thing against anybody who was dark. I mean that was just her way. I was raised with parents who could care less so it didn’t matter to me and I wasn’t around her a lot but you could see it in how she treated some versus the others. I had to do her dishes; that we had to clean her house and the

other one didn't so, (laughter) I saw that very clearly; but, I figured well, you know, it was just because Mom made me.

In addition, Joy shared how intraracial discrimination and colorism has continued to thread through her family and will undoubtedly be passed down to another generation as demonstrated in her following reflection:

I have my sister who's dark. Her mother-in-law is strictly for white people. So I have a niece, her daughter. (R)'s daughter (my niece) turned out very fair and she cried a lot when she was in other people's arms, but her grandmother pretty much embedded in her mind, that's because Mom (my mother) is dark or that's because (R) (the child's mother) is dark and she (the child) doesn't like dark people.

Joy's reflection provided a glimpse into how the concept of colorism may be imposed on children. Her reflection demonstrates how adults may impose colorism on children causing the child to unknowingly develop a preference for light skin.

Bob Cat. Bob Cat presents as a happy-go-lucky guy who stated he would gladly participate in the study. Bob Cat, a dark skinned man, stated that he was 51 years of age. He shared that he is in an interracial marriage to a beautiful woman he has known since elementary school with whom he has two beautiful children. He further shared that he has an adult daughter whose mother is African American. I met Bob Cat at his place of employment during his lunch hour. In selecting an area to conduct the interview, Bob Cat sat back in his chair and stated he was ready for the interview to begin. The concept of being an African American individual in today's 21st century America was addressed and Bob Cat provided the following response:

What does it mean to me to be Black in America? To me, I feel special. You know, God created everybody . . . I feel like it's a special thing because we have had a little bit more obstacles to overcome in the past beyond other people . . . God never gives you more than you can handle. So, uh, being Black in America in a predominately White America, I feel like I am a special breed because we have overcome certain things and we continue to overcome certain things and so . . . Being Black, that is a special feature.

Concerning intraracial discrimination, Bob Cat provided a recollection of a situation that occurred in his teen years which involved the concept of “good hair.”

In school. Yeah. There was a guy and he was a light skinned guy, and I don't know if he was half White or half Black. But you know; the other brothers, uh, Black guys with the kinky Afros (pause). He had straight hair, so that's my first. It was one of those things. “I don't have to do anything to my hair and you have to get relaxer to get your hair like mine.” That was kind of an interracial; well I don't mean interracial, but an inner circle head-butt to each other. You know, “your hair is better than mine.” “I got good hair” and you know, something like that. Yeah. I remember that.

In addressing racial terms which he had heard, Bob Cat provided a recollection of an incident in which a racially derogatory term was used in his presence and his reaction to it. It is as follows:

I remember I was working with this big German dude; his name was (A), he was just so comfortable. One day we were driving and he just said, “Yeah, my daughter is dating a Nigger” and I knew he wasn't prejudiced. I wasn't mad at him because I knew him. The guy had bought me lunch and. . . . Then he said, “Oh man, I am sorry.” I told him, “Man, don't worry about it but just a word of advice, just be careful. Don't run up on somebody and say that word. It will get you killed.” . . . We used to have a guy that worked with us and we called him, “Nigger Joe.” That's just what we called him. Man, I loved that guy (A) to death, but he didn't know no better; it's just ignorance.

Bob Cat's reflection demonstrates the acceptance of interracial discrimination that a Black American may experience based on the relationship he may have with the individual who has made racial remarks. His reflection also demonstrates how a Black American may choose to dismiss racial statements in order to maintain relationships.

Traveler. Traveler is 62 years of age. She presents as a tall, slender beautiful medium brown woman with red undertones. Her dark straight hair is pulled back into a bun and her dress reflects that of professionalism and grace. Her posture and presence reflected confidence and her smile complemented her soft keen features. Upon arriving at Traveler's home, I was greeted with a hug and invited into the designated area, a

beautiful and warm room. Traveler answered each question thoughtfully and shared her reflections openly with me. I began the interview by asking Traveler to share her thoughts concerning being an African American today in the 21st century. Traveler asked if she could please come back to the question. I smiled, said “sure” and proceeded with the next question. In addressing the concept of her first remembrance of racism, Traveler did not hesitate to provide the following reflection;

I do. I don't know exactly how old I was but my first encounter of racism is when I . . . I will give you two encounters. One was passive and one was active. I grew up in a town in East Texas where of course things were so segregated and my first passive encounter was knowing that there were colored and white separate restrooms at the courthouse. And my first active encounter was, I was in the hospital in that town and the hospital was above the pharmacy and the pharmacy had a silver fountain and we were not allowed to get drinks or anything in that soda fountain; and I remember wanting a coke while I was hospitalized and my mother telling me that she had to walk too far to get me one and she didn't want to leave me; and she decided to go down to that fountain and get me a coke and bring me one and we both knew, I was old enough to know, that she was not supposed to go down to that fountain to get me a drink. And I must have been about a good, about, nine maybe eight or nine.

In discussing the concept of colorism in the 21st century America, Traveler was asked if she perceived that there was an unspoken advantage lighter skinned African Americans had over darker skinned African Americans, and if so, did she believe it continued to exist within the black community today? Traveler provided a very real daily concern that many African Americans have in today's America:

That's unfortunately true. My son, for example, is very dark skinned and I know that racial profiling and that kind of thing (pause). He is more of a target for that than is my daughter who was more like my color and I honestly feel that within the African American community if you are darker skinned, you have to prove yourself first whereas if you are lighter skinned, you prove yourself second.

Concerning the concept of intraracial discrimination, Traveler provided a reflection of her college days where she attended a historically Black university. Her reflection of intraracial discrimination is as follows:

I, I went to school at (D) University and to be Miss (D) it was well known unspoken and sometimes spoken that you had to be of a certain hue to be Miss (D). So I remember some years later back in an event and talking to some folks and folks saying, “Did you ever run for Miss (D)”? “Because you know, you know, you were (pause).” “Me, I wouldn't have been light enough.” And they said, “Oh, yeah. You would have made the mark.” In my younger years I was actually a little bit lighter than I am now and I said, “Oh no. You know and let's be honest at (D) you have to be light, bright and nearly white to be Miss (D).” And a person was disagreeing with me. Now as it happened in my senior year, we elected a young lady who was very dark skinned and that was kind of in protest to what we knew the president wanted. But yes, I would not have been able to run for Miss (D). The incident at (D) was probably my first experience with that in terms of inside my race because now I grew up in a small community where my parents had no money but family had standing in the community; and there was no discrimination against me in the Black community. I just don't have that in my background.

I asked Traveler if her family had ever shared any stories concerning racism or colorism with her. She provided a recollection of a story that her mother had shared. Her mother shared an incident that actually happened to her when she was six or seven years old. Traveler shared this story:

Oh yes. And I remember a particular one my mother told me that happened to her when she was young and my mother was the baby in the family of six children and her oldest brother was 18 years older than her and they were apparently renovating doing work on the family home and the Carpenter was White and I don't know how old my mother was maybe six or seven and she said the man told her “Have you ever seen a monkey”? And she said, “No” and she was playing outside where this man was working and he told her “Well go look in the mirror and you'll see one.” And I said to her “What? Did you tell, (we called her father Poppa) did you tell Poppa that?” And she said “No,” and I said “Never even later in life did you tell him?” Because Poppa would have never let that man work on their house and she said at that time she did know what it meant. It wasn't until much later that she knew what it meant. . . . My mother was born in 1924 so that was around 1930.

In discussing her views of how African Americans today are portrayed in the media both nationally and globally, Traveler contemplated her answer for a short moment before providing the following response to the interviewer:

(Pause). Now you know I spent a lot of years, so you said today's media. So, you are talking about right now. It's hard for me to separate today's media from not so long ago when Blacks were portrayed so poorly in the media and I don't think we've gotten much better in terms of how we portray Blacks. It's just that people have gotten so much worse that Blacks don't look so bad anymore. So I think the media still portrays Black people just as poorly as they did 20 years ago; but other folks have just gotten bad. So the comparison kind of negates itself. The media is still portraying Black people poorly, but others have reached the same poor mark.

I asked Traveler if she had ever heard the term, “being Black enough” spoken within the Black community. Traveler indicated that she had indeed heard the term before and was definite in her following response:

Now I know I have always had a problem with that. I have always had a serious problem with that from the time I was very young. Even before people began to use the term because I think that probably came along in the 70s somewhere around in there. And by that time, I was pretty much formed in terms of who and what I was and I didn't know how to be black enough. I only knew how to be me and I just didn't understand what to do with that term. It still is one of those things that I discard. I discount. I don't like to hear folks talk it and say it because I don't know what it means.

When asked if she felt colorism and inter racial discrimination were still prevalent today in the 21st century, Traveler without hesitation provided the following response.

I think it still exists but I “X” it out of my own area now that does not mean that I am not aware of the fact that things exist. Like I tell my son, “you have to understand that you are going to be profiled by certain groups, by certain people like the police because you happen to be an African American man and you happen to be a dark skinned African American man and you happen to be driving a decent car and you're moving through an environment where there happens to be a lot of White folks, so, you have to be careful. Now I know that does exist but I also go on to tell him, but that shouldn't stop you from doing anything that you can do that is legal. It does exist but it's just something that you have to “X” out.

I readdressed the topic of being Black today in the 21st century with Traveler. She provided the following response:

Well, I will tell you for one thing it allows me to be a little bit more special and I am going to be honest with you I, I would have to wonder would I have made the successes in life that I have made if I had been White because then I would have just (pause) I don't know. There's nothing about me that would have made me ordinary. I don't care what color skin I'm wrapped up in and I am sure you could say the same thing about yourself; just simply would not have been ordinary no matter what color skin you are wrapped up in.

She continued her response in the following manner:

But the fact that I was Black and happened to be able to do things that people were just “Oh, god you are just out-of-the-box,” I think has given me a leg up rather you are White, Black, Purple or “Urple” has given me a leg up. So to me, being Black in America has probably helped me to succeed because I have always been the unexpected because no matter where I moved whether it was amongst Black folks or White folks, people never expected what they got from me. It was always the extraordinary beyond their expectations. I don't know what their expectations were but it was always given and in fact, I think if you're moving through White America or whatever; In America, my world happened to be filled with people who were not Black most of the time and you are the unexpected. You get a leg up. You get some extra. You get some something. You get to try something different, do something new. And when it turns out that you can do it and do it so well; oh well, oh my goodness. So for me being Black in America, in the way that I have moved through, being in the profession that I am in and going to the schools I went to and so forth, being Black has helped because it was the unexpected. You know, you are younger than me so, so maybe you don't know how people used to say Black folks always look like they are mad. And when I was growing up one of the things that I did was to make sure I didn't look like I was mad. I always smiled. So the fact that I smiled at people no matter who you were or what you look liked has always been something that has helped me out. So if you want to label me in a certain way I'm going to not be that label (pause) and that has been one of the reasons that being Black has been good because I'm just going to be the unexpected Black.

Traveler demonstrated the true concept of being judged on the content of her character as opposed to the color of her skin. Traveler's reflection demonstrates the strength in character that captures the essence of the Civil Rights Movement in regard to

the mindset of moving forward and being other than what was expected regardless of the circumstance and situations.

Findings for the Black Racial Identity Assessment Scale (BRIAS)

The participants were provided with Janet Helms's BRIAS Social Attitude Inventory of which each individual completed prior to the discussion portion of the interview. The BRIAS, which is an acronym for Black Racial Identity Assessment Scale, is comprised of five stages, Pre-Encounter (Conformity), Post-Encounter (Dissonance), Immersion, Emersion, and Internalization. According to Helms (1990), the following is a summation of the five stages:

The Pre-encounter stage . . . reflects some manner of identification with Euro-American world view, including belief in derogatory stereotypes of Blacks as a reference group. The Encounter stage marks the person's decision to adopt a Black perspective and is characterized by feelings of euphoria as well as confusion with respect to racial identity issues. The Immersion/Emersion stage describes those persons who have psychologically and/or physically withdrawn into a Black world in an effort to define a Black identity. The Internalization stage is one in which one's racial identity becomes crystallized. (p. 36)

In following the scoring key for the BRIAS, which provided instructions "to add together the responses for each of the keyed items to obtain a person's score on each of the schemas," I discovered that each individual participant presented with the highest scores in the Internalization schema. As such, one individual demonstrated an Internalization schema score of 39. The other 11 participants however, demonstrated Internalization schema scores ranging from 47 to 62 (Table 2). Please note that according to the scoring key provided for the BRIAS, "total scales scores are not appropriate for evaluating a person's racial identity." Helms (1990) states,

If one uses a racial-identity-attitude measurement approach, then according to Parham and Helms (1981, 1985a, 1985b), stage of racial identity per se is not determined by whether or not a person has a certain type of racial identity

attitudes (since everyone is assumed to have some of each type in some amount). Instead one determines the amount of attitudes associated with each stage. (p. 36).

In conjunction with Helms (1990) statement that in accordance with the five stages of racial identity, that “every-one is assumed to have some type in some amount” (p. 36), I therefore utilized the BRIAS as a tool in demonstrating the participant’s schema scores in conjunction with the personal participants’ reflections during the discussion interview.

In the Pre-Encounter stage, according to Belgrave and Allison (2010), “individuals may feel that Blacks are responsible for their own oppression and fate. Correspondingly, they may hold individualistic views about opportunities, seeing the individual and not the environment as responsible for what happens to people” (p. 71). The participant, Lawrence Green, demonstrated the above sentiments of the Pre-Encounter schema in his following reflection:

some people [African Americans], in my humble opinion, don’t feel as if they have the same advantage and they don’t take advantage of some of the things offered to them; and some, in my opinion, again, um, (pause) they would rather look for a hand-out than working toward what’s available in putting in the hard work and putting in the time much like yourself. I mean, like the advanced education you have; and putting in the time. I mean it takes a lot to do that and a lot of people, instead of putting in the education or the work, would rather make excuses; and to the fact that “I can’t do it because I’m Black” or use that as an excuse. But, I think right now, it’s a wonderful time for all races in America and I think the opportunity is out there and it’s available. We can go get it.

Helms (1990) states,

the person whose attitudes are primarily Pre-encounter may also have adapted either a Black-deprecatory or assimilationist world view as far as reference-group orientation and ascribed identity are concerned. It appears that painful feelings may be associated more with the former adaptation than the latter. Yet the latter, which also may be dysfunctional in the long run, is not easily recognized because it so closely matches White behavioral norms. (p. 46)

Concerning the Pre-Encounter person, Helms (1990) states that the Pre-Encounter person seems confused about whether or not he or she is Black and can easily get in touch with dissimilarities rather than similarities between herself or himself and other Blacks (p. 46). Although the participant Cinderella is very much aware that she is African American, she does however provide a glimpse into a possible stage of Pre-Encounter in her following reflection concerning colorism and rather or not it played a part in her selection of her current mate. She replied as follows:

Absolutely not. You know what's so funny is my husband is someone I ended up working for. . . . He is my second husband. I was married to a Black man before and things just didn't work out. We had too many differences.

Belgrave and Allison (2010) state that during the dissonance or encounter stage, individuals encounter an event or series of events that shatter the perception of themselves or the perception of the conditions of Blacks in American. This experience, described as "pulling the rug from under one's feet" makes salient the consequences of being Black (Belgrave & Allison, 2010, p. 72). The participant Neil provided a reflection that demonstrated the schema of Dissonance. His shared reflection is as follows:

As a child, and as a teen, and as a young man, I was much more timid when challenged with anything to do with race or discrimination. At some point in my life I was in the Air Force and I had been in the Air Force for about a year. I was about 19 and I wanted to buy a car, a second car. I was married and I was on my second car; and I found the car on the car lot; and the salesman down there was White and it was no big deal. I found a car. It was not an issue. So, I went to the credit union to get a loan for the car and they evaluated the car and thought the car was not a good idea. It was not worth what they were asking and so when I got back to the dealer and told them what they were asking for, he basically turned into this racist A**hole; and was just a demeaning A**hole; and it was just this, "Oh your credit it's not good enough, this and that and the other." It has nothing to do with the car to the point of, I wanted to cry; and then that other part of me wanted to jerk him across the desk and beat the crap out of him. That was the first time I had that kind of feeling, you know, I had been angry before; but you know, this was something new. Um, and from that point forward if anyone challenged me and I felt that it was a racial issue or discriminatory issue.

Parham (1993) states, in relation to the Dissonance or Encounter stage, that during this stage, “an individual experiences a startling personal or social event which challenges their belief in a pre-encounter orientation (they discover that racism does in fact exist)” (p. 38).

The participant Sylvester Drake’s reflection concerning his first known occurrence of interpersonal racism provides the reader with a glimpse of his stage of Dissonance. His statement correlates with Parham’s summation of the Dissonance or Encounter stage perfectly. His reflection is as follows: “She couldn’t talk to me because other people were calling her a Nigger lover. She couldn’t talk to me and had a crush on me and that is when I first realized that racism was real.”

Belgrave and Allison (2010) state that Dissonance may also be experienced when an individual is transitioning from one environment to another. This might occur, they say, when a person leaves a predominately African American high school to attend a predominately White school. In the transition process, his race becomes salient to him and to others (p. 72).

The participant, Joy, in her reflection about experiencing interracial discrimination, addressed an occurrence which took place in a predominately White school.

(Pause) I think when I was in . . . when I went to that all White school, I was in third grade and I was the only Black in an all-White school. Yes. Yes, that was actually my real first racial experience. There was this older girl in the fifth grade I believe. I was in third grade and she was in the fifth grade and she beat me up. I mean I wouldn't say I got my butt kicked but she approached me and my little friends, one was Hawaiian and the other one was Chinese so, it was this Black, Hawaiian and Chinese; and she comes up to me and she towers over me and she said something and I jumped up like you're not pushing me around and she pushed me around. She pushed me right down and I hit the ground just as hard as I could . . . and I jumped up, but my teacher (Ms. K) came over and broke it up

and she, (Ms. K), from that day on, kept me where she knew I was safe. Even on the playground. I had totally forgotten about that one . . . an all-White school . . . all White neighborhood . . . it was a good neighborhood. I was the only Black in the entire school.

