“I'm not dark, I'm not light... I'm medium!”: The Colorism Experiences of Adolescent African American Girls

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“I’m not dark, I’m not light… I’m medium!”: The Colorism Experiences of Adolescent African American Girls
by
Maya Angelica Williams

A dissertation presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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St. Louis, Missouri
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I acknowledge all of the African American girls who participated in this study. Their candid anecdotes have allowed this work to shine. It is my hope that these girls will be the catalyst for change in the eradication of colorism on a domestic and global level.

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May 2021
This dissertation is dedicated to my older brother, Atiba Williams (1985-2005). I am so honored I had the opportunity to know him. Atiba will forever live in my memory, as he truly was a gift from God. May he rest in power.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“I’m not dark, I’m not light… I’m medium!”: The Colorism Experiences of Adolescent African American Girls

by

Maya Angelica Williams

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work

Washington University in St. Louis, 2021

Professor Vetta Sanders-Thompson, Chair

While colorism scholars often discuss the effects of skin tone bias on the lives of African American adults, Black youth are understudied. This mixed methods study analyzes the impacts skin tone bias and colorism have on African American girls’ self-concept, impression formation, affiliation with others, attraction to others, and interaction with their environment. This paper proposes a conceptual model that integrates four theoretical models (i.e., critical race theory, intersectionality theory, social identity theory, and skin tone theoretical model) to frame this research. Participants in this study range from ages 11-14 and attend school in Missouri. N=60 girls completed the quantitative online survey and N=30 girls participated in the qualitative interviews conducted by the Principal Investigator. Thirty girls completed both the quantitative and qualitative portion of this study. The majority of the girls participated in a local after-school program that caters to the needs of young girls by offering education and cultural programs to build self-efficacy and improve academic success. Study findings reveal that girls acknowledged, witnessed, and experienced skin tone bias among teachers, peers, and family members. However, girls were able to overcome negative comments through resiliency and advocacy. This research
serves as a guide for social work practitioners, researchers, and educators to address skin tone preferences and the consequences of colorism when working with African American girls.
Introduction

Problem Statement. Skin tone bias is a global phenomenon (Hunter, 2005; Telles, 2014; Thompson & McDonald, 2016). As stated by Brown (1998, p. 55-56), “skin tone bias may be expressed as a general, affect-driven preference or dislike for… specific skin tones or as stereotypes about individuals possessing light or dark skin.” Skin tone bias can evolve into colorism, a term first coined by Alice Walker, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, who defined the concept as the “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color” (Walker, 1983, p. 290-291). Colorism is a system of inequality privileging individuals that possess physical features proximal to whiteness (Wilder & Cain, 2011). The concept of Whiteness is interpreted as the European racial archetype that includes light skin, a narrow nose, thin lips, and/ or smooth hair (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1993). Though colorism is a world-wide issue, it has particular impacts on African Americans in the United States and their perception by others (Rollok, 2007).

Suffice it to say, there are distinctions that must be made between racism and colorism; they are two interconnected, though distinct, manifestations of oppression (Hunter, 2008). According to Bell (2019, p. 242), racism is “prejudice against all members of a race,” where colorism is “prejudice against specific members based on their color.” Although color often serves as a marker of race, colorism is not always linked to race. Colorism exists both within and between racial and ethnic communities, and even impacts groups such as Anglos and Asians (Hochschild, 2006). This explanation indicates that colorism does not solely affect communities of color. Given that it is not racially based, but rather, rooted in color variations, colorism can exist regardless of racial categorization and can even be an in-group phenomenon.
Review and analysis of current research demonstrates the divisive nature of colorism among African Americans. In a study conducted by Hochschild and Weaver (2007), the researchers asserted that, among African American men and women, individuals with light skin tones obtained higher levels of education in comparison to their darker counterparts. Further, Monk (2014) found that lighter skin was associated with greater family income and increased job opportunity. In conjunction with these findings, Monroe (2016) reported that dark skin African Americans are more likely to be relegated to low wage employment, resulting in limited housing options. Additional critical attention has exposed the range of effects that colorism has on African American men, women, and youth.

Prior research has examined the gendered expression of colorism to uncover its distinct impacts on African American men and women. Regarding employment, dark skin Black men are frequently stereotyped as violent, untrustworthy, or inconsistent, thereby limiting their ability to obtain financial rewards and promotions (Thompson & Keith, 2001; Uzogara & Jackson, 2016). As for Black women, they reportedly experience economic constraints, as White male employers disregard dark skin Black women who are interested in certain employment opportunities (Allen, Telles, & Hunter, 2000).

Colorism even results in gendered influences in criminal procedures. Burch (2015) studied the sentencing outcomes for Black and White males and found interracial and intraracial differences. The author concluded that Black males with dark and medium skin tones receive sentences 4.8% longer than White males, while light skin Black males receive similar sentences to White males (Burch, 2015). As stated by Norwood (2015), dark skin Black males face greater risk of arrest, incarceration, and the likelihood of receiving the death penalty than their light skin counterparts who commit similar offenses. In terms of African American female offenders who
committed analogous crimes, Viglione, Hannon, and DeFina (2011) reported that light skin offenders receive reduced incarceration sentences (maximum time an offender can be imprisoned) and detention time (actual time the offender serves in days).

Colorism is tied to beauty and status as well. Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall (2013) recognize that light skin symbolizes power bestowed through association. Therefore, light skin Black women are more advantaged in the marriage market (i.e. access to more partners and more likely to be married) than medium and dark skin Black women (Hamilton, Goldsmith, & Darity, 2009). Since colorism is a gendered phenomenon (Adams, Kurtz-Costes, & Hoffman, 2016), Black men are not necessarily disadvantaged by skin tone when dating. According to Wade (1996), some African American men believed their darker skin tone was an asset in the dating realm. An overwhelming amount of research has focused on the ramifications of colorism among African American adults, but limited studies exist that focus on youth.

Scholarship indicates that two-month-old infants demonstrate a preference for attractive faces by gazing at them longer than faces they deem unusual or unattractive (Slater et al., 1998; Slater et al., 2000). Features perceived as attractive include facial symmetry, eyelid shape, mouth curvature, and even skin tone (Axelsson et al., 2010; Perrett et al., 1999; Stephen, Smith, Stirrat, & Perrett, 2009). Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman (2016) discovered African American youth conceptualize or understand skin tone differences beginning in kindergarten and exhibit preferences for light or medium, rather than dark, skin tones. In the seminal “Doll Test” study scholars used Black and White dolls to understand racial identification and preference among African American youth (Clark & Clark, 1947). Approximately 60 years later, child psychologist and professor Margaret Beale Spencer replicated this pivotal study and found similar results,
preference for dolls with lighter skin, among children between the ages of 4 and 10 (Billante & Hadad, 2010; James, 2010). This preference remained regardless of age.