Joy provided a further reflection concerning her being the only African American student in her school at that time. She stated,

someone made fun of me when we had the class play because I was the teddy bear. Because what else were you going to make me? (laughs) And my daddy said, "I could see you all the way across the room." Because I was the only Black one stage.

Belgrave and Allison (2010) state,

the Immersion and Emersion stage is characterized by a new way of thinking and a new identity that incorporates being Black. . . . Individuals in this stage may have overvalued beliefs about the goodness of being Black. . . . Individuals in this stage attend events and participate in activities that affirm and support their African American identity. (p. 72)

The participant Anna Marie demonstrated both schemas of Immersion and Emersion in her reflections about joining a college sorority where she experienced colorism in relation to the paper bag test, as well as her thoughts on present day passing of African Americans. Anna Marie's reflections are as follows:

The college level . . . I started dealing with fraternities and sororities; oh, it (colorism) was very evident there; it was um, of sorority members because I am (A). We were of course below the brown paper bag. Jet black and we broke that barrier. The year I pledged was in 1975. Yes, because it was still going on. If you were not fair skinned with long hair you could not pledge; the only organization you were worthy to pledge was (Z) that was it.

Helms (1990) states that the end of the Immersion stage is Emersion. During this phase the person's world view is Black, but it is proactive rather than reactive (p. 46).

When addressing the perception of the media concerning African Americans on a national and global level, Anna Marie sat back in her chair and provided a thoughtful look as she responded:

Um, If I look back in the era; if I could go back a little bit. If I look back at James Brown, Temptations, Shirley Cesar; when I look back at those individuals, to me they look like we [African Americans] were coming out in the forefront and it wasn't a denial of who they were. I say now, today, Beyoncé, Michael Jackson, as far as handling what we call, the fame with the monetary emphasis behind it; I think they are a little more up front . . . I think per se, like Michael Jackson they are sort of mentally mixed; they didn't really know or if they knew they did not know who they were really were. Like Michael Jackson, now Beyoncé . . . they represent the African Americans to a certain extent and to me after that it's like you know, I'll say I am [African American] but now I'm out here. So don't label me in a sense as African American.

She went on to address racial stereotyping in today's media in the following manner:

Let's take Tyler Perry. True, he is bringing more women into the media and the reason I say media is because [African American] men were out with Shaft and given a higher position [in movies]. Denzel Washington, sort of a heroic position, but when it came to the [African American] women, most of the time; we are hardworking, we are making zilch money, like Florida on Good Times. We see it now with Tyler Perry. Yes, he has integrated color, but yet still that color has to look like what the media wants to see. I have to have the long straight hair; I have to have the Coca Cola shape. That's how I make it. If not, then I have to be fair skinned with the long hair.

Helms (1990) indicates that “persons in Internalization no longer need judge people by their cultural group memberships (e.g., race, gender, nationality). Rather they are concerned with common peoplehood” (p. 31). The reflections of the participants provided me with a glimpse of their Internalization schema. The participant Bob Cat demonstrated his schema of Internalization in his following reflection:

I remember Dr. King's march a few years ago. People started, I mean some White people started walking and people (African Americans) were saying, “What you doing here?” I mean, what do you mean what are they doing here? It's a march you know. They're supporting you, you know. You should be shaking that man's hand. He's here to support you. He's not even the same color as you and he is showing support by being at this march. This is what Dr. King was about. It was for everybody. It's not just for Black people.

Belgrave and Allison (2010), state that it is in this stage that the individual has internalized a new identity:

Table 2

Participant's (BRIAS) Social Attitude Inventory Results

Participant	Pre-	Post	Immersion	Emersion	Internalization
	Encounter (Conformity)	Encounter (Dissonance)			
Air Defender	35	18	36	33	51
Dianne	26	13	19	27	49
Etienne	22	12	21	19	57
Anna Marie	35	18	36	33	51
Lawrence Green	49	23	25	19	54
Black Princess	26	14	29	32	56
Sylvester Drake	44	12	32	36	58
Cinderella	33	16	18	17	39*
Neil	41	20	38	25	48
Joy	35	11	24	31	54
Bob Cat	22	9	20	25	47
Traveler	25	8	24	33	62

Note. *Unable to record an answer due to the participant selecting two answers for this question.

The conflicts between the old and the new identity have been resolved and the anxiety, emotionality, and defensiveness of the prior stages are gone. The individual feels more calm and secure. This person knows who he is, and he does not have to display his Blackness in order to prove that he is Black. (p. 72)

The participant, Air Defender, demonstrated his stage of Internalization in addressing his reflection concerning his aforementioned encounter with racial discrimination. Before providing an answer, Air Defender placed his hand under his chin and paused for 45 seconds to a minute with a look of concentration as if in deep thought. Upon answering, he responded as follows:

Well, it made me to look at people, I would say, in a different light. Not based on their, (pause) the color of their skin, but who they are. So, that's how I look at people. Maybe I may have received negative based on my color but I, you know, thank God, that I don't do that. So, I look at people for who they are.

The participant Lawrence Green provided a reflection that not only demonstrated his Internalization schema but the influence that his parents had in his development as well. His reflection is as follows:

Don't let anything hold you back my mother always said. I don't care who you bring home; I mean not necessarily racial, but just anything; . . . whomever you bring home, just as long as she loves you and you love her. So, I mean, that was their impression. . . . Even growing up, we dated. I mean me and my brothers we all dated people of any race; and I mean it really didn't matter . . . it was always . . . be proud of who you are and everything that stands for. Whatever that means to you; be proud of that and make us proud.

Lawrence Green discussed his children and in his reflection, demonstrated that the lessons passed on to him from his parents, he was passing on to the next generation.

When asked if he would have concern with his children's selection of a mate in relation to culture, he provided the following statement;

Not . . . not at all. As a matter of fact, I love the fact that () had her birthday party last year and she decided that she just wanted to bring her best friends to the house and just wanted to have cake and play in the pool and it was interesting that one of her best friends were Black, one was White, and one was Mixed; and it's just interesting, you know, that that's her crew; and that's just who she hangs out with; and color had absolutely nothing to do with it.

The above totals reflect the participants' compellation scores of specific questions on the BRIAS to reflect an African American's racial identity attitude.

The participant Traveler's Internalization schema score was the highest of the 12 participants. In the discussing the concept of African Americans symbolically passing for White, Traveler shared a reflection which demonstrates the "Internalization stage of one's race becoming crystallized" (Helms, 1990, p. 36). Her reflection is as follows:

There was a lady in my sorority that when I first saw her I didn't know if she was Black or White; and she was very active in our sorority right here in town. And I never asked any questions about her background because she could very easily pass; very easily. And very recently . . . she was interviewed by some national newspaper and there was an item on AOL that spoke about her. Her mother was White. Her father was Black; and I never knew what her characteristics were because, because no one ever asked. And she was just so active in the sorority; and we had new members throughout the nation who happen to be White . . . but she was speaking about the fact that, um, her parents, (pause) she's close to my age; so you can imagine when her parents got together; and they were married for years and years.

Traveler's reflection addresses the concept of a biracial individual who could have passed as a White American due to her skin tone and features making a decision to join a historically Black sorority. Traveler's statement that "no one ever asked" demonstrated how the lighter skin toned individual was accepted without question.

Summary

The provided reflections of the 12 participants demonstrate different stages of the BRIAS. As previously stated, each participant, prior to the discussion portion of the interview, successfully completed the BRIAS, which comprises five stages of racial identity: Pre-Encounter, Post-Encounter, Immersion, Emersion, and Internalization. As noted, each of the participants scored high in the Internalization stage yet demonstrated scores in other stages of the social attitude inventory as well. This proved to be in conjunction with Helms's (1990) statement that the "stage of racial identity per se is not

determined by whether or not a person has a certain type of racial identity attitudes (since every-one is assumed to have some of each type in some amount)” (p 36). Therefore the racial identity of the participants was not determined in this study, but rather the racial identity attitude of the participants in regard to interracial and intraracial discrimination.

Chapter V: Findings and Discussions: Their Thoughts, Their Words, Their Voices

I have a dream this afternoon that the brotherhood of many will become a reality in this day. And with this faith I will go out and carve a tunnel of hope through the mountain of despair. With this faith, I will go out with you and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. With this faith, we will be able to achieve this new day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing with the Negroes in the spiritual of old: Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last! [Applause] (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963, Freedom Rally in Cobo Hall delivered in Detroit, MI)

Colorism is directly tied to racism in that it is the concept of skin tone preference.

Racism, as stated by Nuru-Jeter et al. (2009), “constitutes a profoundly personal and severe threat to well-being” (p. 30). The purpose of the present chapter is to convey the findings that were discovered as a result of participants’ reflective accounts in regard to colorism— skin tone preference and its relation to interracial and intraracial discrimination as perceived by the participants of the study.

As a result of the participants’ stories and reflections, a thread of common themes that emerged through each interview was uncovered. The themes that appeared to be most prominent were

- ☐ the acknowledgement and personal acceptance of a racial identifier,
- ☐ the affect of interracial discrimination, and
- ☐ the impact of intraracial discrimination.

In addition, multiple subthemes emerged as the provided reflections of the participants demonstrated a correlation between racial and self acceptance concerning both inter and intraracial discrimination in regard to colorism.

The personal accounts of the participants of the study demonstrated the importance of family and community in the African American culture in relation to

colorism and interracial discrimination. The participants' personal reflections also brought to light the emotional and psychological pain that one may continue to carry as a result of intraracial discrimination as well as the cultural misgivings and misconceptions that lie within the African American community itself. Through the reflections of the participants, the racial and societal struggles that Blacks in America experienced pre- and post-Civil Rights Movement were discovered.

Theme One: The Acknowledgment and Personal Acceptance of a Racial Identifier

The United States has a long history with the Blacks in America concerning the concept of a racial identifier. According to Russell et al. (1992) African Americans have held the racial identifiers of "Negroes," "colored people," "persons of color," "colored Americans," "Black Anglo-Saxons," "Afro-Americans," "Afro-Americans," "black Americans," "Black Americans," "African Americans," and now, again, "persons of color" (p. 71).

The theme concerning the acknowledgment and personal acceptance of a racial identifier emerged as a result of the various terms for race provided by the participants. Etienne, during the discussion portion of the interview, switched his reference of African Americans from Black Americans to African Americans and vice versa. Taking note of Etienne's switching of the racial identifiers, the concept of racial identification was addressed. With the emergence of the concept of the multiple racial identifiers that are connected with the African American race, I revisited the previous two participants with this question and used it as a question for the remaining of the participants' interviews. As a result, three of the male participants identified themselves as African Americans with the remaining three identifying with the racial identifier of Black Americans. Two of

the women participants identified themselves as African Americans, one female participant identified herself as Black American, one female participant identified herself as Black, one female participant stated she did not have a preference; and lastly, one female participant identified herself as an American.

Etienne, when asked if he, indeed, had a racial identifier, provided the following reply demonstrating that he had accepted his racial identity and as such demonstrated the stage of Internalization.

I think from an intellectual perspective, I may have used that African American as a form of intellect. I have always thought of myself as a Black American because I was born here. Um, for a long time, I would argue the point—African American. I don't know anything about Africa. Now, I was thinking, I don't know anything about Africa from the intellectual and educational perspective, I wasn't born a slave. Do I know about slavery? Of course I know about slavery. Was it something that was wrong? Of course it was wrong. But I wasn't born a slave and thereby since I was not born a slave, I don't think I could tell the slave story. But I could believe that from their history, I can tell my own story. So, when we say Black American, first of all the identity of Whose [God the Father] I am has to take root for me to understand who I am. So I hold to the adage of Black American because this is where I was born into. African American has its own place in history for me.

One participant, Dianne, also shared a similar concept to Etienne's in relation to the present societal racial identifier of African American. These sentiments as well as her chosen racial identifier are expressed in Dianne's following statement:

I was raised with Kunta . . . I know all that he went through. But . . . don't call me Black "African" American. I ain't from Africa. I am from the eastern part of the United States; I have never been to Africa . . . I am a Black woman and I'm not afraid of you call me Black. We just got away from Negro and it used to be Negress . . . I don't have to be African American because I'm not African. I'm just Black.

Dianne's reference to Kunta was in relation to the 1977 family autobiography and television miniseries, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, written by author Alex Haley that provided many Americans a glimpse into the life of the African pre-slavery to

the emancipation of slaves. So what of the roots of the African American today in the 21st century? The Black in America's roots to Africa have long since been removed, as expressed in a sentiment by a Nigerian in *How to be Black*, "This is the problem with you so-called African-Americans. You have no history, no culture, no roots. You think you can wear a dashiki, steal an African name, and become African? You cannot!" (Thurston, 2012, pp. 20-21).

The expressed sentiments of the Nigerian father is the same conclusion that was expressed in 1963 by social scientists who made the statement that "The Negro is only an American and nothing else. . . . He has no history and culture to guard and protect" (Billingsley, 1992, p. 83).

Although Alex Haley, as demonstrated in *Roots*, was fortunate to have the opportunity to be able to discover his ancestral roots, many African Americans may not be aware of their ancestral heritage, and as demonstrated by the participant Lawrence Green, may even question if Africa was their only ancestral place of origin seeing that "women of African descent were forcibly transported throughout Africa, Europe and the Western hemisphere" (Staples, 1999, p. 32).

In discussing the concept of colorism and racial identity, the participant Lawrence Green indicated that he had never really thought about the concept of racial identification and expressed in his statement that he had basically accepted and assumed that the present identifier of African American was correct due to the assumption that his ancestry was only in Africa. Yet, as we discussed racial identification, Lawrence Green, provided a reflective response that indicated that he may investigate "his complete roots" in order to discover his actual heritage as opposed to his assumed heritage.

If someone was to ask me my preference, I would probably say Black American only because I make the assumption that I'm African American; but to be honest, I haven't gone back in my roots to find out if I'm necessarily African American. I mean, there are a lot of Blacks that believe they are from Africa and actually are not. They may be from a number of different countries and so, if someone asks me, I say, "I am Black," and it may be because of my age also (laughs).

Lawrence Green's statement, "and it may be because of my age also" was in reference to his growing up during the Black Pride era of the late 1960s and 1970s.

The participant Air Defender, who identified with the racial identifier of African American, expressed more of an egalitarian view in his reflection and feedback on the discussion portion of the interview. His sentiments are as follows:

I really uh, haven't really sat around and put everything in this type of prospective . . . you know, I see society. I see what's going on and I see what's going on in the political arena. I see that. Also the African American viewpoint and all that but I haven't been really engaged, in let's say, the Black American focus or White American focus. I guess I look at things little differently. I look at things from an American perspective. I know we are a melting pot. I know that and I know we have value and unique characteristics per each ethnic group. I know we bring great stuff to the table but I don't look at it as being that individual side but I look at collective aspects of it. That's how I see things. Maybe I shouldn't but that's how I see it.

In addressing the concept of racial identification with the participants of this study, I reviewed their responses provided in their personal reflections. Each of the participants had come to a place of self-identity in relation to race. Therefore their responses demonstrated a sense of self as well as a sense of cultural heritage and pride in being a member of the African American culture. The participant Diane demonstrated this in her reflective statement, "Being proud of who I am. Period. Just being proud of me. Just being proud of who I am."

The participant Cinderella provided a similar sentiment in her statement, “It’s just who I am. I don’t feel I have to do anything special to meet the criteria the world sets for me. I just have to be true to who I am and that’s it.”

Both Diane and Cinderella’s statements embrace the concept of Helms’ stage of Internalization in which the individual’s “racial identity has become crystallized” (Helms, 1990, p. 36).

Although all of the participants had arrived at a place of cultural self-acceptance in their personal selection of a racial identifier, the journey for some was not always an easy one. The participant Anna Marie provided the following reflection which demonstrates the important role parents have in helping an African American child develop “psychological strength” (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009, p. 62). Additionally, Anna Marie’s reflection also demonstrates Thomas, Hacker and Hoxha’s (2011) statement that “racial identity serves as a buffer for acts of racism, discrimination or prejudice” (p. 531):

As an individual, its (interracial discrimination) sort of mostly hurting but at the same time, it was like a joy that I know who I am because of the way my parents raised us. So, in other words, if I just keep that in my mind, it doesn’t matter who I meet. I treat that person the way I want to be treated.

One participant provided me with a wonderful glimpse into the mental process that one may possibly go through in discovering his or her own level of cultural self-acceptance. The participant, Traveler, in her reflective discussion of her racial preference, shared her mother’s racial identification as well as how her mother, in essence, had an influence on the personal perception of the racial identification she herself had developed. Traveler’s reflection correlates with the statement of Dotterer et al. (2009), which discussed the concept of parental influence on the development of the child’s

“racial knowledge” (p. 63). In her discussion, Traveler acknowledged the different cultures within her family line and as such, provided the following thoughtful reflection as she journeyed alone to her own true personal racial identification preference. She stated:

I was Colored and I hardly remember that; but I told you about those water fountains. So of course I knew Colored. And when we became Black my mother objected to that. I never knew what my father thought about it. But my mother objected to that term because she said, “I am not Black” and I said, “Mother, they are not talking about your skin color, okay?” But you know her objection to that. Me being so young, it did have some influence on me. And then when we became African American and my Mother probably objected to that too; and I can understand why. Her father was half Indian and she had a grandmother who was half Irish so we know there was Africans somewhere in there but my mother is probably more Irish and more Indian than African. We’ve got African hair and all that kind of stuff so she objected to that not so much that she was negating their heritage or her African roots but because Africa was foreign to the United States and my mother objected to anything that was foreign. You being from San Antonio, you were foreign because you didn't come from our little section of Texas and it didn't matter if you were Black, White or what. If you didn't come from our little section of Texas you were foreign. So I remember my mom was objecting to some of that too but less than this term [African American] of being Black. So in actuality, I look back and I realized just how much I really was influenced by my mother. I probably prefer African American and one of the reasons I prefer African American is because if you think about it, African American means to those of us who are even in the little bit of the know, it means mixture. And it means mixture of so many things. So I preferred that [African American] because it gives you the indication that there is mixture.

Lawrence Green provided insight into the “cultural mixture” in his reflection concerning his discussion of his biracial children in regard to his and his wife’s decision of selecting a racial identifier for academic purposes.

The first time we actually faced a decision that we had to make--one we thought we would never have to make, was the decision on the “are they Black or are they White” issue? It was when we first signed them up for school. And it is interesting that we had different perspectives because to me they were always Black. I mean there wasn't a question about it and then for my wife . . . they were White. Yeah. Well, she kind of thought; ‘Well not so fast. There is some room for discussion here isn’t it?’ And honestly that surprised me. And maybe it shouldn't have, but in discussions we've had as we were filling out forms and things like that; it was that

she thought, ‘Well you know, are they Black?’ And we have since come to the decision that they are (hearty laugh).

One participant, Anna Marie, who reported that she has lived and experienced the change of the various aforementioned racial identifiers, jokingly alluded to the fact that the present “politically correct” identifier (African American) may indeed “change in a few years” demonstrating the constant search for an acceptable racial identifier of the African American. Anna Marie expressed the following reply concerning her racial identifier preference: “I do not have a preference. I guess if I could laugh about that a little bit, it’s like we change every three to four years (laughs); so, as long as you know who you are.”

As demonstrated in this section, some of the participants, in discussing the concept of being an African American in the 21st century, responded as if they were first mulling the concept over in their minds. Yet, in answering, they discussed some of the different identifiers that they had experienced Pre-Civil Rights Movement as well as Post Civil Rights Movement. Their reflections provided wonderful insight into the various paths that one may mentally travel in order to come to grips with the acceptance and ownership of his or her racial identifier as their own personal stance of cultural pride and self-identity.

Social identification. Although the participants’ acceptance of a racial identifier demonstrated their Internalized stages, they had to come to a place of comfort and acceptance in their social identity in relation to America in the 21st century. Belgrave and Allison (2010) state “identity focuses on self-ascribed definitions that include social roles, reputation, values, and possibilities” (p. 64). The participants’ responses clearly reflected their thoughts concerning their socialization as African Americans in America

and how they have adapted to a level of realization concerning their self view in relation to their acceptance in America as well as their own self acceptance.

Anna Marie provides a vivid demonstration of Allison and Belgrave's (2010) statement that "identity may be thought of as an adaptation to a social context" (p. 64). A beautiful dark-skinned woman, Anna Marie, provided a response which reflected that she still carries the pains of racial discrimination. Although proud of being an African American, Anna Marie does not feel that same sense of pride and acceptance in being in America as an African American in present day 21st century. This sentiment is demonstrated in her following statement:

To me, today in America, being Black is like a struggle; a struggle without the actual chains around my ankles, and my arms, and my neck. I feel it's a struggle because it's invisible.

"Social identity may include one's self-concept with relation to nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, health status, and racial and ethnic identity" (Belgrave & Allison, 2010, p. 64). Anna Marie not only acknowledged the concept of social identity and acceptance in relation to her ethnicity, but also in relation to the fact that she was an African American woman as noted in her following response: "I still feel today especially African Americans or Black females specifically, that there's still a struggle. We still have to (pause) demonstrate or we still have to reveal that we are three times better."

Anna Marie's statement, "We still have to . . . demonstrate or we still have to reveal that we are three times better" correlates with the participant's Neil's statement concerning interracial discrimination. Neil's statement is as follows: "I felt that I had to

be better than the White guy next to me. I couldn't be just as good because being just as good I was going to be overlooked. So, I had to be better.”

One participant, Air Defender, addressed his view of social identity and acceptance in relation to the election and acceptance of the first African American president. I noted that Air Defender had to process through his response before coming to a place of social acceptance as an African American in present day 21st century, as noted in his following response:

That's . . . that's a little difficult. Um . . . I never thought about that really. Um, being Black in the 21st century today, I know a lot of changes have happened in this 21st century. You know, first Black president that we have. I guess reason to be proud of that and how things have progressed. You know, in Black America. I think we have a lot to be proud of, so from that aspect . . . opportunity available to Black America, you know that we never had before. . . . As far as in the business sector . . . a lot of Black entrepreneurs out there. . . . So, yes. I have a lot of positive things in the 21st century that has occurred. So, I feel good about that.

Sylvester Drake took another position in discussing his social identity in being an African American in today's 21st century. Sylvester Drake presented a list of adjectives to note his concept of self-acceptance in being an African American present day. A demonstration of his individualistic view is as follows. “Strong. Educated. Approved quality of life. Um, Economically advantaged. Cultured. More open minded.”

Sylvester Drake's list of adjectives demonstrated his concept of the positive strides that have occurred within the African American culture as a whole and his personal adaption of those characteristics.

Education and social identity. Sylvester Drake presented the concept of education as being a component of his social identification. In the now historical case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, 1954, it has been appropriately noted that education for

the African American did not come without a price. Education is therefore an important factor for the Black in America.

Etienne provided a social view in his discussion concerning being an African American in today's 21st century and his desire to educate not only those within his peer group but those of younger generations as well. In his following response, Etienne demonstrated the qualities mentioned in Belgrave and Allison's (2010) concept of social identity in relation to "social roles . . . values" as well as his own "self-concept with relation to . . . religion" (p. 64). Etienne utilized the discussion on what it was to be Black in America today to discuss the importance of education and faith in the context of self acceptance and cultural and heritage acknowledgement.

An opportunity (pause) to teach (pause) either those of my peer group and young people about opportunity itself. Uh, what I mean by that is you know, not to focus so much on what you are but who you are and Whose you are; and from the Black American prospective I think it most important to understand Whose we are. And if I was to elaborate on that; because when we think about Whose we are, it gives us a sense of identity as to who are. I think that we lost that a little bit in America because when you think about Black America or we think about the Black experience, we first should think about our own existence.

Etienne continued to address his stance of social identification in relation to his concept of his experience or view in being an African American in today's 21st century.

I say that because one of the things about slavery was the intent to disconnect the people from their existence. And I'm going to elaborate on this because when I think about the idea of slavery, I wasn't taught to read because if I was taught to read I would understand who I was. And thereby you wouldn't have the power that you had over me (pause) as a slave. Now, the problem with that and I see that from this prospective. The problem with that is in America what were they teaching me. They were teaching me a different language, they were teaching me English. And you know the trouble; the struggle that I think we have with that is if I had learned to read in my native tongue you would not have had a chance to enslave me in the first place; The fear that might have come with me learning to read with the idea of why you didn't want me to read in the first place. So, I would say education is the key.

Etienne's discussion speaks to the heart of a recent statement made by Dr. Ben Carson on a national news show: "They (African Americans) need to realize that the reason that, that it was illegal to educate and particularly to teach slaves to read was because they knew that an educated person is a liberated person" (Fox News, 2013). Etienne and Dr. Carson's sentiments were addressed by Mitchell (2008) in one simple statement, "The bare name of educating the coloured people scares our cruel oppressors" (p. 78).

As history has duly demonstrated, African Americans eventually won the right and liberation to obtain an education. The participant Traveler truly demonstrates the personal freedom and liberation one obtains in being *an educated person*. Concerning the concept of social identification and the conceptualization of self, Traveler presented a response that echoed a true level of comfort and understanding in being the color of skin, as she expressed it, that she is *wrapped up in*.

Being Black in America has probably helped me to succeed because I have always been the unexpected because no matter where I moved rather it was amongst Black folks or White folks people never expected what they got from me. It was always the extraordinary beyond their expectations. . . . So for me being Black in America in the way that I have moved through being in the profession that I am in and going to the schools I went to and so forth; being Black has helped because it was the unexpected.

For an African American to reach certain educational, professional, and personal heights and achievements have indeed historically been the unexpected; yet Traveler and the other participants have obtained such heights and although they acknowledge that society has not always been an ally of the African American's quest for success, each participant openly and warmly discussed the special and supportive individual(s) who were involved in the personal journeys of their arrival to the place of having a strength in

the acceptance and comfort of being *wrapped up in the skin* as well as the culture that they were born into.

Negative societal perceptions of African American females. Unfortunately societal disapproval towards African Americans is not a new phenomenon and has played on the psyche of African American women of all skin tones. Belgrave and Allison (2010) provided the summary stating, “one’s beliefs and feelings about the self may be linked to one’s social group for those from interdependent cultures” (p. 64). Each individual participant demonstrated Belgrave and Allison’s (2010) discussion of interdependent and independent acceptance in consideration of “social context and the self . . . in relation to others” (p. 63).

The participant Traveler addressed a negative characteristic attribute that had been attributed to African American women and her decision to break the stereotype and take pride in not only her culture and in her race, but in herself as a person. Here is her reflection:

You know, you are younger than me, so maybe you don't know how people used to say Black folks always look like they are mad. And when I was growing up, one of the things that I did was to make sure I didn't look like I was mad. I always smiled so the fact that I smiled at people, no matter who you were or what you look liked, has always been something that has helped me out. So if you want to label me in a certain way I'm going to not be that label (pause) and that has been one of the reasons that being black has been good because I'm just going to be the unexpected black.

Black Princess expressed a similar sentiment concerning the perception of African American female in 21st century America:

I think the way that they portray Black people especially Black women, is that Black women are angry. Black women are quick to get an attitude. Black women are rude. Black women are disrespectful. That's what I see when I turn on the media; and there are Black women on typical programs, on reality TV, or news shows. It's always somebody either waving a finger in somebody's face or being

disrespectful . . . I think that is what I see as how Black women are being portrayed today.

I was fortunate to come upon a section of bell hooks' book, *Sisters of the Yams* (1993), which included a summation by Opal Palmer Adisa addressing the concept of anger and the African American woman. Her attempt to provide an explanation for the perceived anger is as follows:

Did you ever wonder why so many sisters look so angry? Why we walk like we've got bricks in our bags and will slash and curse you at the drop of a hat? It's because the stress is hemmed into our dresses, pressed into our hair, mixed into our perfume and painted on our fingers. Stress from the deferred dreams, the dreams not voiced; stress from the broken promises, the blatant lies; stress from always being at the bottom, from never being thought beautiful, from always being taken for granted, taken advantaged of; stress from being a black woman in white America. Much of this stress is caused by how the world outside us relates to us. We cannot control the world, at times we can change it but we can assert agency in our own lives so that the outside world cannot over-determine our responses, cannot make our lives a dumping ground for stress. (p. 61)

Although the angry look of a Black woman may be *justified* due to societal stressors and disappointments as eluded in Opal Palmer Adisa's poem, it is nonetheless perceived as a negative characteristic associated with both female and male Black Americans.

Although anger in Black Americans have been associated with being a "response to race-related experiences" (Carter, et al 2008, p. 102), the negative association concerning Black Americans and anger are viewed by some as being a "stereotypical social view" which "may also be contributed to counselors' and mental health professionals' tendency to overpathologize them" (Carter et al. 2008, p. 102).

The affect of validation for African American females. In addition to the negative characteristics that African American women have had as a stereotype, the African American woman has not traditionally been viewed by society as being a woman of beauty. It was only if she resembled a woman with European features that she

experienced favor due to her *beauty*. The lighter skinned the mulatto woman was the more attractive she was considered to be. The mulatto became the standard of beauty in the Black community—standards adapted from the European woman as noted by Anna Marie:

We see it with Tyler Perry. Yes, he has integrated color, but yet still that color has to look like what the media wants to see. I have to have the long straight hair; I have to have the Coco Cola shape. That's how I make it. If not, then I have to be fair skinned with the long hair.

Unfortunately, African American women with more Afrocentric features such as tightly curled hair were demeaned by such terms as *nappy headed* and categorized as having *bad hair* whereas straighter textured hair was considered *good hair*. This has undoubtedly had an effect on the psyche of African American women (hooks, 1993, p. 85). Black Princess provides a glimpse into the negative aspect of being a little African American girl with *non-straight* hair and the negative societal view she endured by her young White American peers. “Being a child and being called names by the White kids like nappy headed and things of that nature.”

Therefore it is imperative for African Americans to receive validation in their lives. Each of the six female participants provided a reflection of their validation by caregivers in their families of being beautiful Black American females.

In addition to the participant Traveler noting that she was indeed the “unexpected,” she also openly expressed and discussed the important role her mother played in helping her develop a strong sense of self and validating her beauty as an African American, as well as affirming of the beauty of her skin tone. With admiration in her eyes and enthusiasm in her voice, Traveler stated the following:

Oh, my mother absolutely. She, um, used to tell me, and I think this was just a part of building the self-confidence, would tell me that I was very pretty and had beautiful, beautiful brown skin. And like I said, it was just building the self-confidence but she had me believing it.

The participant Diane paused before providing her answer concerning who had indeed validated her as an African American female. Her response demonstrated an inner struggle concerning the concept of self-acceptance as well as the problems she encountered in relation to her social identification. Her response demonstrated the hurt and pain that she admittedly carried for many years.

(Pause) My mother. My mother even though she struggled with her things in her life but as a mother she always made me feel beautiful. She always made me feel special. She always told me I was beautiful. I don't know where I lost it; but, because for the most part I did hear that from her; but with everything that was bombarding me in my life I couldn't hold on to that little thing because everyone was telling me what I wasn't but she did do that. And my dad did too in his own way. He did but when you leave the safety of your home and you're out in the world and there's so many other people in your head being heard and badgered by Black folks, not the White man . . . you forget it. I forgot that's what they said to me. You know, (they) had always said to me but I lost it because I was bombarded with so much negativity that I couldn't find myself again until years later.

The participant Black Princess, who had presented in such a controlled manner during the interview, unexpectedly became teary eyed in discussing the concept of personal validation in being an African American. Her emotional response demonstrated how special she felt as an individual due to the validation she received.

The first person (pause) you know, I would probably say (pause) it would probably be my parents. Both of them because it was just a strong sense of, "Okay this is who we are but you know what? We can do much better. We are good people." Look I'm getting all emotional. "We are good people and we have the ability to go out there and do whatever we want." So see, I would say for me, it started in the home. It truly really does start in the home where my parents were very focused on, you know, making sure that me and my sister knew that we were beautiful and also letting us know the importance of not letting our color hold us back; that there are no limitations set on us and if there is it is because we were setting the limitations ourselves; And if we want something then we have every

ability, we have the intelligence, we have the mindset, and we have the ability to go out there and get those skills that we need and the education so that we may find out what we need to do to accomplish those goals. So it really started, for me, in the home.

The participant Anna Marie spoke with a sense of pride concerning the individual who had validated her beauty. She presented with a smile on her face as she provided the following response:

My mother (smiling). She would always sing in the kitchen. (Anna Marie starting singing the tune her mother would sing). “I’m getting married in the morning.” (Anna Marie continued with enthusiasm), we would be dancing and she would always touch my nose, “Cute as a button with a teensy nose.”

The participant Cinderella indicated that she too had received validation from within her family unit in the form of a song as noted in her following response. “My grandmother. Um, for some reason or not she had this ability to make up songs about her grandchildren and make me feel special.”

In interdependent cultures, the self is seen as connected to and linked within the surrounding social context, and the self is considered in relation to others. “Fitting in, attentiveness to others, and harmonious relationships are important” (Belgrave & Allison, 2010, p. 64).

The participant Joy provided a reflection demonstrating that her validation, as with the other female participants, too came from within the home. Her statement is as follows:

Probably Mom. Let’s see, my beauty as a Black woman. Well, you know, nobody has said that. Ain’t nobody ever said, Wow. You’re a beautiful Black woman. They just say either you are beautiful or you’re not. And I never equated it to what color I am. I do have people stop me and say, “What a beautiful smile you have.” No one ever attaches “for a Black woman on the back of it.” So, I hadn’t thought about it until you said that; but, you know. So, my parents have always told me, “You are beautiful.”

Through their reflections and life stories, the participants shared a glimpse of the confidence, pride, self- acceptance, self-esteem, and appreciation in being an African American woman who has been validated by individuals that care for and love her.

Racial validation. The racial validation for the African American male is vitally important in accordance with Mahalik, Pierre, and Wan (2006) who report that the “Black men’s racial identity in response to racism, or how much they prefer or identify with a Black or White reference group, is believed to contribute to their self esteem and psychological distress” (p. 94).

The Air Defender presented a point that demonstrated the self-esteem that his mother, through her love and admiration, provided him in validating him as an African American child. “I would have to say my momma (laughs). You know, I really have to say momma because momma would say, ‘Hey you handsome boy’ (laughs) . . . and ‘You look good.’ So, I would say my mom.”

Lawrence Green, through his reflection, demonstrated Scottham and Smalls’ (2009) concept that “caregivers engage in racial socialization more frequently with their daughters than their sons” (p. 808) as well as the fact that he not only received validation concerning being an African American from his caregivers, he also shared that he was provided with a validation to not adhere to any societal imposed limitations. In addition, Lawrence Green provided the following reflection that demonstrates Seaton, Yip, Morgan-Lopez, and Sellers’ (2012) statement that “racial socialization consists of the mechanisms through which parents transmit information, values, and perspectives about race and ethnicity to their children” (p. 450):

Mmmmm. My parents. Yeah, my parents growing up. They, they always, you know, they always validated everything we did, they always encouraged us and

told us we can do anything and that kind of thing and they led us to be more, more people of the world. My mother you know, was a strong Christian, not immediately, but you know when we were probably in our teens she became a Christian. All of us were saved in my parents' house and it's hard for me to describe but it's almost like they raised us to be people of the world not to just be," okay you are here and these are the only things you can do." "You can do anything. Don't let anything hold you back." And my mother always said, "I don't care who you bring home"; I mean not necessarily racial but just anything; I mean, but whomever you bring home, just as long as she loves you and you love her." So, I mean that was their impression so I mean even growing up, we dated, I mean me and my brothers we all dated people of any race and I mean it really didn't matter and my parents never, it was always, not just a Black person, be proud of who you are and everything that stands for. Whatever that means to you, be proud of that and make us proud.