Porter (1991) reported Black elementary school children expressed preferences for skin tone as early as age 6. Even in middle school, young African American girls are impacted by the intersections of race, class, and gender; teachers’ implicit or explicit biases toward these students may result in disproportionate disciplinary responses (Morris, 2005). Research studies have considered factors that could serve as colorism buffering mechanisms for African American girls. Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, and Jackson (2010) observed that when Black female adolescents were confronted with colorism and stereotypes, possessing a strong ethnic identity did not protect them against this negative imaging.

Racial socialization is a crucial process that can be used to cultivate positive development among African American youth (Davis Tribble, Allen, Hart, Francois, & Smith-Bynum, 2019). The process of racial socialization can involve Black parents’ promotion of Black consciousness and pride as a means to foster independence and self-esteem among their children (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008; Wilder & Cain, 2011). Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, and Ojie’s (2011) findings indicated that, among a subset of Black girls, racial socialization (positive messages about race) can offset the negative relationship between stereotypes, colorism, and engaging in substance use. However, these findings did not apply to the subset of girls that reinforced western beauty standards (Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011). Research on additional psychological, emotional, and/or physical mechanisms that African American girls employ to buffer the effects of colorism are not available. This gap hampers the creation of preventive programming to promote positive developmental outcomes. Considering Black girls are emerging adult women, this study seeks to understand how colorism impacts their
development at a young age. Minimal studies have addressed adolescence experiences of colorism, which is a primary reason for this colorism study.

In the academic literature, there is a dearth of studies on colorism and African American girls in general, even though the lived reality of youth demonstrates they also grapple with the implications of colorism (Adams, Kurtz-Costes, & Hoffman, 2016). Colorism affects African American girls’ development, interactions with others, and health outcomes (Baxely, 2014; Morris, 2016; Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013; Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, & Belgrave, 2016). This study researches young Black girls age 11-14 because this is an important period of development with respect to identity. At this age, some girls have already engaged in risky sexual behavior (Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010) or indulged in substance use to cope with colorism and rigid beauty standards (Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011). The researcher hopes that this study generates a better understanding of young African American girls’ experiences of colorism and begins to address the gap in the current literature.

**Purpose of Study.** Extensive research has discussed the perspective of African American women regarding colorism. Situating this study in the current colorism literature, the research question posed explores the impacts of colorism on African American girls’ development and social relationships. This study will contribute to the literature by identifying coping mechanisms employed to combat colorism. These findings will provide insight into the ways girls learn about and manage colorism, which may impact adult self-concept, confidence, and aspirations.

This research study analyzes the unique experiences of African American girls as they relate to their skin tone and self-concept, impression formation, affiliation with others, attraction to others, and environments. The study mainly explores the colorist experiences of African American girls who participate in an after-school program that happened to primarily serve
students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. An effort is made to examine variations in the extent to which girls demonstrate awareness of the type, intensity, and environments of occurrence among those experiencing colorism. Environment will focus on the school setting and how participants are influenced by teachers and peers. The girls’ coping strategies are also examined.

An extensive literature review on colorism indicates that there is a dearth of information on protective mechanisms used by African American girls to overcome this issue. The goal of this study, conducted through small group interviews on Zoom and an online survey, is to explore the resiliency of Black girls as they overcome experiences of stigmatization and marginalization surrounding skin tone discrimination. This study seeks to give voice to Black/African American girls and provide social work researchers, educators, and practitioners with strategies to assist these girls in schools, at home, or in their community.

**Research Question and Study Aims.** This study’s specific research question is as follows: In what contexts and circumstances do African American girls report skin tone bias/colorism, if any, and how do they understand, make sense of, and address these experiences? The aims proposed are as follows:

**Aim 1:** This study seeks to understand the beliefs and attitudes that African American girls hold toward specific skin tones, their associated behaviors, how African American girls believe their skin tone will impact their future social relationships, and how they perceive these beliefs are shaped through socialization.

**Aim 2:** This study explores the associations African American girls create between themselves and others (family and friends) based on their skin tone.
**Aim 3:** The final aim of this study is to examine the adaptive coping mechanisms that African American girls use to overcome skin tone bias in school, at home, and in their community.

The literature often references “skin” and “skinned.” Though these terms are used interchangeably, for example, “dark skin individuals” versus “dark-skinned individuals,” the term “skin” will be used throughout this proposal rather than “skinned” for consistency. In addition, the terms Black and African American are used throughout this document to represent Americans who are descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States. Even though this study did not ask the girls to identify if they were descendants of Africans, they all identified as Black/African American. Finally, in this dissertation study, I will refer to myself as the Principal Investigator (PI).

To guide the reader, a brief summary of the chapters in this dissertation follows. Chapter One will provide an overview of the empirical literature and history of colorism in the United States. The effects of colorism will be analyzed across various domains such as economic, criminal justice, marriage, education, and sexual behavior. The chapter will end with an emphasis on African American girls and their relevance to this study. Chapter Two will present various theoretical frameworks integrated to create a conceptual model for this study. In this chapter, the importance of each model is explained to provide a critical understanding of the need to develop a new model. Chapter Three will elaborate on the study design and methodological approach selected for this research study. Chapter Four will highlight the results and findings of this research. Chapter Five will introduce discussion of the findings and will detail the limitations of this work. The dissertation closes with Chapter Six, which will outline the implications of colorism literature on the field of social work.
Chapter 1: Literature Review

**Overview of Skin Tone Bias.** Skin tone variation in the United States is, in part, a product of racial mixing (Norwood, 2015; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1993). Historically, racial mixing occurred during three key periods in U.S. history: (1) migration, (2) slavery, and (3) reconstruction. In 1607, European settlers arrived in Jamestown, Virginia and individuals of African descent followed, which resulted in European men and African women frequently engaging in sexual relationships (Jones, 2000). During the slavery era, White slave owners commonly sexually exploited (i.e., raped) enslaved African women (Charles, 2011; Gullickson, 2005; Mathews & Johnson, 2015). Although deemed unlawful, some White women also engaged in sexual relationships with African male slaves (Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013). Throughout the Reconstruction era, there were Quadroon Balls (Blassingame, 1973) where elite White men courted Mulatto women (Bontemps, 1945; Williamson, 1980; Kein, 2000). These balls occurred in several cities and states in the South, but were most notable in New Orleans (Guillory, 1997) due to Louisiana’s large population of racially mixed individuals, legal acknowledgment of this population, and acceptance of interracial relationships (Aslakson, 2012; Blassingame, 1973; Kerr, 2005). Consequently, racial mixing produced mixed offspring. These individuals were often referred to using primarily one of three terms. Ya Azibo (2014) reported the use of terms based on the person’s racial background, such as mulattos (50% White and 50% Black), quadroons (75% White and 25% Black), and octoroons (87.5% White and 12.5% Black).