The participant Bob Cat expressed the following concerning the individual in his life that provided validation to him as an African American. In his reflection however, he noted the social discomfort he felt in the academic setting during a history lesson that addressed slavery, demonstrating the internal discomfort that an African American child concerning his ancestral heritage of slavery even though he himself has never experienced it. His reflection is as follows:

Probably my grandmother and uh, she said "don't be ashamed of who you are. You are just like everyone else" and you know, she taught us. The only time I felt inferior; well not inferior; well yes I did, if you look at those history books and every time you open it up and the teacher is talking about slavery; see the Black person getting hit with the whip and you are reading, and you hear, "Bob Cat would you like to read" and I think not really but you know you start reading and all the White kids, they are listening, they are reading and are young just like I am but that's where a lot of complex and a lot of people; a lot of Black kids get these complexes; get these inferiority complexes because you know you are reading these history books and it just talks about how we were slaves.

With the residual of slavery in relation to the racial and personal validation of the African American male remaining prevalent in America's 21st century, it is imperative for the African American male to receive validation in relation to his racial identity.

As with the female participants, the male participants provided reflections concerning their validation as African American males. It was interesting to note that three of the participant's reflections of validation came from venues other than their caregivers as found with the female participants. However, through the responses of the male participants, it became apparent that a theme of affirmation had emerged as a result of their reflections.

The importance of affirmation for the African American male. The participant, Lawrence Green provided a reflection that demonstrated his perception of racism and the debasing of African American males in the present day.

In a recent commercial with (CB) and he's wearing a dress and . . . a lot of people have issue with, you know, anytime they see a strong Black man in a dress they say they are trying to humiliate the Black race; not that the person is trying to do it but the commercial or the media or whoever is making that movie is trying to um, somehow emasculate the Black male by showing it that as strong as he is, still we can put him in a dress and put him in a wig and have him act like this.

In relation to Lawrence Green's 21st century sentiment, I discovered a concept presented by Simon Wendt that addressed Lawrence Green's statement. Wendt (2007) provided a quote by historical sociologist Orlando Patterson who stated, "but the single greatest focus of ethnic domination was the relentless effort to emasculate the Afro-American male in every conceivable way and at every turn" (p. 545).

Sylvester Drake demonstrates this concept in his response that the affirmation of himself as an African American did not come from within his family unit nor from his like cultural group; however, it came from within his social setting during adolescence when, as stated by Seaton et al. (2012) "the complexities of identity are explored for youth" (p. 448). His reflection is as follows:

Um, I would have to say the situation in high school where the young lady liked being around me. She did not care about my skin color. Being the only Black male in the high school she still took it upon herself to let me know she had a crush on me even though I was the minority in an entire high school. The only Black male in the whole high school. That let me know that she looked beyond my skin color. She liked me for how I was.

The participant Etienne, after a long pause, also provided a response that did not reflect his validation as an African American from within his family unit but rather from a neighbor who, unknowingly, through his life example, made an imprint on Etienne that impacted his life in such a way that he continues to carry that demonstrated concept to this present day. His reflective gratitude and acknowledgement to this “mentor,” which took place during his adolescence years also, is as follows:

Frank (H). He was a Black American out of Louisiana. Uh, he and his wife, they used to live next to us off of the 5th ward in Houston, off of () avenue and I used to watch him. This was in 1964-65 and I would see him coming out in the street and he had a lunch pail in his hand and they lived right next door. You know a shotgun house. One big house split in two. You looked out of the back door; you looked out the front door. Uh, but I would always see him in the evening. I would never see him in the morning but I would see him coming home in the evening. I presumed he was coming from work. Working you know. And he always did that and then when I came back from Louisiana, I am kind of jumping here. I am jumping from 1966 to 1974; I moved back to Louisiana in ‘74 and I saw him. He, his wife and my mother . . . they were always good friends; and they lived in Houston and he (now) had a gas station. I like to look at it from the perspective if you know where I came from and then you might get lucky and see me there; and I saw him there. He had a nice home and a gas station and I worked for him. And for me, that was inspiring because as a Black American, it was like, he has a nice home, he has his own gas station, he got this big old Lincoln Continental. He got this wonderful wife, yeah. And that validated the ideal that as a Black American you can achieve and he was, yeah, he was somewhat of a mentor to me and I always thought he did right by his family. So yeah, and it hit me at just the right point because I knew what I wanted to do with my life. And I knew I wanted to be here. Right here in this place right here and I knew there was nothing wrong with that because all too often, we as Black Americans, we settle, and I never wanted to settle. So. Yeah. Frank (H).

The participant Neil had a somewhat of difficult time addressing the concept of validation of being an African American. He was the first participant that was unable to

provide an answer on the day of the initial interview. His initial response concerning validation is as follows:

(Long Pause). Wow. You know, I don't know. (Long Pause). That is an interesting question. I'm going to have to think about that. I honestly do not know . . . I don't know. (Pause). I don't know and you know it's like I think about and I have been thinking about this in the last two years about our (African Americans) education and my grandkids. I've been exposing them to more Black culture than I had ever been exposed to in literature because we didn't get that in school. We didn't get any historical figures that were Black other than George Washington Carver. That was the one there was no other and even though I grew up in the Civil Rights era and I was fairly knowledgeable of what was going on because one of the things I did was I always sat and watched the news with my Dad; and when he came home from work, he would watch the news and then I would watch the news with him every day. So I knew what was going on in the world as far as what we were exposed to concerning what was going on in the media. So I was exposed to the Kennedy assassination, you know, the war in Vietnam, and I was aware of all of those things but, I can't honestly, I can't think of any time I felt like I was validated as being Black. That's an interesting question and part of that from my family from my father's side of the family is that they also were very proud of their Indian heritage. I don't know if that was running away from being a Black or not but that's one of the things I've thought about in the last few years.

Neil approached me within a two day period of the initial interview day stating that he had been earnestly thinking about the validation that he received as an African American and had come to the following conclusion; that his validation came from within an academic setting.

You know you asked me that question as to who validated me as an African American and I have been thinking about that question. I would have to say it was a teacher of mine. Before him, I did not think I could achieve. He taught me that it was okay to be smart and to excel. So, I would have to say it was him.

Neil demonstrated the important role an educator can serve in the life of a child. The encouraging words and mentorship that an educator can present to their students may prove to be a life lasting event.

Summary. The racial validation and the affirmation of the Black African male by caregivers and mentors proved to be very important to the participants of the study. With

the participants Bob Cat, Lawrence Green, and Neil being provided positive affirmation and validation that they “were just as good as everyone else” and that they “could do anything and be anything,” they were validated. Additionally, the mentorship and modeling that took place in Etienne’s life also demonstrated the importance of affirmation in relation to self acceptance.

Theme Two: The Affect of Interracial Discrimination

The beginning of colorism and interracial discrimination in America that began with the concept of the enslavement of Africans by Europeans, produced emotional pain and hurt that continues to be experienced by Black Americans today. These emotions were reflected in the lives of the participants as expressed by Bob Cat in the following statement:

The stuff that went on through the years, you know, we have been held back as slaves. You know, it’s still going on today because there is still some prejudice in America and it has stopped some minorities from getting certain jobs and as much as you hate to believe that goes on, it’s just that you don’t know who these people are; you can’t identify them because they are not wearing those sheets like they used to wear.

The relational discord between America and the African American, of course, begins in the era of slavery and the discord continued to take place post slavery, as demonstrated by the lack of respect that African Americans were given by members of the White American race. The African American adult male was generally referred to as “boy” and the African American female was generally referred to as “gal.” Each were allowed to be addressed as either “boy” or “gal” or by their first name by White American children, further demonstrating the interracial discrimination that was being modeled and taught to a younger generation of White American children. The participant Anna Marie’s reflection notes how she as a young child witnessed the disrespect that

White American children were able to show her father. Rowley, Burchinal, Roberts, and Zeisel (2008) speak to this in their statement that “the expectation that someone from another racial group would discriminate against a member of one’s own group is an aspect of social cognition” (p. 1538). This type of behavior in the African American community had become both normalized and accepted as expressed by Anna Marie:

as far as saying White, Black; our parents again shielded us. So . . . it was pretty much normal that the storeowner was White and (for) his kids to say to my father, “Howard” but he (my father) had to say, “Yes sir” (to the storeowner’s children).

With Anna Marie’s account of disrespect and learned interracial discrimination of children toward an adult, Traveler’s reflection paralleled Anna Marie’s account thereby demonstrating the act of interracial discrimination and disrespect of an adult towards a child. Through her shared experience of her mother’s hurtful encounter as a six year old girl in 1930, Traveler demonstrated the societal views of that time. Here is Traveler’s reflection:

Oh yes. And I remember a particular one my mother told me that happened to her when she was young and my mother was the baby in the family of six children and her oldest brother was 18 years older than her; And they were apparently renovating doing work on the family home and the Carpenter was White; And I don't know how old my mother was maybe six or seven and she said the man told her “Have you ever seen a monkey?” And she said, “No” and she was playing outside where this man was working and he told her “Well go look in the mirror and you'll see one.” And I said to her “What? Did you tell, (we called her father Poppa) did you tell Poppa that?” And she said “No,” and I said “Never even later in life did you tell him?” Because Poppa would have never let that man work on their house and she said at that time she did know what it meant. It wasn’t until much later that she knew what it meant. . . . My mother was born in 1924 so that was around 1930.

Traveler’s mother may not have had an understanding of the discrimination that was being directed toward her due to a lack of cognitive skills, which according to Rowley et al. (2008), generally develop “around 7 or 8 years of age” (p. 1538).

As the study has demonstrated, African Americans, regardless of age, were subjected to the abuse of colorism and interracial discrimination. The participants have provided wonderful insight into the lives of the pre-Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights African American and the affect that the exposure to interracial discrimination has had not only on them individually, but in some cases placed a color line on members of their families.

The effectiveness of passing past and present. Some African Americans discovered a way to avoid the harshness and cruelty of slavery from that time period to the Civil Rights Movement — the concept of *passing*. The act of passing does not necessarily represent a desire on the part of the African American to denigrate themselves, but rather a tool of survival. One participant, Cinderella spoke of how members of her family *passed* for White for the sustainability of the family.

My mother's side of the family, when I was coming up, they talked about how they had to work; they did housekeeping, ironing, and whatever; but they never suffered for lack of food because . . . what people may have said, the White man took care of us; they probably did because they were family. So they brought food to my ancestors and we survived. They survived because I didn't live that; but they survived and I am here today because they were taken care of; so all wasn't bad. All wasn't bad.

African Americans generally referred to as mulattoes, who were a lighter skin tone and presented with European features, were able, in many circumstances, to pass as White Americans. Two of the participants were able to provide a reflection demonstrating that they had individuals within their family unit that had passed for professional opportunities, and personal enjoyment, and survival.

The participant Diane provided the following reflection:

My grandmother, my mother's mother did look White and she did cross over [pass]. She was a nurse even; and in those days you didn't have many Blacks that were in the medical profession. That was not very much heard of.

The participant Neil reported the following in relation to a member of his family *passing* in order to enjoy different aspects of life due to the color of her skin tone. He states:

My aunt . . . she was very light skinned, very light skinned. My grandmother was a little darker than my aunt so there was this thing that my aunt could go places pretty much freely where darker skinned people could not go.

The participant Dianne, who is of a lighter hue, provided a reflection that addressed the terms that she heard from within the African American community in reference to her color. Her reflection demonstrated a feeling of pain and hurt that she carried for a large portion of her life. Regarding the concept of passing, she provided the following statement that demonstrated that she herself would have passed, not to escape the harshness of slavery or ill treatment at the hands of White Americans, but rather to escape the harshness she experienced at the hands of other African Americans:

Absolutely. Some of them. Some of them. Because if I had a choice and to be totally honest with you; if I could crossover and be there because of the treatment I've had and never feeling accepted and in fact would give me an edge of an opportunity that I did not have because I was Black, I would do it only to experience what it would've felt like to make it or just to not be so oppressed. It would've been alive to just feel that for a moment.

Dianne demonstrated the concept presented by Russell et al. (1992) concerning how light skinned African American women felt as if they too had something to prove in relation to their skin tone.

In discussing with participants the concept of colorism based on lighter or darker complexioned skin tone, the participants provided their thoughts as to whether or not they felt that lighter toned African Americans had an advantage over their darker toned

African American kindred. The participants presented situations where they were viewed both positively and negatively based on skin tone.

The participant Sylvester Drake discussed the concept of passing in the past in relation to individuals of current day that symbolically pass or who have an advantage in the work place due to their lighter hued skin. He stated,

No. I think that they still have that complex to feel that they are better than some of the darker African Americans, and they use it to their advantage . . . it's only for their own economic or personal gain that they use it . . . when it comes together to enhance their career or improve their quality of life.

Sylvester Drake went on to share his reflection of a lighter skinned toned individual in the workplace and how he, in the opinion of the participant, utilized his skin tone to enhance his social and employment status as reflected in his following response:

Yes, in a job environment. An individual was in management and he would associate more with the Caucasians and as far as going to lunch, uh, going to dinner, socializing after work; things of that nature because he could walk the line. Because if you looked at him you could not tell that he was actually African American but he was and he had that light complexion; and he had, uh, green eyes. So he used that to his advantage for jobs and socially; and uh, he would use that to pass. That's what he did.

Etienne, a light skinned man, had a different take on the concept as to whether or not the lighter complexioned African American presented with an advantage in today's work environment. Although a proponent of Blacks passing for Whites in the days of slavery, due to the slaves being put in a position to "do what you gotta do," he provided a different view in today's concept of passing:

I think it is more theoretical and I think it is more of the perspective from those outside. Uh, because you sometimes hear, "Oh, she got that way or he got that way because he looks like them [White Americans] or acts like them" . . . I think it's kind of grounded in the idea of not so much from my perspective of being a light skinned person you know. I think it is how people look at me. How my own race looks at me. Oh, he thinks because he talks this way or looks this way, you

know. So, I think it is from the perspective outside of oneself and not myself that interpretation is landed.

Etienne's reflection demonstrated his concept of being negatively perceived by individuals based solely on his complexion.

Participants' view of societal discrimination. In the area of interracial discrimination, the study revealed that 11 of the 12 participants were able to reflect on specific experiences of discrimination that occurred in their lives. The remaining participant, Bob Cat, proved to be an outlier concerning his experience of interracial discrimination.

Bob Cat stated that he himself had never been a victim of interracial discrimination. However, what I found interesting is Bob Cat's statement that he would remain in his current city of residence so that he and his wife (an interracial couple) would not be subjected to the experience of interracial discrimination.

You know what? I never experienced that (interracial discrimination). I was just talking about that yesterday with my friend. I never experienced anything like that. I mean you hear it on TV and you hear it happening to other people but even with my wife being Mexican and Irish, I never experienced it; I don't know what people say behind your back or their facial expressions. You know people look at everybody and you don't know what they are saying. I used to get mad when people turned around and looked but as far as people saying, "I don't like you because you. . . ." No, I've never experienced that. No. Never. I've loved people all my life. I have been a fun loving guy all my life. I have never had anyone tell me they did not like me because of my skin color . . . I know if I move anywhere else, I may experience that (discrimination) so God hasn't told me to live anywhere else, so I am staying right here.

Bob Cat's response seems to be somewhat of a contradictory statement. His response leads one to conclude that he projects racial discrimination to be a verbal experience. I found the concept interesting due to Bob Cat's previous statement concerning his co-worker:

I remember I was working with this big German dude; his name was (A), he was just so comfortable. One day we were driving and he just said, “Yeah, my daughter is dating a Nigger” and I knew he wasn’t prejudiced. I wasn’t mad at him because I knew him. The guy had bought me lunch and . . . then he said, “Oh man, I am sorry.”

Bob Cat’s statement demonstrates that although he had an experience with interracial discrimination he did not personalize this as interracial discrimination. His reflection demonstrates his perception that he has never experienced interracial discrimination.

With Bob Cat being an outlier concerning his personal experience and perception of interracial discrimination, the remaining 11 participants were able to give a specific account of their experience in regard to interracial discrimination; some were able to provide an account of interracial discrimination that occurred in the lives of their parents. The parents passed down these accounts to the participants demonstrating that their parents had continued to carry the hurtful remembrance of being discriminated against as a result of their being an African American. Admittedly, the accounts expressed by the participants’ parents took place in the 1930s thru the 1960s. Yet, unfortunately, as provided in the personal reflection of the participants, racial discrimination and colorism continues to rear its ugly head in the 21st century as demonstrated in Traveler’s discussion.

Traveler provides a reflection of an educational conversation that she had with her young adult son concerning racial profiling in America. In this mother’s genuine concern for her son, she addressed racial profiling in relation to colorism. Her statement is as follows:

I think it still exists but I “X” it out of my own area. Now that does not mean that I am not aware of the fact that things exist. Like I tell my son, you happen to be

an African American man and you happen to be a dark skinned African American, “you have to understand that you are going to be profiled by certain groups; by certain people like the police you happen to be an African American man and you happen to be a dark skinned African American man and you happen to be driving a decent car and you're moving through an environment where there happens to be a lot of White folks, so, you have to be careful.” Now I know that does exist; but I also go on to tell him, “but that shouldn't stop you from doing anything that you can do that is legal.”

It is the 21st century, the year of our Lord 2013, and African Americans are still receiving words of caution in relation to skin tone. Traveler's statement conveys strength and resiliency to her son. Her statement, “you have to understand.” were the words of a mother who in one phrase spoke caution to her son in regard to colorism, racial bias, and racial group identity. Seaton et al. (2012) address this concept in their statement that “preparation for bias refers to parents' efforts to promote their children's awareness of discrimination and has been emphasized as a critical component of racial socialization” (p. 450). Traveler's statement “but that shouldn't stop you” were the words of a mother who not only serves as a living example for her son, but who also in one phrase spoke volumes of encouragement and wisdom to him. Traveler, in the advice she provided to her son, emulated the “result of Black women's historical efforts is the cultivation of three virtues—invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage” in their quest to sustain life (Ross, 2003, p. 7).

Although Traveler presents a different worldview than Bob Cat, they each present with a similarity in relation to their stance and perspective that interracial discrimination will not define them. As Traveler previously stated, she has made a decision to “X” it out of her area. Bob Cat presents with a similar stance.