Initially, distinguishing between pure Black individuals and those of mixed ancestry contributed to the enforcement of skin tone hierarchies; however, as the 1930s approached, the terms mulatto, quadroon, and octoroon, which referred to individuals of mixed parentage, disappeared in America (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). Specifically, the term mulatto began to
fade from American consciousness for three reasons: (1) Congress voted to drop the term in 1929 and it was removed from the Census in 1930, (2) Black leaders advocated for one term representing people of African descent, and (3) the increased implementation of one-drop laws in Southern states (Hochschild & Powell, 2008). Between 1850 and 1920, the U.S. Census Bureau employed enumerators to classify individuals who appeared to have African and European ancestry (Hill, 2000). These people were called mulattos and had a “visible” mixture of White and Black (Williamson, 1980). Although the term “mulatto” was used from 1850 until 1930, the Census decided to eliminate its use in 1930 and enforced “one drop of blood” laws instead (Hochschild, 2006).

“One drop” rules or The Rule of Hypodescent stated that even a drop of Black blood, any African heritage, or African features classified a person as Black (Brown, Ward, Lightbourn, & Jackson, 1999; Drake, 1987, Hunter, 1998). This meant that a person did not necessarily have to possess “Black features” to be classified as Black, since the Supreme Court had sanctioned one drop rules that were upheld by majority of the states (Blay, 2021). At that time, the one-drop rule was permitted in the United States because race was exclusive, meaning a person could only identity with one racial group (Lopez, 1997). Over time, the idea of race as exclusive was challenged due to a rise in interracial marriages (Roth, 2005). This resulted in decreased enforcement of this rule beginning in the 1940s (Washington, 2011). During the 1990 Census, approximately 500,000 citizens expressed discomfort in identifying with one race and opted to select two or more racial groups (Wallman, Evinger, Schechter, 2000). Though not strongly enforced today, some individuals still adhere to one-drop rules by only identifying as Black even if they are multiracial (Roth, 2005).

Skin Tone Stratification
Historically, White beauty standards were imposed on people of African descent during slavery (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). At that time, slave masters established a color caste system between enslaved Africans based on skin color variations (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, Gocial, 2005; Horowitz, 1973; Uzogara & Jackson, 2016). Subsequently, slaves of lighter complexions, who often had kinship ties to their White masters, received privileges denied to darker slaves (Franklin, 2000; Hunter, 1998; Reuter, 1917). Lighter slaves also commanded higher rates on the auction block and were perceived as symbols of wealth and prestige for plantation owners (Baxley, 2014; Carpenter, 2009). These slaves engaged in domestic work, had skilled labor opportunities, and the possibility of manumission, or freedom from slavery (Billingsley, 1968; Davis, 1995, Monk, 2014). In contrast, dark skin slaves had to complete strenuous field-related tasks (Bodenhorn, 2002; Bodenhorn, 2006; Myrdal, 1944).

These divisions were perpetuated through the terms “house slave,” referencing light skin mulattos, and “field slave,” referencing dark skin individuals, which resulted in controversial relationships (Reece, 2018). For example, various mixed raced enslaved women were subject to forced prostitution (Uzogara & Jackson, 2016). House slaves were at greater risk of abuse, too; in particular, of sexual violence in the form of rape and forced procreation resulting in mixed-race offspring favored by their fathers/owners (Myrdal, 1962). The realization of these experiences by house slaves is not to suggest that field slaves did not experience sexual violence (Harris, 2008). Whether subjected to domestic or field tasks, enslaved Africans grappled with the brutality and dehumanization of chattel slavery.

While the era of slavery helped establish color hierarchies, this stratification continued after the abolition of slavery in the United States (Hunter, 2007). During the antebellum period, light skin African Americans had greater access to property (Frazier, 1957) and were better-
educated (Wirth & Goldhamer, 1944) due to the historical privileges they had received (Uzogara & Jackson, 2016). Even though one-drop rules implemented in 1930 equalized Black Americans, daily practices reinforced differences between Black people based on skin tone, hair texture, and facial features (Wilder, 2010). Additionally, free Black people granted mixed, light skin Black people superiority over their dark skin counterparts due to their proximity to Whiteness and their status advantage in the form of appearance, speech, and actions (Edwards, 1959).

A framework developed to discuss the levels of racism has explained why some Black Americans have exhibited a preference for lighter skin tones. Jones’ (2000) listed the levels of racism as institutionalized, personally mediated, and internalized. According to her framework, institutionalized racism is defined as racial stratification of goods, services, and opportunities within society, while personally mediated racism is the experience of prejudice and discrimination (Jones, 2000). To broaden the understanding of colorism in the Black community, internalized racism is “the situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group’s power” (Bivens, 1995).

Jones (2000, p. 1213) also asserted internalized racism:

…manifests as an embracing of “whiteness” (use of hair straighteners and bleaching creams, stratification by skin tone within communities of color, and “the white man’s ice is colder” syndrome); self-devaluation (racial slurs as nicknames, rejection of ancestral culture, and fratricide); and resignation, helplessness, and hopelessness (dropping out of school, failing to vote, and engaging in risky health practices).
Due to internalized racism, certain racial group members may promote negative racial stereotypes causing others to feel satisfied or dissatisfied with their skin color (Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, & Belgrave, 2014). These internalized stereotypes can result in acts of discrimination between members of the same racial group. Evidently, the history of skin tone preferences in the United States created divisions among African Americans, while stereotypes continue to reinforce the role and importance of skin tone in the African American community.

**Skin Color Stereotypes**

In the United States, even though whiteness was deemed superior to blackness (Hunter, 2007), there were different stereotypes ascribed to African Americans of varying skin tones. People with dark skin have been stereotyped as unintelligent (Harrison & Thomas, 2009), threatening (Mathews & Johnson, 2015), poor (Hall, 1995), and unattractive (Averhart & Bigler, 1997). On the other hand, scholars have found that light skin is linked with intellect, beauty, social and emotional stability, and charm (Anderson & Cromwell, 1977; Bayton & Muldrow, 1968; Chin-Quee, 1993; Marks, 1943). Dark skin is more common than light skin, yet positive stereotypes ascribed to light skin help maintain biases within the African American community (Hall, 1992).

Likewise for African American girls, these stereotypes affect their interactions with others. Previous research has been concerned with the fact that colorism ignites divisions among African American girls, impacting their identity development (Baxley, 2014). This occurs in schools where Black girls face color bias and severe stereotyping (Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011). In these settings, dark skin Black girls are perceived as boisterous and impolite (Morris, 2016). On the contrary, light skin Black girls are preferred and favored. For example, they are often selected as the teacher’s assistant (Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013). Outside of
schools, African American girls note the preference for light skin women and unfavorable messages regarding dark skin women in rap music (Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, & Belgrave, 2016). These messages are negative influences on African American girls’ health, interpersonal relationships, and self-image (Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, & Belgrave, 2016). Skin tone stereotypes and divisions have also influenced the establishment of clubs and organizations that cater to African American men and women.

**Black Organizations**

Shortly after the Civil War, some light skin African Americans started to establish elite communities and separate themselves physically, socially, and economically from dark skin Black individuals through civic/cultural organizations, churches, fraternities, and sororities (Baxley, 2014). There is a history of African Americans of lighter skin tones distancing themselves from those of dark skin tones, as they realized skin color influenced their ability to obtain status (Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, & Ward, 1987). As African Americans transferred opportunities, capital, and social standing from one generation to the next, elites of lighter complexions were able to preserve their dominance (Hall, 2010).

**Black Leaders**

Even Civil rights advocacy groups hired African Americans for leadership positions based on skin tone (Data, 2019). Dr. William Edward Burghhardt Du Bois, also known as W.E.B. Du Bois, was an eminent historian, journalist, educator, civil rights activist, and sociologist that contributed crucial work on the Black community and racial relations in the United States (Du Bois, 2013). Du Bois famously referenced “The Talented Tenth,” a group he believed would elevate the Black community and lead it to greatness (Jones, 2000; Norwood, 2004). The Talented Tenth included 23 men and women, who were mostly light skin and of mixed race,
except one individual (Data, 2019; Norwood, 2015). These members mainly lived in northern urban areas and were college educated (Jones, 2000). During that time, various prominent Black leaders and members of the middle class were mostly light complected. Colorism was reinforced in these Black organizations through leadership positions as well as acts of discrimination.

Colorist Practices

Subsequently, Black organizations often reinforced discriminatory practices against dark skin Black people (Robinson, 2011). This mainly occurred through the “brown paper bag test” used to compare African Americans’ skin tone. If an African American was lighter than the paper bag, they would be granted admission into the organization; if they were darker than the paper bag, admission would be denied (Frazier, 1957; Kerr, 2006; Maddox, 2002). Some affluent Black social organizations, labeled Blue Vein Societies, also granted membership if the African American’s veins were visible through the possession of light skin (Bond & Cash, 1992; Hill & Burger, 1999). “Blue Veiners” were perceived as Black people with preferred blood lines (Cunningham, 1997). Black clubs also used combs (instruments for adjusting, managing, and styling hair) for exclusion. They hosted “comb” parties and rejected African Americans with tight or kinky hair, as straight and smooth hair was required for entrance (Kerr, 2006; Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). Access to these clubs was crucial for status acquisition because they fostered informal networks for employment opportunities, promotions, and social capital (Hunter, 1998). Furthermore, churches maintained similar admissions requirements that were based on one’s proximity to Whiteness.

Black Churches

Several African American churches reinforced a “color caste system” and were known for only admitting Black people with lighter skin tones (Frazier, 1957). Even for African
American women, who have historically been active participants in women’s social organizations and churches, these sisterhoods were influenced by colorism (Turner, 2013). Some churches, labeled “color-conscious congregations,” only accepted members if they were of lighter complexions (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1993). In addition to discriminating against church members, this practice carried over to leadership roles within the church. African American churches engaged in discriminatory practices, as a case in the 1880s illustrates. Parishioners of Washington’s Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church are noted to have complained about the selection of a pastor they believed to be “too black” for the light skin African American congregation (Kerr, 2005). This practice was also found in the education sector.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) provided the opportunity for African Americans to pursue higher education as the community continued its struggle to obtain equality and recognition (Allen & Jewell, 2002). The African Methodist Episcopal Church founded several HBCUs (Gasman & Tudico, 2009). These HBCUs are acknowledged as supportive settings to foster the psychosocial development, racial pride, and self-efficacy of African American students (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Strayhorn, 2010). HBCUs were established to educate African Americans, but some of these institutions allowed certain Black people to distance themselves from their community through colorism (Gasman & Abiola, 2016). HBCUs initially predominately admitted African Americans with light skin and straight hair (Robinson, 2011). In particular, Howard, Morehouse, and Spelman were perceived as the most prestigious HBCUs (Taylor, 2009), with light skin African Americans establishing a well-known presence on these campuses (Gatewood, 2000). Colorist
practices and preferences flourished during the creation of Black sororities and fraternities on HBCU campuses, as well.

**Historically Black Greek-Lettered Organizations**

Various historically Black Greek-Lettered organizations (BGLOs) were established in the 1900s, when African Americans were stigmatized due to the separate but “unequal” rhetoric that plagued the nation (Bonner, 2006). For undergraduate African American students attending predominately White institutions, BGLOs served as crucial venues for social support (Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper, & Quaye, 2007; Kimbrough, 2003; McClure, 2006; Patton & Bonner, 2001; Schuh, Triponey, Heim, & Nishimura, 1992). Even though such fraternities and sororities were created to foster solidarity between African American college students and establish a sense of community (Giddings, 2007; Sheffer-Parrott, 2009; Taylor, 2009), they have faced backlash for exhibiting skin tone preferences.