See, I get all my blessings from God. I'm not taking credit for anything. I am trying to follow His [God's] ways and do things that He wants me to do. That's why some of those questions [BRIAS], I disagree with them because being Black

to me is like I say, a privilege because all the stuff that Black people have been through. He made me Black because He said, you can handle this. He made me Black and said you are going to go through this, but you can handle it. People don't want to hear that. . . . So, I feel like it's a privilege. That's how I feel.

Bob Cat's response not only demonstrated his faith and his belief in Psalm

139:14, it also demonstrated that he had reached a point of comfort as a person and a Black American.

Emotional residue of interracial discrimination. Belgrave and Allison (2010)

stated,

historically, African Americans in the United States have been described as having a negative self-concept and self-denigration as a result of inferior status in this country. . . . The self-concept of the Negro is contaminated by the central fact that it is based on a color-cast complex. (p. 66)

The following participants touched on this concept in their following reflections.

Lawrence Green stated:

You don't realize that you are just as smart as anyone out there; that if you apply yourself you have the same capacity as anyone else has but I think in a lot of cases young people just don't see that they don't see that around them. They don't have role models necessarily. Sometimes the father figure is not available to show them that kind of thing and sometimes if he is he doesn't believe it himself so he hasn't imparted that into his kids; and then in turn they just don't understand or maybe growing up they're told negative things about themselves not just because they're Black it may just be you know, any number of different reasons and they just don't feel like you know, feel in their mind that they can achieve.

Neil, after a long pause, stated the following in relation to his self-concept to

interracial discrimination:

The difference and the earning power clearly, uh, I'm just not sure that that leads to feelings of inferiority. My personal feeling is that, I will just speak for me, to get where I wanted to go, I felt that I had to be better than the White guy next to me. I couldn't be just as good because being just as good I was going to be overlooked. So, I had to be better.

With the participants discussing the concept of interracial discrimination in relation to their self-concept, they also provided a discussion of their experience to interracial discrimination and the personal effect it had on them.

The participant Cinderella provided an account of interracial discrimination that allowed her to show kindness to those of another culture as she had been taught in her family unit. She provides a wonderful account of how her upbringing has aided her in the development of interracial relationships:

I remember, um, going to an all Black school and we had a family come to Fort Lee, Virginia, and they lived in our town of Hopewell, Virginia, and they were white and their two girls were the first two White girls to attend our school. I remember how my fellow students picked at them because they were different and I always thought, why. I was always raised people are people so I invited them to go home with me, and guess what? They did and that's how it's been for me and my family. We don't see color of skin we see individuals who need to be nourished and loved and cared for and all the good things that we are supposed to do for each other so that was my first encounter. There have been others. As I continue to live, I just laugh a little bit more now.

Lawrence Green provided an account of his becoming aware of the Ku Klux Klan and his reaction to this type of exposure to the concept of interracial discrimination.

There was always something on the news about the Ku Klux Klan. I remember one time the Grand Wizard, he got on the news and he said they were going to march in every city in North Carolina every weekend so the whole year they would hit all the major cities in North Carolina and it was something that was just so foreign to me; I had heard about it of course but this was the first time up close I experienced it. I would go to local shopping centers, I mean it just felt so different and I had never felt that way before in my whole life.

Lawrence Green goes on to state the emotional impact that his exposure to interracial discrimination has had on his life as an African American.

Well, it made me. . . . It didn't make me second-guess myself because of my experiences. Up to that point [it] was all positive in [my] dealing with all races. It just made me understand that everybody you meet isn't the same and that doesn't necessarily mean a negative on myself. It's just the way they view the world or they view things and uh, it really made me realize that this thing called racism that

I heard so much about, it still abides and it still exist and yeah, it can be directed at you. And 'til that point I had never felt anything like that ever. I mean being an Air Force brat it's just so different. Yeah.

Lawrence Green's statement, "that doesn't necessarily mean a negative on myself" is a statement that may reflect his *private regard*, as noted by Bynum, Best, Barnes and Burton (2008), who state "private regard may help protect African American males from the emotional consequences of racism. African American males may be less likely to internalize these negative experiences and more able to deflect them cognitively and emotionally when they occur" (p. 146). This concept may also address the experiences of two of the male participants who experienced interracial discrimination first hand.

Sylvester Drake recalled the following incident of a negative racial slur that was expressed to him by a supervisor in a work environment:

I (once) had a job as a supervisor and was with another supervisor on the loading docks. I thought we were cool. You know he was Caucasian and I thought we were okay. So one Saturday, I am talking to him and we were talking about work. And you know, as we were talking, he had a few beers and he forgot who he was talking to and out of his mouth as we were talking, he called the people on the loading docks, a lot of our people (African Americans), he said "Niggers" and he was talking to me. I guess he forgot because he had had a few beers and he forgot who he was talking to. That right there let me know . . . you are still going to be looked at as who you are regardless; you know, professionally or not. They [White Americans] still look at you in some way.

Bob Cat provided a similar recollection of the same racial slur that too was expressed in a work situation:

I remember I was working with this big German dude; his name was (A), he was just so comfortable. One day we were driving and he just said, "Yeah, my daughter is dating a Nigger" and I knew he wasn't prejudiced. I wasn't mad at him because I knew him. The guy had bought me lunch and . . . then he said, "Oh man, I am sorry." I told him, "Man, don't worry about it but just a word of advice, just be careful. Don't run up on somebody and say that word. It will get you killed. . . ." We used to have a guy that worked with us and we called him,

“Nigger Joe.” That’s just what we called him. Man, I loved that guy (A) to death, but he didn’t know no better; it’s just ignorance.

Through Bob Cat’s reflection the ignorance of racism that may become a part of an individual’s level of normal functioning was demonstrated. Bob Cat’s reflection demonstrated how an individual who functions among different cultures may in essence have racial tendencies which emerge when at a level of personal comfort.

Summary. The concept of interracial discrimination and the affect that it has had on the participants has been demonstrated through their reflections. Unfortunately, the ignorance of interracial discrimination that Bob Cat spoke of was not exclusive to White America. The ignorance that bred the concept of colorism between Black Americans and White Americans also gave birth to discrimination within the race of African Americans itself producing the offensiveness of colorism that continues to impact the African American culture in the present day.

Theme Three: The Impact of Intraracial Discrimination

In *Roget's Thesaurus* there are some 120 synonyms for blackness and at least sixty of them are offensive, such words as blot, soot, grim, devil, and foul . . . Ossie Davis has suggested that maybe the English language should be reconstructed so that teachers will not be forced to teach the Negro child sixty ways to despise himself, and thereby perpetuate his false sense of inferiority . . . (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1967, Eleventh Annual Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Delivered in Atlanta, GA 16 August 1967)

Dr. Martin Luther King stated that the Roget’s Thesaurus had a vast number of offensive synonyms in relation to the word black. Cinderella expressed a personal point of being able to “laugh a little bit more now” in relation to interracial discrimination. But what of the concept of intraracial discrimination? Where is the laughter when the derogatory and degrading terms, and discrimination are coming from within your own

culture? Breland (1998) records skin tone as, “the visible color gradations that exists in the African American racial group” (p. 297).

Cinderella stated the following sentiment that not only addressed the concept of derogatory terms she had heard within the African American community, she also addressed the concept of cultural and personal self-respect.

Sometimes we have been our own worst enemy by using the term, Nigger. We have used the term, boy to be demeaning in the past. Why we feel the need to do those things can be mind-boggling. Get away from that stuff. Leave it in the past. Respect each other because when you respect each other, the world sees that. While we demean ourselves, what can we expect from everyone else? It doesn't matter if you are red, White, Black or whatever. If you do not respect yourselves or each other who else is going to do it?

With individuals of other cultures using the N-word in their everyday language, as noted above, African Americans themselves using the N-word in reference to one another is an aspect that needs to be looked at and addressed. Intraracial discrimination is just as hurtful, if not more so, than interracial discrimination. African Americans use the N-word as a derogatory term in referring to one another. The younger generation of African Americans state that they use the word *nigga* as opposed to *nigger* but it is still the same word. As Bill Cosby and Alvin F. Poussaint, (2007) state, “you can't change its meaning by saying *nigga* instead of *nigger*” (p. 145). “Martin, Malcolm and Medgar Evers must be turning over in their graves. ‘They put their lives on the line. Why? So our young people can pick up where white people left off and debase themselves instead of being debased?’” (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007, p. 16).

Etienne's reflection not only echoed the concerns of Bill Cosby and Dr. Alvin Poussaint, he also provided terms that reminded me, as discussed in the portion on interracial discrimination, of the notion of African Americans being compared to or made

to look like apes and monkeys in caricatures which date as far back as the early 1900s.

Etienne's reflection of the continual poison of racism that infects African American minds to the point that they use these terms to refer to one another within the culture is as follows. (Please note that Etienne's use of the term *honkey* that he used in his reflection is in reference to a lighter skinned African American and not to a White American):

Like nigger, spook, coon, honkey. Yeah, the full gamut. Even from within and it's still prevalent today. We don't say nigger, we say nigga. You're my nigga; and it amazes me because it is perfectly acceptable for us to say it to one another. But let some White boy come on up there and say, "You my nigga" and then you want to fight. I never understood that. You have already denigrated yourself (by) calling yourself nigga; so why, (laugh) why get mad when a White boy comes up and says it to you. Now you want to get uppity. How you going get uppity when you have already denigrated yourself? Now that's the thing about that; how are you going to get uppity when you have already denigrated yourself; don't get upset when someone validates that, it just confirms what you have already said about yourself.

Concerning the embarrassment of African Americans making reference to another African American, Lawrence Green provided a reflection that addressed a friend being very comfortable referring to him as a *Nigger*. This unfortunately served as an embarrassment to both the participant and his acquaintances. His reflection is as follows:

I got stationed in North Carolina and . . . my friend was probably a few years younger than me and he would always come by my office, unannounced. He would just bust in the door and he would be what you might call, cobbler stoned country and (laughing) and he would try to talk to all the girls; to all the women that we would work with and that kind of thing. So one day, I'm out there in my apartment; I had no idea he was in town and I was going to sell this white convertible; and there are these two guys talking to me about my car; these two White guys and they lived in my apartment complex and so I knew them. Then my friend came rolling up and he said, "Hey, man" and they (my neighbors) said "Mr. Green is thinking about selling his car" and he (my friend) said, "That nigger ain't gon sell that car;" they were shocked because they had never heard Black people talk to each other like that (laugh) and so they didn't know what my response was going to be and for the rest of the time they didn't talk; they couldn't get away fast enough; but you know to my friend that was just natural conversation to him; it didn't mean anything; he didn't even know he said it because that's just how he talked and that's how he expresses himself and of

course I was a little offended by it but then I was embarrassed by the fact of who he said it around more than anything.

Emotional pain of intraracial discrimination. Sylvester Drake, who is a very dark-skinned African American male provided a litany of debasing terms that have been used in reference to him by other fellow African Americans within his community:

Well, growing up, because of my skin complexion, I was being made fun of by my own people. Uh, it was all kind of different names that I was called. You know. Crispy critter. Uh. Let's see. Burnt bacon. Charcoal. You know, just all different names referring to my skin color as I was growing up. By my people. People in the community; and African Americans in the community.

Dianne provided a very emotional reflection that demonstrated the pain one may feel in experiencing colorism in relation to intraracial discrimination:

Black people that I was raised with were so mean spirited. So mean, so hurtful they spit on you. That has happened to me. Uh, girls used to run me home from school; I'm gonna beat you up after school for no other reason than I am light-skinned with long hair and they want to beat me up for that. Now why? I didn't do anything to you. Why don't you like me? We just don't like you because how you look. You think you're White. No I don't. I'm just me; but that wasn't good enough (embarrassing look as tears started to flow).

Dianne, through her expression of sadness and disappointment in being treated negatively as a light skinned African American, exposed her internal wounds and emotional scars that she continues to carry to the present day. Although she experienced emotional and physical abuse, Dianne did not make an indication to me that she wished she had “darker skin” or that having darker skin would have made her life easier or made her feel more accepted. This point of inference is in direct accordance with findings by Ronald Hall (2008) who stated the following concerning lighter-and darker-skinned toned women:

Nearly all the dark-skinned women wanted to be lighter at some time in their lives in order to accrue some of the privileges of light skin. In contrast, despite the painful stories of exclusion from many light-skinned women, none reported ever

wanting to be darker-skinned. This significant difference points to the enduring and substantial privilege of light skin. (p. 72)

Hurt by the voices of family. The participants shared some really special reflections concerning the concept of intraracial discrimination. Two participants however shared a concept of colorism that took place within their family units. The participant Joy, who is light brown in complexion, provided a reflection of colorism that took place in her immediate family unit between her and her sister. Joy's reflection is as follows:

Uh, intraracial discrimination was my sister and I. I have two sisters and all three of us are different colors. So, I have a sister that is dark, a sister that is medium brown which we called pretty and then there's me. I'm not as light now, but I was the color of light brown with light blonde brown sandy hair. So my middle sister, who was the darker one, would have her slang words for me and we fought regularly . . . she would call me "high yellow" and anything else she could think of. So I started calling her "darkie." You know, so internally, in our family, we have intraracial issues.

Anna Marie's provides a reflection of her first hand experience with colorism through the words of her own relatives. Here is her reflection:

she's pretty. Her hair is pretty. She's fair skinned. She's beautiful. So, I observed that through relatives, great aunties and all of that who loved to pull hair and all. And of course mine was kinky so they couldn't pull it all the way down but my sisters all had red hair. So, I experienced that.

Anna Marie, demonstrated how colorism not only is present in today's society, she also provided a reflection that demonstrated how colorism had infiltrated itself within a family unit and has set the stage for possible discord between siblings. She shared that she instinctively protected her granddaughter from those who were supposed to provide security and acceptance; her family. Anna Marie's reflection is as follows:

I see it (colorism). I see it every Sunday. When I have my granddaughter, I see it. When we had a family reunion about two years ago, and it was pretty much a diverse group there at the family reunion, I saw it; my granddaughter's sister, who

was visiting us at church, is just a little darker than she is. My granddaughter, who is sort of fair skinned, she was just the princess of the ball; this little girl, every time she moved people would have somewhat negative things to say. So much so, I took her out of the atmosphere (whispering) I removed her and they are sisters.

In the realm of intraracial discrimination, the participants shared not only incidents but terms that they had been exposed to in their childhood and teen years within their own African American community in an effort to show how the African American culture had adapted and utilized terms that denigrated one another. The terms demonstrated in the participants' reflections in essence could have served as a deterrent as well as having had the potential of diminishing a strong sense of self; but as previously stated, the participants were able to reflect on an individual or individuals in their lives who nurtured and assisted them in developing a strong sense of self regardless of the hate and hurtfulness that fellow African Americans as a culture chose to impart upon one another.

Passing the torch of colorism onto the next generation. Neil, a light brown man, provided terms that also were directed toward individuals who were dark in skin tone, demonstrating that African Americans within the African American community spoke in derogatory terms when referring to individuals darker in skin tone and color. "Oh, probably 'darkie' would be the predominant one or just 'dark' or before black was okay it was 'black' or, 'they are too black' or 'he or she is too black.'"

Neil, in providing the terminology that he was exposed to as a child, provided a reflection when he used negative skin referral words in an encounter with a neighbor. Although he admits he was too young to remember the incident, his mother passed it down to him. His reflection is as follows:

This makes me think of when I was a small child, (laughs) probably three or four I think. No, I had to be five and our next-door neighbors were Black and they had children. They had a little boy who was a year older than me and the little girl who was a year younger than me; and the mother was very, very dark skinned. My mother is light skinned and apparently, I said something like, “Ooooo, that woman is really Black” (laughs). I don't remember that. My mom has told me about that. So there you go. As a five-year-old (laughs) you know I'm making the differentiation that she is really, really dark skinned and (I) compared (her) to the people in my family. So I don't I think like that today. I don't make that kind of a judgment. It may run through my head and I dismiss it. It is not right but it's fair; like I said even as a five-year-old it was there.

Cinderella, also provides a reflection of intraracial discrimination that occurred in her childhood that has been recollected to her by her family members. It is as follows:

I was a little prejudiced as a child. I was very, very yellow when I was born and I had some really, really dark skinned cousins and I bit them. I didn't bite the lighter ones; but I bit the darker ones (laughs).

Neil's statement, “even as a five-year-old it was there” as well as Cinderella's statement “I was a little prejudiced as a child,” demonstrates the statement by Rowley et al. (2008) statement that “little is known about the nature of children's expectation for discrimination in social settings or the factors that influence their development” (p. 1537).

Joy shared with how colorism is being impressed onto another generation of children, as demonstrated in her following reflection:

I have my sister who's dark. Her mother-in-law is strictly for White people. So I have a niece, her daughter . . . turned out very fair and she cried a lot when she was in other people's arms, but her grandmother pretty much embedded in her mind, that's because Mom [my mother] is dark or that's because (R) [the child's mother] is dark and she [the child] doesn't like dark people.

Perception of colorism in relation to attractiveness. Anna Marie discussed her feelings about the notion that colorism is as prevalent today in the 21st century as it was in the days when she was a child. As I listened I took note that Anna Marie views the

actions of individuals today who display a preference toward other African Americans based on skin tone and hair texture to be an unconscious act. In short, the concept of colorism may be so engrained in the minds of African Americans that they are not even aware that they are participating in an ideology that began in slavery. Anna Marie shared:

I feel it is still the same. I really do and I hear it so often and I think people are not thinking consciously. And I see it happen so much. When they see a fair skinned child or a boy, curly hair, you know and they say, "Oh, he's handsome." "Oh, he's cute." "Oh, she's beautiful." "Oh, she's. . . ." But then you see the little one over here, hair braided; rarely do you hear it so much openly; and then it's like a second thought, "Oh, she's pretty."

Sylvester Drake, addressed the concept of colorism from the other side of the prism. Sylvester Drake also believes that the concept of colorism is still prevalent in the African American community. He provided a reflection that demonstrated that darker skinned African Americans were "more favored" in the present day over lighter skinned African American males. In reviewing his statement, I found it interesting that he, being a darker skinned African American male, noted that African American females were more attracted to darker skinned African American males but did not state that African American males were more attracted to darker skinned African American females. His reflection in relation to colorism within the African American community is as follows:

In our community I do not believe it exists. I think we have evolved as a people where in the past that was something that everyone as far as African Americans, you know the fine hair and the light skin. Back in the day it used to be, you know, the ladies would like them, the guys that had the good hair they would say. But now, uh, it's like the tables have turned, the darker complexion, the more strength the man has. The African American females look at the men not so much the hair anymore as being a symbol of good looks. It's more about intelligence and I believe that even the darker the African American is, I mean the males, it's like the more we are looked up to or the more we are appreciated; more than the lighter skinned African American [man].