Skin tone discrimination was cultivated through the extracurricular activities of the sororities and fraternities (Gasman & Abiola, 2016). For example, many sororities reinforced colorism by basing admission on skin tone (Giddings, 2007; Sheffer-Parrott, 2009; Taylor, 2009). Both sororities and fraternities used the “brown paper bag test” as a requirement for admission (Drake & Clayton, 1945; Torbenson & Parks, 2009). The chronic and pervasive experiences of colorism within BGLOs also provided the inspiration for director and Morehouse graduate Spike Lee’s 1988 film School Daze (Lee, Blake, Jones, Lee, & Ross, 1988). School Daze centers on the experiences of Black college students at a historically Black university, while depicting issues of social class, political issues, Greek life, and higher education (Lee & Jones, 1988). The film underscores the divisions among African Americans based on skin tone and hair texture, as discussed by the students in fictional Black fraternities and sororities (Lee &
Jones, 1988). This motion picture includes an array of testimonies by African Americans of the trauma they experienced due to the persistent and ubiquitous nature of skin color preferences in society (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). Some African Americans believe this film sparked public discussions around color consciousness within their community (Baxely, 2014; Breland, 1998). Despite the harmful effects of colorism within the Black community stemming from slavery, society continues to grapple with its effects today.

**Economic Concerns**

The National Survey of Black Americans Series (NSBA) data from 1979-1980 revealed that skin color influences employment and income more than background characteristics (Keith & Herring, 1991). Additionally, data gathered from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI) from 1992-1994 indicate an association between skin tone and income, demonstrating that African Americans of light skin tones have higher hourly wages than those of dark skin tones (Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2007). Findings from the National Survey of American Life (NSAL) collected between 2001-2003 revealed that there is still an association between skin color and household income among African Americans (Monk, 2014). Current datasets reinforce past findings, which demonstrates that income differences dependent on skin color have persisted over time. This research highlights the fact that skin tone can affect African Americans’ economic standing, especially in the employment sector.

**Employment**

Colorism affects African American women through employment. According to Brown and Keith (2003), more than light skin women, dark skin Black women struggle with the direct impacts of colorism through adverse experiences and negative assumptions about their beauty, which can result in lower self-esteem and decreased levels of competence. Even among
unemployed Black women, individuals with darker complexions are more likely to experience depression than those of lighter complexions (Diette, Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2015). As aforementioned, African American men also deal with the adverse effects of colorism in employment.

Limited research exists regarding African American girls and future employment; yet predictions are possible. Beginning in academic settings, those Black girls that drop out are at risk for future unemployment or underemployment (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Colorism even affects employment opportunities, as some dark skin women are overlooked for certain positions, like stenographers (Allen, Telles, & Hunter, 2000). African American girls in this study will answer questions related to their physical and social environments. Though studied less often, colorism also affects the housing market, as discussed below.

**Housing Market**

Despite the U.S. government’s attempts to reform the housing market, racial segregation and inequality have remained in the housing credit system (Hernandez, 2009). One practice that reinforced housing discrimination was “redlining,” where central cities were outlined in red (Zenou & Boccard, 2000). These cities predominately consisted of African American residents. Due to banks’ refusal to invest in redlined communities, residents were unable to achieve middle class status. Consequently, these areas lacked grocery stores, employment opportunities, and other businesses (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Redlining permeated the 20th century, as banks continuously denied mortgages to African American home seekers and requests for home improvements to African American owners (Rothstein, 2015).

Retailers also engaged in redlining, as they refused services to certain areas after determining the proportion of racial and ethnic minority residents, rather than providing services
based on economic criteria (D’Rozario & Williams, 2005). From 1950-1960, redlining was a federal policy that determined areas that were likely to receive mortgage loans, insurance, and housing services (Wilson, 2011). These discriminatory practices, along with racial profiling, restricted housing options for racial and ethnic minorities and led to underdeveloped metropolitan areas (Squires, 2003). Unfortunately, the African American community faces the greatest challenges in the housing market due to a history of hyper-segregation and exclusion from high income White neighborhoods (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Hordge Freeman, 2010). The history of discriminatory practices in the housing market provides context for the treatment of African Americans when seeking housing. Although redlining is a racist housing practice that is not directly associated with colorism, scholars have observed that housing segregation has been fraught with both racist and colorist practices. The three following studies have observed colorism in the housing market (Branigan & Hall, 2018; Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Massey & Denton, 1993).

Generational wealth is often secured through home ownership (Steinmetz & Koeppel, 2017). After the Civil War, light skin African Americans had more knowledge of American culture and were preferred by White Americans who were more comfortable around them than dark skin African Americans. This led to White Americans providing them greater access to housing (Norwood, 2015). Massey and Denton (1993) partially defined American apartheid as the residential segregation dark skin African Americans experienced post-Civil War. This housing segregation confined dark-skinned African Americans to economically disadvantaged areas (Massey & Denton, 1993). Regarding home ownership, Hochschild and Weaver (2007) found African Americans of darker complexions are less likely to own homes than their light skin counterparts. Finally, Branigan and Hall (2018) conducted a study with African American
and Latinx “testers,” to observe skin tone discrimination that might occur when seeking housing. The authors found that dark skin Black testers were frequently asked for criminal background checks and shown fewer housing units than light skin Black testers (Branigan & Hall, 2018). The skin tone discrimination that African Americans face in the economic and housing markets is also present in the criminal justice system.

**Criminal Justice**

The United States has the highest prison population in the entire world (Moore, 2017). Over a thirty-year span, the penal population in the United States has risen by an estimated 1,700,000 prisoners (Alexander, 2010). These increasing incarceration rates include significant racial and gender disparities. Carson (2015) found Latinx and African American men are two and six times more likely to be imprisoned when compared to White men. As for female imprisonment, beginning in 2010, the population of women in jail has steadily increased by approximately 3.4% each year, and women are now the fastest growing prison population (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014). By the end of 2013, the proportion of women in state or federal prison was 49% White, 22% Black, and 17% Latinx (Carson, 2014). Even though there were fewer Black women in state and federal prison at that time, this population was jailed two times more than White women (Carson, 2014). Higher rates of incarceration are noted among people of color with certain skin tones, as detailed below.

African Americans of varying features have distinct experiences within the criminal justice system. In a study conducted by Dixon and Maddox (2005), the possession of Afrocentric features (e.g., wide nose, full lips, and darker skin) activated negative stereotypes and perceptions among the undergraduate participants. Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, and Johnson (2006) tested the association between Afrocentric features and the probability of African
Americans receiving the death penalty from 1979 to 1999. The researchers reported that being sentenced to death was positively associated with the possession of Afrocentric features, especially when a White victim was involved in the case (Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson, 2006).

Blair, Judd, and Chapleau (2004) observed samples of Black and White inmates from 1998-2002 to observe whether facial features affect criminal sentencing. These scholars reported African Americans with more Afrocentric features (or who appeared stereotypically Black) received longer criminal sentences than inmates with less Afrocentric features (Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004). In cases involving an African American committing homicide and a White victim, those offenders with darker skin and kinkier hair had an increased chance of being subject to the death penalty (Hammett, 2020). Crutchfield, Fisher, and Webb (2017) analyzed how skin color was associated with police killings of unarmed African Americans, using a sample of confirmed police victims from 1999 to 2014. Findings indicated skin tone was positively associated with police killings, as 80% of the sample possessed darker skin tones (Crutchfield, Fisher, & Webb, 2017). The aforementioned studies focused on the impacts of different Afrocentric features on criminal justice outcomes, but the following study analyzed skin tone and how it affects criminal perceptions. Dixon and Maddox (2005) observed that when participants who frequently viewed television were exposed to White and light, medium, and dark skin Black perpetrators, they were most uncomfortable with dark skin Black perpetrators and could easily remember them among all other perpetrators. These studies support the claim that feature based stereotypes and negative criminal perceptions occur in the criminal justice system, in police interactions, and among community members.
As for African American youth, colorism and stereotyping can affect school discipline and increase contact with the juvenile justice system. In schools, African American adolescents are perceived as adults more than White adolescents, which heightens their risk for school discipline (Blake et al., 2020). Juvenile justice probation officers also perceive Black youth as older and believe they are more likely to commit offenses than any other racial group (Graham & Lowery, 2004). African American girls are perceived through negative stereotypes (e.g., loud, aggressive, hypersexual) that contribute to increased discipline when they endorse these stereotypes (Blake, Butler, & Smith, 2015; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). In terms of colorism, those African American girls possessing more Afrocentric features (e.g., darker skin) were at greater risk for being stereotyped (Maddox & Gray, 2002) and disciplined. Hannon, DeFina, and Bruch (2013) also lament that African American female adolescents with dark skin tones are suspended three times more than those with lighter skin tones.

Due to limited research on colorism and African American girls, studies based on Black women serve as a guide for this understanding; assessing the experiences of African American women through this literature review frames conversation about the experiences of Black girls. The connection between youth and adults exists in the fact that Black girls later develop into Black women who experience the societal impacts of colorism. Even though there is limited research examining Black girls’ experiences of colorism, this study starts to address this issue. The following section will explore skin tone preferences in the marriage market. Since the current literature has commonly examined the effects of colorism on heterosexual relationships among African American women and men, the next section synthesizes literature surrounding this specific topic.

Marriage Market
In the United States, there has been a significant decline in marriage rates over the last 50 years (Sawhill & Venator, 2015). Among African Americans, the appreciable decrease in marriages resulted in social and economic impacts on the community (Allen, Telles, & Hunter, 2000; Hamilton, Goldsmith, & Darity, 2009; Hunter, 2005). The term “marriageable” was coined by Wilson (1987) to reflect the economic stability of potential partners, as the availability of these partners impacts marriage rates. In the 1970s, African American male unemployment skyrocketed, which heightened the number of single parent households (Wilson, 2011) and lowered the likelihood of marriage for this population. Moreover, scholars have documented other factors that contributed to the declining rates of marriageable Black men, which include increased incarceration rates, drug use, and mortality (Darity & Myers, 1983; Ellwood & Crane, 1990; Wilson & Neckerman, 1986).

While marriage rates have decreased (among this population) due to the availability of marriageable men, skin tone bias also plays a major role in the likelihood of marriage for Black women. Conversely, this does not assume that skin tone preference is the only issue influencing marriage decline. Beauty and/or attraction is a major factor in the dating and mating realm, and skin tone has a significant impact on this aspect of partner selection (Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013). Black women deal with specific trauma related to their skin tone because a woman’s worth has been historically linked to her physical attributes. Unlike women, men can compensate for appearance through money and position (Banks, 1999). In Golden’s (2004) memoir Don’t Play in The Sun, she recalls her family encouraging her not to play in the sun to prevent her skin from darkening. Family members also mentioned that she would need to find a light skin partner so that her children would not possess a darker skin tone (Golden, 2004). These findings and accounts demonstrate that the marriage market presents unique challenges regarding appearance.
for Black women that Black men may be able to circumvent through financial capital and social status.

In the United States, African American women of lighter complexions are considered more attractive (Averhart & Bigler, 1997; Hunter, 2007). As a result, light skin Black women are preferred marriage partners (Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013). African American women with darker complexions are considered unattractive, unintelligent, and unfeminine (Wilder, 2010). Due to the associations of beauty and light skin, Black men pay greater attention to light skin Black women (Hill, 2002; Hunter, 2008). Researchers even note that, among young Black women, those with lighter complexions are significantly more likely to be married than medium and dark skin Black women (Hamilton, Goldsmith, & Darity, 2009).

Though light skin African American women tend to receive greater privileges in society, they also confront colorism within the Black community. Their blackness may be perceived as inauthentic, and they may be stereotyped as pretentious or “not Black enough” (Hunter, 2008). In addition, because some light skin Black women are deemed more attractive by Black men, darker skin Black women may feel threatened, breeding resentment (Wilder, 2010). This phenomenon may result in dark skin African American women surmising that light skin Black women do not experience similar levels of oppression (Uzogara & Jackson, 2016), which may contribute to exclusionary behaviors.

In a study conducted with African American college students, Hall (1992) reported Black students perceive lighter skin as more desirable and darker skin as a negative attribute. These results support the idea that light skin is considered more attractive. In this colorism study, one variable discussed is African American girls’ attraction to other skin tones. Based on previous research, it is predicted that Black girls will find light skin tones more attractive than dark skin
tones. Russell-Cole, Wilson, and Hall (2013, p.158) asserted that “light skin both signifies and grants power by association,” which underpins the hypothesis that Black girls (regardless of their skin tone) may perceive Black boys of lighter complexions as more attractive. Even though attraction and the marriage market are a primary arena where colorism leads to differences in experience, the influence of individuals’ skin tones on educational outcomes are explored below.

**Education Attainment**

Several studies show that educational attainment is associated with skin tone discrimination. As supported by the MCSUI survey, African American women and men with dark skin tones have lower levels of education, while those with the highest levels of education were respondents with light skin tones (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). The NSAL dataset also had similar findings to the MCSUI. Skin tone was associated with educational attainment for both African American men and women (Monk, 2014). Specifically, as age increased from 30, light skin African Americans obtained six months to one and a half additional years of education compared to their dark skin counterparts (Monk, 2014). According to the NSBA, data on African American women’s skin tone were positively associated with education; those with lighter skin tones obtained one additional year of education compared to those with darker skin tones (Glenn, 2009; Hunter, 2005). Colorism also influences African American girls in schools.