Sylvester Drake was specific in his statement that, “I believe that even the darker the African American is, I mean the males, it’s like the more we are looked up to or the more we are appreciated; more than the lighter skinned African American.” He demonstrates his belief that the same concept of attractiveness and acceptance was not bestowed upon the African American female of darker complexioned skin.

In looking at the reflections of Sylvester Drake concerning his intelligence and strength in being a darker skinned African American male may be as recorded by Hall (2008) as the “self-corrective response to a societal bias for fair skin” (p. 139) as well as for the concept of intelligence in relation to being darker complexioned (p. 140). The writings of Russell et al. (1992) addressed this concept:

By the time they are teenagers, African-American children have well-defined stereotypes about skin color. Charles H. Parrish was one of the first to explore the nature of skin-color stereotyping in Black teenagers. He discovered in the 1940s that junior-high students used as many as 145 different terms to describe skin color, including “half-white,” “yaller,” “high yellow,” “fair,” “bright,” “light,” “red-bone,” “light brown,” “medium brown,” “brown,” “brown skin,” “dark brown,” “chocolate,” “dark,” “ink spot,” “blue black,” and “tar baby.” Each term was associated with a particular personality type: in general, light to medium skin tones were linked to intelligence and refinement, while dark skin tones suggested toughness, meanness, and physical strength. (p. 66)

Sylvester Drake’s self-reflection demonstrated that the variables, strength and intelligence, involved in the stereotypes presented by Parrish over 70 years ago (Russell et al., 1992) are still held in the mindset of African Americans today, although his perceptions are in essence the inversion of Parrish’s.

Colorism in relation to relationship building. Etienne provided a reflection that also demonstrated Parrish’s concept in relation to skin tone exploration and stereotypes. Etienne highlights his developed preference of African American women in relation to their skin tone, including the selection of his wife. Here is his reflection:

To be honest, uh, as I as I grew up, I tended to find myself attracted to women . . . women of my own complexion or lighter. Yes. Not to say I did not, or would not have been with someone of a dark complexion. “We close.” (Holding his arm next to his wife’s arm). But, yeah, I tended to pick the lighter skinned preference and I think it was because of my own (pause) belief; that in my belief of what I thought the offspring would be like as far as I’m concerned. I will leave it at that. That way it will stay decent at that point.

African American women have undoubtedly been the victim of intraracial discrimination as a direct effect of the ideology of skin tone and hair texture preference in relation to European features. Etienne’s statement that “I tended to pick the lighter skinned preference and I think it was because of my own belief . . . of what I thought the offspring would be like. . . .” is a concise example of the misconception that darker skin toned individuals would be less attractive than those of lighter skin. But what of the other male participants concerning mate selection? Did skin-tone play a role in their mate selection? One male participant reported yes, three male participants reported no and one participant stated that he was not sure if colorism had played a part in his selection of a mate. Lawrence Green’s reflection is as follows:

Pause. I would like to say no. But in all honesty, I don’t know. It may have. The way I prefer to think about it and I hope I’m right is, I date who I was around and who I knew, and who I would interact with and who someone would introduce me to and I would hate to think that it did but to be honest, I don’t know. I mean, I’ve dated women of all races and ethnicities and that kind of thing but I would like, I would hope to think that it didn’t.

In comparison, the study discovered that of the six female participants, four stated that colorism did not play a part in their selection of a mate with the remaining two participants stating that colorism was indeed a factor in their mate selection. Dianne expressed the following:

Absolutely (laughter). Well they say opposites attract and I was never attracted to lighter complexioned man and I think that kind of in our system of “us” we tend to like opposites. . . . You know, same personality types are not going to be

attracted to same personality types. . . . I don't know if that was the trauma of modern life or if I just have that preference. I don't like light or white men. They need to be chocolate or darker (laughter).

The findings of the female participants in relation to colorism and mate selection is in correlation with the findings noted in Hall (2008) which indicates that African American women do not necessarily utilize skin tone preference as a criteria for mate selection due to “being aware of skin tone issues” and are therefore “more egalitarian than men” (p. 139).

“Black enough” in variation. Breland (2008) relates this concept concerning lighter skinned African American women as being “often viewed as not being ‘Black enough’ (i.e., not having strong ties to their ethnic identity by their darker peers” (p. 294). Today’s concept of not being “Black enough” is a term that would imply that African Americans are to display a certain persona in order to be considered “Black.”

Concerning the concept of “being Black enough,” I addressed this subject with the participants. I noted that each participant paused before providing a thought concerning this topic. Some of the participants were somewhat agitated, not by the question, but rather by the concept that the term had become a part of the African American culture. The participants’ reactions and responses to the term, “being Black enough” are as follows:

In addressing his understanding of the term, “being Black enough,” Air Defender paused for approximately 20 seconds before addressing the question. After which, he stated the following,

Okay. (pause) . . . it’s the environment in which you grew up in. It’s the values that you know you grew up in . . . from birth on up to your teen years and everything else. . . . Everything. It’s also the environment, the area you lived, you know, poor, middle class, upper class. . . . You know it all boils down to who you

hang out with, friends that you have and everything else. And also rather or not you are really motivated even when you are in school. You know learning is really getting a great education. . . . You may not speak slang or the language that some of us African Americans have. . . . You don't talk like you are from the hood or something like that. So, uh, I think it all depends on the environment of which you grew up in and also in how you want to convey yourself. It has nothing to do with being Black or not, it's just the culture in which you are living in and which you are to operate in.

Cinderella provided the following response to her understanding of the term being

Black enough:

You know what? I hate that. What's being Black enough? Is it the color of that skillet that we used to use on the stove? You know, I just think that needs to be erased from the terminology. I think that it's just being right enough. Just being a person. Black enough, what is that? What is being Black enough? I really think, (laugh) I don't know if I can answer that question if you ask me to point it out in a color, I can show you a black skillet, you know there is black dishes but as far as a Black person is concerned, I don't see a Black person.

Before providing his response to his opinion of the term "Black enough," Etienne

replied that he was enjoying the interview. He then provided the following response:

I have no idea. Because I think there are certain terms and slogans we put on ourselves. We have things put on us. There is no such thing as "are you Black enough?" Are you White enough? I mean, no one runs around saying, Are you White enough? Are you Mexican enough? Are you Black enough? I mean, I mean what? What do I have to do? Do I have to swallow some tar or something. Something, you know, dip myself; you know . . . maybe when Bill Bo Jangles put on the Black paint, they asked him, Are you Black enough? Maybe when folks like, I may be reaching a little bit, folks like Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly would paint themselves like minstrels, they were asked, "are you Black enough?" You gon' get on television, are you going to act like you Black. Hogwash. I don't understand where it came from. Um, and I think euphemisms such as that really don't have a place today because of where we are. There is a Black American in the highest office in the land. So, Black American drop that euphemisms, drop that slang because certainly it has no place today. I think Barak Obama proved that. What's this thing, "Are you Black enough? I guess there is still someone out there who thinks you still have to have a measure of Blackness to prove something. I don't even think, there was a Black enough standard for the Black panthers, Eldridge Cleaver; because when you look at them, they were mainly light skinned. You know, so I don't know if they had this standard for themselves. So, I don't know.

Dianne provided the following concerning the concept of being Black enough in the following manner,

Ooooh; Okay that's a good, good question. In high school it was hard for me to get my hair to go into an Afro and back in the 70s you really wanted to do the Black thing; your hair had to look a certain way. I don' have dreads. I don't look good in dreads; I don' want dreads. Some people feel that, I don't know, I'm not going to assume I know why they feel they have to identify with anything that's Afrocentric; anything that looks like the motherland. (laughs); But for me; not being Black enough; for me, I wasn't dark enough. I didn't feel Black enough because of my hair and my hair is not that great of hair. It is just that it was long and my skin color. I never felt Black enough. I just didn't. I didn't and even today (crying) so long I tried and tried and tried for show many years. I tried to be like other people. "Okay let me be like this person because they seem to have it together" and you know, try and talk proper; and I had to discover who I was. I'm funny. I like to make other people laugh because I had so much pain in my life and I didn't realize I have to give to be able to break down walls with so many other people. So now I get to laugh and I like to make other people laugh; but, it does not take away my sincerity of who I am. I am very serious about who I am but also the funny person is who I am and I'm okay with that and I'm black and I'm proud of who I am (laughter).

Black Princess stated her understanding of the term. "What does it mean to be Black enough?"

Being Black enough? When I hear that term, I think it's not about the color of your skin. It has a lot to do with your attitude. A lot of how you see how you carry yourself. It is about the people you interact with. Do you interact with more Black people? Do you have some White friends? Because when I hear Black enough and when I've heard that term used, it's usually referred to people who are in situations to do things with White friends and they do interact with White people and they are in situations where they deal with White people and they are comfortable with White people. And actually when you hear that term, are you Black enough is because somebody has decided, "you know what, I'm going to explore outside of my race." It's okay to have White friends, Asian friends. It's okay to do that but a lot of times when we do those things, a lot of time, our own people will put it back in your face as like, you're not Black enough or you've forgotten where you came from as you have decided, Okay I can. It's okay. It's okay to deal with White people. It's okay to deal with Asians. It's okay to deal with Hispanics. But as soon as you step out of that, and you want to deal with more people than the people that are inside of my culture, is when that term gets thrown around; you're not Black enough or you need to be more Black; you need to act Black, you need to talk Black. I've personally been told that you need to talk Black; and please educate me what Black talk is because I'm still trying to

figure that one out. Because you see Ebonics in the urban dictionary, that's not the way to go. That's not the way to go.

Joy provided the following response to reflect her understanding of the term, “to be black enough:”

Um, to be Black enough; you can be an Uncle Tom. I would almost say you can't have a decent job and live in a neighborhood that's not all Black because you know people got mad she was a you come back at them and then they are alike all year you know she is plenty black so approach if you want to but you know don't be offended he but no my own family you talk white and that has happened since I was a kid you know you're very proper and that has happened since I was a kid you speak or you know I don't I tend to go to where you know I tend to go where I think it is a nice comfortable neighborhood and if I want to go and leave the door unlocked and open then so what so they may think I'm not black enough and then anybody bold enough to actually you're bold enough to hear it so laughter.

The participant, Lawrence Green provided the following response to the term, “being Black enough:”

Mmmm. Um. I kind of grimace at that because I would think people, some people would say that I'm not. You know every time I hear that term, if I weigh it against myself, I would think that somebody external would think that I'm not Black enough and when I hear that term, it kind of, it hits me different ways you know, hum, I don't know if there's such a thing as being Black enough to be honest with you. I mean, I can only be who I am. I am not going to try to flaunt for somebody. I'm not going to try to pretend I'm someone I'm not if I am around someone else who considers themselves more Black because more they are more Black than I but I mean, I've heard it about but as far as my opinion of it, I mean there is no such thing being Black enough or not Black enough. I mean, if you are comfortable with whom you are and you can look at yourself in the mirror and be proud of what you represent then you need to be.

Sylvester Drake providing the following response for his understanding of the term “being Black enough:”

Um. Black enough is not about the skin tone. It's about who you are as a person regardless of the skin tone. You can care less if you are dark skin or whatever. You know it's how you speak and what you believe in. That to me is what determines the skin tone. Um. I have a granddaughter who is mixed, um, race she is Caucasian and Black and I've raised my son not to believe in that skin tone uh to be racially biased so it is all about who you are as a person and what you think

about and what you speak about. How you speak tells whether or not you are Black. You believe you're Black.

The participant Bob Cat provided the following reply as his understanding of the term, "being Black enough":

Mmm. Hum. I kind of grimace at that because I would think people, some people would say that I'm not. You know every time I hear that term, if I weigh it against myself, I would think that somebody external would think that I'm not Black enough and when I hear that term, it kind of, it hits me different ways you know, hum, I don't know if there's such a thing as being Black enough to be honest with you. I mean, I can only be who I am. I am not going to try to flaunt for somebody. I'm not going to try to pretend I'm someone I'm not if I am around someone else who considers themselves more Black because more they are more Black than I but I mean, I've heard it about but as far as my opinion of it, I mean there is no such thing being Black enough or not Black enough. I mean, if you are comfortable with who you are and you can look at yourself in the mirror and be proud of what you represent then that's what you need to be.

Traveler, provided the following response in relation to the understanding of the term "being Black enough":

Now I know I have always had a problem with that. I have always had a serious problem with that from the time I was very young even before people began to use the term because I think that probably came along around 1970 somewhere around in there and by that time I was pretty much formed in terms of who and what I was and I didn't know how to be Black enough. I only knew how to be me and I just didn't understand what to do with that term. It still is one of those things that I discard, that I discount. I don't like to hear folks talk it and say it because I don't know what it means.

Traveler's last sentiment, "I don't like to hear folks talk it and say it because I don't know what it means" captures the sentiments of the remaining 11 participants concerning the discussion of "being Black enough" as demonstrated by the different response of their understanding of the term.

Summary. The 12 African American participants of the study confirmed the concept that colorism has not only proven to be a core component of interracial discrimination but of "intraracial discrimination" as well; and as such, has been deemed

as being “an embarrassing and controversial subject for African Americans” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 1). The 12 African American participants born between the years of 1952 and 1972 successfully demonstrated this concept as a result of their shared reflections given through the narrative interviews. The color consciousness of the 12 African American participants in relation to colorism in 21st century America gave birth to three themes that emerged as a result of the provided reflections. Additionally multiple subthemes emerged as a result of the participant’s reflections including (a) the acknowledgement and personal acceptance of a racial identifier, (b) the effect of interracial discrimination, and (c) the impact of intraracial discrimination.

In this theme the concept of racial and self-identification were discussed. I discovered, based on the participant’s reflections as well as scholarly evidence, that it is imperative that African Americans receive racial validation in order to obtain a healthy racial and social identification. The participants’ reflections, along with scholarly literature demonstrated the imperativeness of racial validation being bestowed upon or demonstrated to African Americans in their childhood by their caregivers, namely their parents (Dotterer et al., 2009) in order for the individual to obtain a healthy social identification and a “psychological strength” in relation to “racial knowledge” (Dotterer et al., 2009).

The caregivers, namely their parents, serve as springboards in aiding African American children and adolescents into assimilating comfortably into society. It is without question that nurturing that is a very important component in the lives of African American children and therefore will provide the child with a healthy outlook on racism

and discrimination as well as arm them with a strong sense of self that will serve them well in the future event that the child is confronted with inter-racial discrimination.

The findings of the study in relation to the theme of the participants acknowledging and accepting a racial identifier demonstrated that all twelve participants had reached a defining point in their lives concerning their personal choice of a racial identifier. Each of the participants provided me with the racial identifier that was most comfortable to them individually as well as the personal journey that some of them had mentally traveled in order to arrive at an identifier that was not only acceptable but comfortable for them to own as theirs. Of the 12 participants, the study revealed that 5 of the participants identified themselves as African Americans, 4 of the participants identified with the racial identifier of Black American, 1 participant identified with the racial identifier of Black, 1 participant identified with the identifier of American and lastly, 1 participant did not have a preference.

A glimpse into the personal journeys that the participants took in order to arrive at their level of comfort in acknowledging and accepting a racial identifier was uncovered. The participants, through their reflective narratives, demonstrated a sense of cultural and personal acceptance and pride in their racial attitudes demonstrating their journey as they went through the stages of Helms's BRIAS in reaching their personal stage of Internalization. In addition, the difficulty an African American may experience in addressing a racial identifier due to the mixtures of the cultures that may be found in an African American individual as well as the journey biracial parents may travel in regard to a racial identifier for biracial children was addressed.

The concept of racism begins early in the life of an African American child, with the cognitive ability to discern racism and or discrimination taking place as early as 7 or 8 years of age (Rowley et al., 2008). Therefore it is essential for caregivers to nurture their children in hopes of their development of a comfortable racial identifier. Nine of the participants experienced interracial discrimination in childhood to adolescence, with one individual stating that he had not experienced interracial discrimination to date and two participants experiencing interracial discrimination as young adults. Each of these two individuals was raised in military environments. The validation of the participants' racial validation that the participants received from their caregivers and/or mentors served as a springboard for the participants to successfully assimilate into a society that holds to the concept of colorism.

As noted in the study, children become cognizant of race and discrimination at the age of 7 or 8 years of age (Rowley et al., 2008). Two participants demonstrated that they were aware of the difference of skin tone when they were younger than the years of noted cognitive ability concerning discrimination. Also, through the participants' reflections concerning their first encounter with interracial discrimination, the importance of African Americans being comfortable in their skin as well as the acceptance and realization of their cultural and individual beauty and self-worth from their caregivers as well as from mentors came forth. This level of comfort and validation begins in childhood in order to dispel discrimination and racism (Dotterer et al., 2009).

The six female participants received validation from within the family unit in a safe and nurturing environment, whereas only three of the male participants received validation from within the family unit. The remaining three individuals received

validation from sources outside of the home, with one participant stating his racial validation, which aided him into assimilating into a societal identification comfortably, was the result of a neighbor, who through his life example became an example of what it meant to be an African American male. The participants' encounters in relation to interracial discrimination that socialize and develop a sense of self became apparent through their shared reflections.

The theme of the impact of intraracial discrimination emerged through the participant's reflections of the concept of colorism discrimination in the African American community and how it continues to be an unspoken part of the culture today. Although studies have indicated that the concept of skin tone and hair texture preference is not as prevalent as it used to be in the days of slavery, it continues to plague the 21st century African American community. The emotional pain that one participant carried as a result of being a victim of intraracial discrimination as well as the pain that participants experienced in relation to the experience of intraracial discrimination taking place within the family unit in regard to their self concept of attractiveness in relation to skin tone and hair texture emerged. The hurtful and derogatory terms that were expressed by the participants in their demonstration of the emotional and psychological poisoning was reflected in the participant's life stories. Their life stories reflected the poisoning of low self-worth and lack of cultural and self-appreciation that had been imposed by others onto the African American community and was being imposed upon African American children present day.