In academic settings, educators demonstrated implicit biases through their encouragement and favorable behaviors toward White and light skin students (Hunter, 2016). Light skin African American girls receive preferential treatment from teachers (Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013). For example, educators often provide lighter Black female students with opportunities to participate in beauty pageants and serve as the lead role in school plays (Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013), which reinforces stereotypes that associate light skin with attractiveness. On the
other hand, dark skin African American girls are often ignored and undervalued while being stereotyped as unintelligent, loud, and rude (Morris, 2016). It is predicted that African American girls in this colorism study may have experienced some of this preferential treatment, or lack thereof, from their teachers.

**Risky Sexual Behavior**

Academic literature addresses the association between behavioral outcomes, such as risky sexual behavior, and skin tone (Landor, & Halpern, 2016; Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010). According to Cooper, Shapiro, and Powers (1998, p. 1528) safe and risky sexual behaviors are defined as “beliefs, attitudes, and motivations that are specific to health protection and disease avoidance.” Landor and Halpern (2016) found African Americans possessing lighter skin tones and positive attitudes toward marriage were less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior. The researchers speculated this association could be a result of light skin individuals believing marriage is more attainable (Landor & Halpern, 2016). Landor, Simons, Granberg, and Melby (2019) paralleled these research findings with their study on young African American women and reported an association between skin tone and sexual behavior. In this study, they operationalized sexual behavior as the frequency of sexual intercourse, number of partners, and HIV/AIDS diagnosis. Low self-esteem was negatively associated with sexual behavior and health outcomes among dark skin women (Landor, Simons, Granberg, & Melby, 2019).

Thus far, this chapter has reviewed the empirical literature related to colorism and the African American community, considering the historical perspective of colorism as it relates to race-mixing, stereotypes, and skin tone preferences stemming from slavery and persisting today. In order to account for the current ramifications of colorism, this literature review has discussed its effects on outcomes such as housing, criminal justice, the marriage market, educational
attainment, employment, and sexual behavior. Overall, this chapter has demonstrated social, political, and economic outcomes that can result from racial and skin tone stratification. This empirical literature review also presents evidence from multiple studies that indicates African Americans are not only disadvantaged by race but also by skin tone.

Furthermore, this chapter highlights the implications of colorism on the experiences of African American girls. Colorism is rooted in skin tone stereotypes that symbolize demarcations of value, intellect, and behavior among light and dark skin Black girls. These implications extend from childhood and can later exacerbate dropout rates, increasing dark skin Black girls’ contact with the criminal justice system and resulting in higher unemployment and low paid jobs. The effects of colorism even exist in the marriage market. Albeit, some Black adolescent girls are not currently seeking matrimony, but colorism can affect their attraction to others and others’ attraction toward them. Attraction based on colorist stereotypes can cause certain African American girls to engage in risky sexual behavior. Ultimately, this study aims to highlight the experiences of Black girls and contribute to colorism research.

**African American Girls**

Upon further review of the literature, scholars presented the implications colorism has on African American girls and their coping strategies. For example, a subset of Black girls who received messages of racial discrimination, accepted these ideologies, and rejected their physical attributes were more prone to substance use (Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011). Likewise, some of the African American girls in this study who endorsed colorism and stereotypes had a heightened risk of unsafe sexual behaviors (Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010). These examples demonstrated that existing adaptive coping mechanisms (i.e., self-concept, ethnic identity, and racial socialization) were not effective buffers against colorism
for certain Black girls. In addition to colorism’s impact on African American girls psychologically, emotionally, and physically, external implications exist. Blake, Keith, Luo, Le, and Salter (2017) observed Black girls with dark skin tones were at greater risk for school suspension. Currently, these are the only articles that highlight the experiences of African American girls and colorism. This colorism study will add to existing research by discussing the effects of colorism on the following outcomes: self-concept, attraction, affiliation, and environments. Since limited literature exists on African American girls’ experiences of colorism, this research will provide suggestions to intervene in negative future consequences that the girls may confront in adulthood.

Using previous colorism literature, the next chapter presents the theoretical models applied to the field. An explanation of each theory is provided and later critiqued. At the end of the chapter, a conceptual model is presented that combines the strengths of each model into a single theory that is used to frame this colorism research.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Model

The theoretical model used to frame this colorism study combines four theories in the field of colorism: critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, social identity theory, and skin tone bias. In this section, each of the theories is explained individually, including the current research studies that apply these models to explain the effects of colorism on an array of outcomes. At the end of the chapter, the integrative conceptual model that guides the present study is presented and explained.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Documentation on critical race theory does not indicate an exact timeframe for its development, but scholars largely agree it was created and established within the legal discipline and gained traction during the post-civil rights era (Baxely, 2014; Matsuda, 2018; Tate, 1997). As the first African American professor at Harvard Law School, the civil rights lawyer Derrick Bell has been instrumental in the development of the critical race theory movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Bell (1995) defines critical race theory as legal scholarship written by an array of minority scholars dedicated to dismantling institutionalized and legalized racism. “Critical race legal scholarship developed in the 1970s, in part because minority scholars thought they were being overlooked in critical legal studies, a better-known movement that examines the way law encodes cultural norms” (Monaghan, 1993, p. A7). Asian, Latinx, and African American scholars have been at the forefront of the critical race legal theory movement (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). During the 1970s, CRT scholars and activists united to evaluate and transform the intersections of racism and power by studying issues such as civil rights and ethnic studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). As stated by Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT recognizes that race is crucial to understand the daily experiences of African Americans and other people of color. CRT
has expanded its scope to include the microaggressions, macroaggressions, and oppressions faced not only by women of color but also Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and same-sex couples (Trevino, Harris, & Wallace, 2008).

The aim of CRT is to observe, unpack, and alter the connections between race, racism, and power in the United States for the purposes of eliminating racism and oppression (Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). CRT is composed of five key tenets: (1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) a critique of liberalism and other dominant ideologies, especially deficit perspectives; (3) Whiteness as economic, social, and cultural privilege; (4) interest convergence, i.e., that gains for people of color are only achieved when those gains converge with the interests of whites; and (5) the importance of experiential knowledge, particularly the lived experiences of people of color (Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014; Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). The five central tenets of CRT give this theory a unique perspective, as they encompass and legitimize the array of experiences people of color overcome living in a racially stratified society. Another component of CRT that is relevant to this work is called centering in the margins. Usually, discourse is engaged from the viewpoint of the dominant group, but centering the margins allows for a shift in perspective that is guided by the marginalized group (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). Highlighting the experiences of critical race theorists and addressing underrepresented populations could: ground the perspectives of minority communities, strengthen the knowledge base around inequalities, and introduce new solutions to archaic problems (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010).