The concept of attractiveness in relation to skin tone preference developed. Of the six males interviewed for the study, four of the males had dated White American women,

with three resulting in marriage. Of the three biracial marriages, two continue to be happily married. The participants openly shared their decisions or experiences in relation to building relationships as well as the role that skin tone preference played in the finding or selection of a mate. In relation, the study discovered that three of the male participants stated that skin tone had not played a difference in their selection of mate, two of the male participants indicated that colorism was surely a concept in their selection of a mate and one participant indicated that he was not sure if colorism played a part in his mate selection.

Six female participants indicated that skin tone played a difference in their selection of a mate with the remaining four women indicating that skin tone was not a factor in their mate selection. The individual concept of the phrase, “being Black enough” demonstrates that the African American culture remains in search of not only a societal racial identifier as recognized by America but a cultural sense of acceptance as well.

Chapter VI: Conclusions and Recommendations

Let us be dissatisfied until that day when nobody will shout, “White Power!” when nobody will shout, “Black Power!” but everybody will talk about God’s power and human power. [*applause*] (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Eleventh Annual Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Delivered in Atlanta, GA 16 August 1967)

Overview of the Study

Colorism: The Unspoken Preference to Skin Tone and its Effect on African American Individuals in the 21st century is a qualitative research study that was conducted in a large city in Texas. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perception of colorism among 12 African American individuals of the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation. As African Americans who may have experienced interracial discrimination, this study addressed whether the 12 participants had collectively or individually experienced intraracial discrimination as well, and if so, to what extent.

The research questions were: (a) In what way does skin tone ideology influence decisions in forming relationships for individuals within the African American community in present day?, (b) In what way does colorism continue to exert an influence and/or be experienced in the African American community among the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation?, and (c) In what way does racial identity development play into colorism?

In this qualitative study, using Janet Helms’ BRIAS Social Attitude Inventory, as well as face-to-face narrative interviews with 12 African American participants, 6 males and 6 females of various hues of skin tones as well as the reflections of the participants provided in depth life stories that addressed the concept of interracial and intraracial

discrimination. Through the exploration of the brown paper bag concept as a metaphor, the concept of colorism in relation to pre-Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights Movement was explored. The aim of this study was to discuss the consciousness of colorism in the 21st century. As a result of the audio recorded transcription of the live interviews, the participants provided the following three themes: (a) The acknowledgement and personal acceptance of a racial identifier of which two sub themes emerged, racial validation and social identity, (b) The affect of interracial discrimination, and (c) The impact of intraracial discrimination.

Findings and Interpretations

Theme One: The acknowledgment and personal acceptance of a racial identifier. According to Russell et al. (1992), the Black in America has held the racial identifiers of “Negroes,” “colored people,” “persons of color,” “colored Americans,” “Black Anglo-Saxons,” “Afro-Americans,” “Afro-Americans,” “black Americans,” “Black Americans,” “African Americans,” and now, again, “persons of color” (p. 71). The theme of acknowledgement and personal acceptance of a racial identifier was a theme that emerged as a result of a participant unconsciously switching racial identifiers from Black American to African American and vice versa during his narrative interview. When I took note of this, I added the question as an interview question and addressed it to the previously interviewed participants as well as the remaining participants.

The theme proved to be interesting in the sense that a variety of racial identifiers manifested as a result of the participants’ reflections. In addressing this concept, some of the participants were able to reflect on the personal journeys they had taken to arrive at their selected racial identifier as well as uncover how their parents had influenced their

chosen racial identifier. In addition, as a result of the concept of racial identification being addressed, one of the participants expressed an interest in researching and discovering his complete ancestral heritage.

Five of the participants identify with the racial identifier of African American, four participants identify with the racial identifier of Black American, one participant with the racial identifier of Black, one with the identifier of American and one participant that does not have a racial identifier preference. The last participant proved to be an outlier in the sense that she did not select a racial identifier, alluding to her perception that the current politically correct identifier would soon “change.”

The study uncovered the concept of the sub theme of social identification and the importance it plays in the individual life of an African American. The study uncovered that the participants felt as if interracial discrimination continued to play a role in America and although they were comfortable in obtaining a racial identifier, the pains of slavery and discrimination in relation to skin-tone preference continued to play a role in society. Phrases such as “I feel it’s a struggle,” “I had to be better,” “I had to be three times better” demonstrated some of the participants’ view that racism is still a part of America.

The sub theme of education and social identity was also uncovered as a result of the participants’ reflections that present day African Americans demonstrate a lack of knowledge concerning “who they are” and to “whom” they belong. The participants’ reflections spoke to the concept that the “disconnect” that began in slavery, in the form of imposed illiteracy, continues to be prevalent in the African American culture, thereby producing a lack of societal identity. This concept is in direct relation to the participant

who addressed the advantages that she had obtained in the field of education in being the *unexpected* as an African American.

The sub theme of the negative societal perception of African American females was also discovered as a result of the participants' reflections. This sub theme in relation to colorism and skin tone preference was discussed as a result of the participants "social context and the self . . . in relation to others" (Belgrave & Allison, 2010, p. 63). This sub theme was a discovery of the participants' shared reflections in regard to society's perception of the African American woman and the negative characteristics associated with being an African American female.

"Since 1619, African American women and their beauty have been juxtaposed against White beauty standards, particularly pertaining to their skin color and hair" (Patton, 2006, p. 26). The sub theme of the affect of validation for the African American female provides a reflection of the participants' response to the validation they had received as young African American females. The participants discussed various negative and degrading references to the natural hair of the African American female as demonstrated by such negative terms as "nappy headed" as well as the perception toward lighter skin tones utilizing the media to address this point. In addition, the participants provided reflections of the validations they received from caregivers and parents affirming their beauty as young African American females.

The racial validation for the African American male is vitally important in accordance with Mahalik et al. (2006) who report that the "Black men's racial identity in response to racism, or how much they prefer or identify with a Black or White reference group, is believed to contribute to their self-esteem and psychological distress" (p. 94).

The sub theme of racial validation emerged demonstrating the importance of caregivers in relation to the African American male. The participants shared reflections demonstrating the validation they received from their caregivers in not only affirming their physical attributes but also the words of encouragement of the caregivers concerning the intellectual and social capabilities of the participants as well.

Patterson (as cited in Wendt, 2007, p. 545) asserted that “the single greatest focus of ethnic domination was the relentless effort to emasculate the Afro-American male in every conceivable way and at every turn”. The sub theme of the importance of affirmation for the African American male emerged as the reflections of the participants addressed the concept of emasculation of African American men as well as the discovery of social, academic, and professional affirmation in being an African American male. The participants demonstrated the importance of caregivers and mentors as well as reflections of how affirmation and validation in being an African American male was received from venues outside of the home from mentors who, through examples, provided these men with a sense of achievement both personally and professionally.

Theme Two: The affect of interracial discrimination. Literature notes that the concept of racism can serve as a contributing factor to the psychological *well-being* as well as the academic achievement of African Americans (Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006). The theme of the affect of interracial discrimination emerged as a result of the participants providing reflections that demonstrated, in some cases, the emotional pain and discomfort that one may experience in being exposed to discrimination. The participants discussed the concept of slavery and its beginnings of interracial discrimination as well as the concept of racial passing that took place in the African

American culture in relation to skin tone preference. The participants addressed the concept of interracial discrimination in relation to reflections of childhood memories as well as the emotional residue that some of the participants continue to carry in regard to the societal discrimination that they face in response to the color of their skin.

As a result of the participants' narrative interviews in regard to interracial discrimination, the subtheme of the effectiveness of passing past and present took shape. The participants shared their views on Blacks in America utilizing the concept of passing during slavery as a measure of survival as well as the ability to escape the harshness of slavery. Additionally, the participants shared reflections that addressed the concept of passing in regard to family survival, occupational advancement, as well as general freedom and ability.

“Thus it may be important to know the contribution of racial discrimination and racial socialization to racial identity development given the importance ascribed to healthy identity development for the life span” (Seaton et al., 2012, p. 448). The sub theme of the participants' view of societal discrimination emerged as a result of the participants sharing reflections their experiences with discrimination. One of the participants proved to be an outlier in the sense that he stated he had never experienced interracial discrimination. In addition, this section addressed the personal decisions made by participants to not allow the subjection to racism affect them as individuals, personally or professionally.

Belgrave and Allison (2010) stated,

historically, African Americans in the United States have been described as having a negative self-concept and self-denigration as a result of inferior status in this country. . . .The self-concept of the Negro is contaminated by the central fact that it is based on a color-cast complex. (p. 66)

The sub theme of emotional residue of interracial discrimination emerged as a result of the participants sharing instances by which their self-concept was affected by interracial discrimination and the emotional resolve they demonstrated in developing a strong sense of self as well as the private regard displayed by the male participants as a result of their experiences.

Theme Three: The impact of intraracial discrimination. The theme of intraracial discrimination as a result of the participants' reflections that addressed the emotional pain that continues to be a part of them as a result of experiencing racial discrimination from within the African American race based on the concept of skin-tone. As stated by Keith & Herring (1991), "skin tone played a significant role in shaping social and economic stratification patterns in the black community" (p. 760). In relaying of their life experiences, the participants shared reflections that addressed their experience of colorism taking place within the family unit, their experience of favored or non-favored treatment, being viewed in regard to physical attraction as well as utilizing colorism in building an intimate relationship, as well as their own individual perception of what it currently means to be "Black enough" within the African American culture.

The participants of the study discussed the negative and derogatory names they were subjected to as well as the physical threat expressed and experienced by members of the African American community as a result of their skin tone or in one case, skin tone and hair texture.

"In my aunt's eyes, something was always wrong with me" (Millner, 2001, p. 134). The sub theme of hurt by voices of family emerged as a result of the participants sharing their personal life accounts of instances in which colorism and members within

their own family unit imposed intraracial discrimination upon them. The participants also shared how they themselves had projected the concept of colorism on members within their own family unit.

The sub theme of the perception of colorism in relation to attractiveness emerged as a result of the participants' reflections. The participants through their shared stories, demonstrated their view concerning the physical attraction of African Americans. These attractions were noted in relation to the participants' physical attribute of skin tone and hair texture. Additionally, the level of attractiveness in relation to skin tone preference in reference to the concept of intelligence emerged as well.

The sub theme of colorism in relation to relationship building emerged as a result of the participants stated regard concerning their level of attractiveness in mate selection. The participants' reflections reveal how skin tone played an essential role in their pursuit of a mate to include one participant's concern that the skin tone of his mate would have an effect on the physical attractiveness of his offspring.

The sub theme of "Black enough" in variation emerged as a result of the participants' perception of the term "to be Black enough" within the African American culture, which carries a variety of meanings as opposed to one definite meaning or assumption.

Addressing the Research Questions

Question One: In what way does skin tone ideology influence decisions in forming relationships for individuals within the African American community in present day? As noted by the participants, skin tone ideology has proven to be a grave influence concerning the forming of relationships for the individuals within the African American

community in the present day. The concept of color consciousness is a continued factor within the African American community and plays a role in the social and intimate relationships that African Americans form and develop with one another. Historically the lighter toned African Americans were considered to have a level of intelligence that superseded those of darker toned skin. One of the participants, however, who is of a darker tone, indicated that the tables had in essence turned and that women were correlating intelligence with darker skin tone individuals. Another participant openly shared his concern in having a child with someone who had a darker skin tone than his own. His worry was that the child would not present as attractive. In contrast, one participant indicated that she did not want an individual who was of a lighter skin tone. She, being of a lighter tone herself, found that she was more attracted to men who were of a very dark shade of skin. The exposure of the concept of present day color consciousness, in the realm of social association that takes place among African Americans, was revealed by one of the participant's remark that she did not want to associate with other African Americans because they were "too dark." Thereby the participants, through their life experiences, divulged that relationships either intimate or social, in the context of skin tone preference, have a continuous bearing on the African American race.

Question Two: In what way does colorism continue to exert an influence and/or be experienced in the African American community among the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation? The participants were very open in their discussions concerning skin tone preference in relation to mate selection and physical attraction, as well as the influence of colorism that is unfortunately being passed

down to yet another generation. This unfortunate concept is in the participants' reflections concerning the acts and terms of skin tone preference that is present day being displayed to African American children by those of like culture and race. The exposure of derogatory terms referencing 21st century African American children within the African American community was addressed. One of the participants shared that she has recently discovered a new derogatory idiom that is being placed on current day African American youth — "Niglet", which, as she indicates is in reference to "younger Black kids . . . maybe middle school age Black children." The life reflections of their experiences unearthed their concern that lighter skin toned African American children receive preferential treatment and praises in relation to having *good hair*, and/or are considered as being more attractive than an African American child with a more tightly curled, non-wavy, or non-straight hair texture and darker toned skin.

The concept of colorism being addressed within work environments emerged. One participant shared a recent memo that had been sent to the Human Resources Department of his company encouraging those with the position of hiring power to practice objectivity in the consideration of employee selection. In addition, one participant shared that he had experienced intraracial discrimination in his work environment by fellow African Americans who did not consider him to be knowledgeable in his field and elected to seek answers from individuals who were of the culture or who were White American.

Question Three: In what way does racial identity development play into colorism? "Racial identity includes, but is not limited to, the extent to which an individual defines himself or herself in terms of race . . . one's sense of pride in group membership and

evaluation of the relative merits of the group . . . and beliefs about how others view the group” (Rowley et al., 2008, p. 1538). As indicated by Rowley et al., racial identity encompasses more than how an individual sees or defines him or herself, it also serves as a factor in how that individual sees the racial group or culture to which they belong. The concept of racism that participants were exposed to as children and as adolescents has in some cases continued to plague them today. Although proud to be a member of the African American culture as demonstrated by the participants all scoring high in the Internalization attitude stage of the BRIAS, the concept of colorism remains a part of their personal and societal view to present day. For a child to be exposed to the negative degradation of terms in reference to skin color and hair texture could result in that child not only developing a low sense of self in relation to their skin tone and hair texture but could also result in the child’s development of disengaging from his or her culture due to the pain and hurt that has been associated with that culture.

Recommendations and Implications

The experience of colorism in relation to interracial and intraracial discrimination has the ability to impact an African American individual from childhood to mature adulthood. The implication of this study has the potential of being utilized in cultural, educational, psychological, and organizational research. The participants’ sharing hurtful memories in terms of derogatory and demeaning terms and behaviors that they were subjected to as children and adolescents demonstrates the psychological impact of interracial and intraracial discrimination in conjunction with skin tone preference. With children developing the cognitive skills to grasp the concept of racial discrimination as early as the age of 7 or 8 (Rowley et al., 2008), it is imperative that African American

children and adolescents be provided with racial and social validation by their caregivers and parents (Dotterer et al., 2009) in order to promote cultural and self assurance and psychological well-being (Dotterer et al., 2009).

The concept of skin tone preference in relation to colorism may also play a role in organizations and work environments as indicated by the findings of the study. The impact of interracial and intraracial discrimination may produce emotional scarring that can be addressed by adequate mental health professionals who themselves have developed “a healthy sense of self” (Pack-Brown, 1999). Therefore, African American adults may be affected within their work environments in regard to their perception and feelings of how they see themselves, as an employee, in being viewed and valued within their organization. Research has discovered that “work communities” (Merriam, 2008) are also environments where an individual’s sense of identity could also be affected by the individual’s perception of whether or not he or she is receiving recognition as well as their level of competence (Merriam, 2008).

Therefore, in summary, this study provides theoretical constructs to aid researchers investigating Black Americans. The researcher may use this study to look at the concept of skin tone and colorism as a factor in the everyday lives of African Americans. Secondly, this study may be recommended for the arena of public policy in the development and implementation of parenting classes that will address the importance of providing and modeling a positive racial validation to African American children. Lastly, this study may be used for changes in educational practice encouraging educators to provide a safe environment for individuals to safely discuss how skin tone

may be related to discrimination. The educator may implement cultural circles as a means of accomplishing this.

Researcher Reflections

The study proved to be very close to my heart. With having had the personal experiences of interracial discrimination as well as intraracial discrimination, I was able to identify with the participants and the pain that one experiences in being subjected to discrimination in whatever form. With the intraracial experience that took place in college to the intraracial experience of being termed, “a nappy headed little Black girl” by newly acquired family members as young adult woman, I was able to join with the participants and sympathize with the pain that one may continue to carry if not internally resolved.

I recall that my true internal journey of cultural and personal self-appreciation and acceptance began when I became a mother of three beautiful daughters. Although cultural awareness and racial validation had been modeled to me by my African American third grade teacher, the actual concept of self-acceptance and appreciation did not crystallize until I had to model cultural acceptance for my daughters. In hearing the participants’ stories and reflections, especially the participants who spoke on “good hair” and “bad hair,” I was reminded of my then 7-year old daughter’s statement that she wanted, “flat hair” like her best friend Kayla, who had long blonde hair. My daughter’s hair was thick and beautiful. I remember taking this time to “educate” my daughters on the history of the African American’s woman’s hair and how God had designed their hair texture to protect their scalps, and so forth. After intently listening, my 7-year old daughter struck me speechless. She replied, “Then mommy, you are a hypocrite.” After some discussion,

I realized she was correct. Hence the journey began. I had all of my permed hair shaven off and began the process of growing natural hair. I vividly remember my 7-year old daughter falling on the barber's floor and screaming that all of her friends were going to "tease her because her mommy was baldheaded." Bless her heart. Praise God that was many moons ago and all three of my daughters have developed into cultural and self-assured young women who, along with me, still wear their hair in its natural beautiful state.

I was amazed at the issues of race relations in the United States that continued to take place as this study was being conducted. I recalled a conversation with a fellow classmate in the spring of 2010 in relation to my plans to pursue the topic of colorism in relation to interracial and intraracial discrimination. The classmate felt that such a topic would open the doors to anger and upset and stir up memories of Pre-Civil Rights discrimination. I explained that racial discrimination is alive and well on planet Earth and that open and intelligent dialogue could serve as a tool for racial awareness and, as such, allow individuals to aid one another in dispelling racial misconceptions and stereotypes, thereby providing a solid unit of strength as Americans as opposed to the disparity that takes place in racial division.

Therefore, in relation to where African Americans are today in the 21st century, cultural, educational, social, political growth has undoubtedly occurred. I recognize the fact that racial advancements have taken place post-Civil Rights period in the United States, as reflected by such appointments of Colin Powell as the first African American appointed to the office of United States Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice as the first African American woman to serve as the United States Secretary of State, and the

election of the first African American president, Barak Obama. Yet, in the wake of the 50th anniversary year of the March on Washington, I earnestly wonder just how much of advancement in consideration to race relations has truly taken place in 21st century America.

In addition, I discovered I was hypersensitive to the “going-ons” in relation to the racial misunderstandings and misgivings taking place in current news affairs that reflected the true state of color consciousness in America. With recent news events such as the Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman case, the beating of the an adolescent White male by three Black male adolescents on his school bus, the beating of an WWII veteran by two young Black male adolescents, which resulted in his death, as well as the shooting of an Australian baseball player by three young adolescent males of which one was Black, one was White, and the other Bi-racial, I wonder if we as a nation are truly any closer to the realization of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s dream. Has Dr. King’s dream of racial equality and of individuals being judged on the content of their character as opposed to the color of their skin truly been realized in America or has it been deferred as a result of the lack of open and honest communication concerning the color consciousness that remains as a factor in the United States?

Through the reflections of the participants, the racial and societal struggles that Blacks in America experienced pre-and post-Civil Rights Movement were discovered and through their life reflections brought me to a place that once again allowed me to embrace and honor my African American culture. Additionally, conducting this study on colorism and skin-tone preference has also served as a venue for rekindling my appreciation for the past struggles that the African American race has endured in our

quest as a culture to strive to overcome the concept of colorism from not only other cultures, but from within as well.

I found myself asking the question, how are we as a culture supposed to work on increasing the communication and dispel the concept of interracial discrimination when we as a culture promote discrimination within our own race? Knowing there are little dark skinned Black girls feeling as if they are not beautiful because their skin is “too dark” is heartbreaking to me. Roland Martin interviewed Bill Duke in relation to his documentary, “Dark Girls” (Martin, 2012). Mr. Roland records the following transcription of the documentary that brings to light the damaging effect that color consciousness, in relation to skin tone preference, can have on a young child:

Facilitator: Show me the smart child.

[A Black child's hand points to the fairest-skinned depiction among a spectrum of drawings of a little girl, identical, save for the skin color].

Facilitator: And why is she the smart child?

Child: ‘Cause she is white.

Facilitator: OK. Show me the dumb child.

[The little girl, who is brown-skinned, points to the drawing of the child with the darkest skin].

Facilitator: And why is she the dumb child?

Child: Because she black.

Facilitator: Well, show me the ugly child.
[Again, the little girl points to the darkest drawing].

Facilitator: And why is she the ugly child?

Child: ‘Cause she black.

Facilitator: Show me the good-looking child.

[The little girl points to the fairest drawing.]

Facilitator: And why is she the good-looking child?

Child: 'Cause she light-skinned-ed.

The above transcribed dialogue is reminiscent of the Clark's Doll Test that was performed in the 1930s. But this is not the 1930s. This is 21st century America and there continues to be African American children who, as demonstrated by Bill Duke's recent documentary, do not have a strong sense of self-appreciation. It is without question that a vast amount of progress has been made in regard to race relations in the United States, yet there continues to be societal element of interracial and intraracial discrimination. Therefore it is without reservation that I, as the researcher, admit that an internal giant that lay dormant within me has been awakened. It is the same giant that rose up when my three beautiful daughters were small and I had to protect them from family members who wanted to impose the ignorance of colorism upon my children. The giant that arose when I shaved off all of my own permed hair in order for it to grow back in its natural state so that my daughters would understand and appreciate themselves for who God had created them in their beauty to be as young African American girls. It was the same giant that arose and led me to teach my daughters that each of them were, "fearfully and wonderfully made" by the hand of God. The sleeping giant that had become dormant in me, with my daughters now being beautiful, intelligent young adult women, is now fully awakened as it has been discovered that 21st century African American boys and girls still have a battle for self-acceptance and cultural appreciation ahead of them. Therefore, it is my quest to be one voice that continues to speak and educate on the topic of skin

tone preference in relation to both interracial and intraracial discrimination. I have taken a vow to take this stance in an effort to bring about education and social awareness to a truly age-old concept that is rooted in the bowels of slavery and has, without hesitation, been the product of separation and disparity in America. As history, as well as the life reflections of the participants have demonstrated, colorism will continue to have such power unless stopped through the venue of intelligent and open dialogue and communication from outside and within the African American culture.

Contributions to the Field

Although there is a growing amount of research in regard to colorism, the majority of the research has addressed the views and opinions of the Baby Boomer Generation. This study, in addition to the Baby Boomer Generation, also addressed the concept of colorism with individuals of Generation X. This study revealed the emotional pain that a Black American, due to discrimination, may carry from childhood into and through adulthood. This study addressed both interracial and intraracial discrimination to provide an understanding that Black Americans may experience discrimination from the dominant culture as well as from within their own culture. Lastly, this study utilized the real life stories and experiences of the participants to reflect that the concept of colorism is an experience that continues to plague the African American race in present day.

Suggestions for Practice

This study has demonstrated that the concept of colorism and racial discrimination are very real factors in the lives of Black Americans. Unfortunately, the practice of racial discrimination did not die with the abolishment of slavery nor did it completely dissolve with the success of the Civil Rights Movement and the signing of the

Civil Rights Law. Interracial and Intra-racial discrimination remain as very real factors in the African American experience. With this knowledge, it is imperative for practitioners to gain awareness and insight into the concept of colorism and racial identification.

Practitioners in the fields of secondary and adult education, behavioral health, and organizational development may find this study useful in the sense that it provides a glimpse into the experience of colorism in regard to interracial and intra-racial discrimination and the effect it could have on an individual in respect to their academic, emotional, or professional well-being. According to Byrd & Chavous (2011) “generally, more empirical research supports direct benefits of high racial centrality and private regard on adolescent academic attitudes and performance” (p. 850). Additionally, Black Americans, as stated by Byrd & Chavous (2011) discuss the importance of the African American feeling a sense of comfort in the work environment and how this level of comfort produces a successful outcome in terms of their work performance. This concept is demonstrated in Byrd & Chavous (2011) statement:

Chrobot-Mason and Thomas (2002) discuss racial identity as an individual difference variable that can directly interact with organizations’ approaches to diversity. The authors posit, for instance, that African American employees who see their race as very important to them may be most comfortable and successful in organizations that value racial differences and have positive intergroup relations. In contrast, they may feel alienated in organizations stressing adherence to a single cultural norm and ignoring the importance of race. (p. 851)

Concerning the field of behavioral health, Carter et al. (2008) addresses the concept of racial identification and its importance in the field of research in their statement,

There is now a well-established body of literature that both validates racial identity as a psychological construct and provides evidence of the role of racial identity status attitudes as a source of psychological variation within racial groups with respect to a range of psychosocial variables, such as coping, perceptions of discrimination, and attitudes toward social change (Carter, 1995; Coard, Breland, & Raskin, 2001; Jefferson & Caldwell, 2002; Watts, 1992). (p. 103)

Sanchez (2013) indicates that identity development is important in the area of adult education “because the biggest gains in identity development occur during the college/university years” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). (p. 115). This is an important concept due to there being an underrepresentation of African American faculty, staff, and administration on major college campuses and universities. This concept is addressed by Watt (2006) as follows:

In general, African American college students attending PWIs [predominately White universities] experience unique adjustments as compared to other college students (e.g. Cokley, 1999; Kimbrough, Molock, & Walton, 1996; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Flowers, 2004; Rankin, 2005). Fleming (1984) reported that African American college students have greater difficulty socially and academically than their White classmates. (p. 172)

With this concept in mind, individuals in adult education may find it beneficial to provide a safe environment, such as cultural circles, where topics such as race relations may be discussed in an intelligent and nonthreatening manner. In acknowledging the need for cultural fulfillment and sensitivity in the academic setting, Tillman (2002) states:

It is important that we [adult educators] begin to implement new teaching strategies, begin new discourses, and create paradigms and models of educational research that are not only inclusive of culturally sensitive research approaches for African Americans but also have the potential to significantly change their lives and their communities in emancipatory ways. (p. 9)

Concerning the concept of colorism and racial discrimination, there are hurt and wounded individuals. Without the development of cultural education concerning the areas of interracial and intraracial discrimination, there may be a “disconnect” between educator and participants or among participants due to the lack of awareness of diverse cultures and the participants’ emotional residue from prior experiences. Therefore, educators are challenged to create an environment that provides student with an

opportunity to express themselves in an environment that promotes open and honest dialogue for the purpose of educating and dispelling misconceptions, stereotypes and racial discrimination.

Suggestions for Further Research

Colorism. What many may believe to be a concept of the past, as demonstrated in the study, continues to be a part of our present. The abiding shadow of interracial discrimination continues to loom in this 21st century America as demonstrated by recent news events that reflect the discord and separation within our country.

Also, as the study has uncovered, skin tone preference continues to be a concept within the African American race that, as demonstrated by the participants, has the power of having a lifelong effect on individuals who have been subjected to the reality of colorism in relation to both interracial as well as intraracial discrimination. With literature demonstrating that the concept of discrimination is cognitively understood by children as young as 7 or 8 years of age due to the development of child's "cognitive ability" (Rowley et al., 2008, p. 1538) it is, in my opinion, imperative for further studies in relationship to color consciousness to be conducted with African American children as well as adolescents to college age individuals. As stated by "(Bynum, Best, Barnes & Burton, 2008) racism and discrimination are important realities in the lives of many African American early and late adolescents and that they must be considered in our efforts to understanding the etiology of internalizing problems in this population" (p. 145).

This recommendation has been suggested on the basis that interracial and intraracial discrimination continues to be a factor in the American society as

demonstrated by recent news events that have taken place that have contributed to “the race problem” in America. Although, as reported by Rowley et al. (2008), “little is known about the nature of children’s expectations for discrimination in social settings or the factors that influence their development ” (p. 1537), the concept of a strong racial identity could prove advantageous for the African American. The development of a strong racial identity could consequently result in arming the individual with a strong sense of personal and cultural self. Additionally, it may also aid in the dispelling of discrimination providing an avenue of better mental, physical and academic health. Therefore, such an act may empower the child to the point that he will develop into a healthy and well-rounded individual, who, unlike some of the participants of the study, will not have to carry the pains of discrimination externally or internally throughout their life span.

Therefore, the participants personal reflections of intraracial discrimination will add to the body of knowledge concerning a part of the African American culture that is not widely and openly discussed and as such, will open the doors of communication for the African American to converse amongst one another as well as with individuals of other cultures with the aim of promoting cultural education and awareness in an attempt to dispel cultural misconceptions and stereotypes. As stated by David Shipler (1997):

Black Americans generally live with a different memory, one that feels pride, the reverberations of slavery, yearns for roots, searches for pride, and reaches back to grasp at ancient uncertainties. Present events occur in context, not isolation, so they are interpreted according to what has gone before. Hence, in the eyes of many blacks, elements of the complex relationships of slavery are constantly being reenacted—between bosses and workers, between blacks and whites sexually, between African-Americans of lighter and darker skin, among blacks who suppress dissent within their ranks. Slavery is a permanent metaphor. (p. 149)

In as much, it is my hope that the true life reflections of the participants will engage others in much needed dialogue and in doing so result in the future studies and discussions being conducted to bring about an embracement of cultures and a disembodiment of discrimination based on a person's skin tone that has its unfortunate roots in slavery. It is past time to dig up the roots of hatred and cut down the tree of separation.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

Interview questions for participants:

1. What does it mean to you to be Black in America today in the 21st century?
2. Research on racial identification has run parallel with investigation of racial awareness and preference. Do you have a remembrance of when you first knowingly encountered racism?
3. Please relay your personal experience of interracial discrimination and the effect it has had on you as an individual.
4. Were stories concerning racial discrimination or colorism expressed by family members?
5. What are your thoughts on the social comparison theory which states that “Black economic progress and social probability leases to greater comparison with Whites and therefore intensifies feelings of inferiority in Blacks”?
6. History demonstrates that many Blacks during slavery and post slavery made the decision to “Pass” as White in order to escape the harshness of discrimination. What are your thoughts on passing and do you feel as if people are symbolically “passing” today?
7. Do you perceive that an unspoken advantage of lighter toned African Americans continue to exist within the Black community today?
8. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you personally judged another African American based on their skin tone?
9. Have you ever felt judged by another African American based on your skin tone?
10. Do you have a remembrance of first encountering discrimination from an African American?
11. In looking at today’s media portrayal of African American males and females, what are your thoughts in relation to how Blacks in America today are being portrayed both nationally and globally?
12. In thinking of relationship mate selection, did or does colorism play a factor in your selection?
13. What is your understanding of the term being “Black enough”?
14. Why do you think colorism and interracial and intraracial discrimination are still prevalent today?
15. Who was the first person to validate your beauty as an African American?

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

**SUBJECT CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY COLORISM:
THE UNSPOKEN PREFERENCE TO SKIN TONE AND ITS EFFECT ON AFRICAN
AMERICAN INDIVIDUALS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Carolyn D. Powell and I am a doctoral student attending the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas working towards the completion of a doctorate degree in Education with a Concentration in Organizational Leadership. I will be conducting a qualitative research study highlighting the expressed experiences of interracial and intraracial discrimination of African American individuals of the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation concerning the concept of colorism utilizing the paper bag concept as a metaphor.

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore the perception of colorism among twelve African American individuals of the pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement generation. Using narrative interviews, this study will capture the stories of the participants through the exploration of the paper bag concept. Please be advised that there are no risk associated with this study; however, a discussion of personal experiences may evoke emotions. The aim of this study will be to discuss the cross generational consciousness of colorism in the twenty-first century. As the researcher, I will address common themes as well as differences which may manifest amongst the participants as a result of the study. As African American individuals who have expressed the experience of interracial discrimination, this study would address whether the participating individuals had collectively or individually experienced intraracial discrimination as well, and if so, to what extent?

Research concerning the African American in relation to colorism is an area that is, in the opinion of the researcher, an under researched area. Therefore, as a prospective participant, you, as an individual, will be adding to the academic body of literature thereby reducing the gap of knowledge concerning the African American culture and interracial and intraracial discrimination in relation to colorism. As a participant, you have indicated that you have met the noted criteria:

- An African American individual between forty to sixty years of age
- Have experienced interracial and intraracial discrimination in relation to colorism
- Have lived in at least one other state in addition to your birth state
- Have a basic knowledge of slavery in America as well as the Civil Rights Movement in America

Please note that as a perspective participant, I, the researcher, welcome every opportunity for you to ask questions of myself in order to ensure that there is a complete understanding of the study as well as your role as a participant. Also please be assured

that as a participant of this study, you are ensured complete anonymity and confidentiality. As a participant, you will be provided an alias name. Your real name will not be used at any time in the study. All questionnaires (which will be sent to your provided address via the US postal service upon your agreement to participate in the study), all individual and/or collective narrative interviews, as well as audio tapes of the conducted interviews will be utilized for the purpose of this study only. After which, the interviews will be transcribed by the researcher verbatim to ensure accuracy. The recorded interviews will be kept in a locked and secure location and destroyed after a reasonable period of time upon completion of the study not to exceed 5 years. Please understand that as a participant, if you develop a sense of discomfort with any information asked of you, you reserve the right to withdraw or discontinue your participation in this study at any time without hesitation or question. Also, please note that if you choose to opt out of the study at any time and for any reason, it will in no way affect your present or future relationship with UIW.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me in the following manner:

Carolyn D. Powell
27019 Granite Path
San Antonio, Texas 78258
Home (210) 481-3058
Cell (210) 380-6449

Any additional questions or concerns in relation to this study that you may have may be asked of my noted chair:

M. Sharon Herbers, Ed.D
Associate Professor
Dreeben School of Education
University of the Incarnate Word
4301 Broadway
San Antonio, Texas 78209-6397
Telephone: (210) 805-3073

If you are agreeing to participate in the study, please provide your signature confirming your consent of participation below.

Signature of Participant

Signature of witness

Name of Participant

Date

Time

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Prospective Participant:

In accordance with your agreement to participate in the study entitled: Colorism: The unspoken preference to skin tone and its effect on African American individuals in the 21st century, please find the assessment questionnaire below.

Please take a moment to indicate which question is appropriate for you as an individual. Upon completion of the questionnaire, please return in the provided self-addressed stamped envelope. This information will be used in the study as tool to provide esurience that the noted required criteria for the study was sufficiently met by all participants.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (210) 380-6449. Please provide an X in the provided line for all questions and statements that pertain to you as an individual.

- _____ I am a male. _____ I am a female.
- _____ I was born between the years of 1952 and 1972.
- _____ I fall within the ethnic classification of African American.
- _____ I refer to myself ethnically as Black American, African American, or Negro.
- _____ I have completed and obtained a high school diploma.
- _____ The highest level of education that I have obtained post high school is
(some college, Associate degree, Bachelor, Master, Ph.D., etc.)
- _____ I have knowledge of the history of slavery in America.
- _____ I have knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.
- _____ I have personally experienced interracial discrimination.
- _____ I have personally experienced intraracial discrimination.
- _____ I have heard of the term “colorism.”
- _____ How many states besides your birth state have you resided in?
- _____ I consider myself eligible for the study and would like to participate.
- _____ I do not consider myself eligible for the study and would like to withdraw myself
as a prospective participant.

APPENDIX D
Received Permission from Marita Golden

From: Marita Golden [maritagolden@gmail.com]

Sent: Monday, April 16, 2012 8:13 PM

To: Powell, Carolyn

Subject: Re: from marita golden

sounds like an exciting study! I give you permission to use the letter in the dissertation,
have you seen Bill Duke's film Dark Girls yet? It is quite good Marita