Generally, CRT dominates the field of colorism research because scholars can highlight certain tenets to investigate the impact of skin tone discrimination on various outcomes. To this end, CRT has been applied to understand both the psychological and societal consequences of
colorism (Crutchfield, Fisher, & Webb 2017; Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). The previous studies measured the influence of skin tone on similar outcomes, as does this study. The PI plans to investigate the psychological and societal consequences of colorism according to African American girls. Psychological consequences will involve variables such as self-concept, while societal consequences will include environmental factors.

**Intersectionality Theory**

Stemming from feminist theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, which expands the theory by considering the intersections of social positions (Reddy-Best, Choi, & Park, 2018). Historically, African American women were obligated to “pick a side,” by identifying with either their race or gender, as their voices were undermined and ignored if their experiences did not align with African American men or White women (Robinson, 2011). Crenshaw (1989) professed that African American women experienced “double discrimination,” due to their race and gender and developed the term intersectionality. To explain intersectionality as a theory, she stated:

> The experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244).

Rather than centralizing acts of discrimination through a single-axis framework, Crenshaw (1989) calls for a multidimensional approach to provide a holistic assessment of Black women’s experiences.
Crenshaw (1991) divided the social conceptualization of intersectionality into three major components: structural, political, and representational. According to Verloo (2006, p. 213), “structural intersectionality occurs when inequalities and their intersections are directly relevant to the experiences of people in society.” For example, Crenshaw (1991) discussed the limitations of some social organizations that attempt to provide the same services to individuals regardless of the intersection of their race, gender, and class. This can disadvantage some individuals, as assistance should be tailored to the specific needs of a population in order to provide culturally appropriate and relevant services. Verloo (2006, p. 213) then recognized that political intersectionality can “…indicate how inequalities and their intersections are relevant to political strategies.” Crenshaw (1991) stated feminist theory and antiracist politics may contribute to violence against women of color, as race and gender are often in opposition in the political realm, resulting in policies that benefit men of color or White women. Lastly, representational intersectionality “concerns the production of images of women of color drawing on sexist and racist narratives and tropes, as well as the ways that critiques of these representations marginalize or reproduce the objectification of women of color” (Carastathis, 2014, p. 307). In this way, Crenshaw (1991) confronted the negative depictions of women of color in the media and explored how these images contribute to their intersectional disempowerment.

Intersectionality theory has guided research that emphasizes the unique experiences of African American women and is still influential in the field of colorism. Studies have applied this theory to examine the impacts of skin color on African American college students (Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, & Belgrave, 2014), and to understand how racism and colorism intersect in media and can intensify Black women’s body dissatisfaction (Jankowski, Tshuma, & Hylton, 2017). Intersectionality theory has also framed research aimed to evaluate the influence of
African American’s skin color on their racial identity and satisfaction with their skin color (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). This theory is essential to frame this study, which incorporates the voices of African American girls’ racialized and gendered experiences.

**Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory (SIT) helps explain conflict that can occur between groups, also known as intergroup conflict. Social identity theory was introduced between 1970 and 1980 by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner (Turner & Reynolds, 2010). Social identity is defined as the psychological perception of self, which connects individuals through identities and comparisons to others, that is reinforced by group identification (Tajfel, 1974). “The creation of group identities involves both the categorization of one’s ‘in-group’ with regard to an ‘out-group’ and the tendency to view one’s own group with a positive bias vis-à-vis the out-group” (Islam, 2014, p. 178). When groups are ostracized from the in-group, they may feel excluded, which can lead to competition or prejudices (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Further, group categorizations are based on numerous factors such as ancestry, nationality, oppression, and skin tone (Sanders Thompson, 2013). Group identification based on skin tone can cause divisions among and within groups.

To illustrate, Goldsmith, Hamilton, and Darity (2007) applied SIT to examine skin tone as the marker of in-group identification to explain why White and Black individuals show preferential treatment for African Americans of lighter skin tones. First, positive in-group bias may result from the belief that individual success is aligned with the groups’ accomplishments due to the perception of a common fate (Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2007). Second, Tajfel and Turner (1979; 1986) presented the idea of the “status effect,” stating that group status influences intergroup behaviors. Thus, when skin tone stratification results in status acquisition,
members of lower status will demonstrate preferences for members of higher status. This creates favoritism for the out-group rather than in-group favoritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) due to the perceived relationship between higher status and the out-group. In this example, social identity theory is ideal because it explains intergroup relations between White and Black social groups. It also clarifies intragroup relations among Black populations due to skin tone variation. Social identity theory does not dominate colorism literature, but the aforementioned study and the following studies have applied it in an appropriate manner.

Social identity theory has guided the literature on intergroup and intragroup conflicts that affect social positioning (Diette, Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2015) and has been used to explain findings suggesting that, under economic stress, dark skin African American women have greater mental health issues than light skin African American women. The study examined the influence of skin tone on unemployment and the mental health outcomes of African American women (Diette, Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2015). The authors reported that unemployed dark skin Black women are at greater risk of depression compared to light skin African American women (Diette, Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2015). Social identities related to skin tone, gender, race, and socioeconomic status lead to unique colorism experiences for Black populations, resulting in negative consequences (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). The cited literature suggests the need to investigate how the intersection of skin tone, gender, and race yield distinct experiences of colorism for African American girls, a focus of this dissertation.

**Theoretical Modifications**

Intersectionality, social identity, and critical race theories provide an appropriate set of theoretical frameworks to explore colorism. CRT encompasses the expansive impacts of race,
racism, and power. These domains are crucial in the lives of African American girls, yet CRT does not include the developmental factors that contribute to Black girls’ experience of colorism that may or may not be impacted by race, racism, and power. These factors could include, but are not limited to, societal biases related to developmental behaviors, status, roles and/or negative attributes associated with Black girls. CRT has impeccably framed conversations around racism, but may not account for colorism experiences that impact how Black girls are treated in schools, their families, and communities.

Intersectionality theory has been tailored to the experiences of African American women and girls. This theory is ideal to frame this research study, but has not accounted for the developmental differences relevant to Black girls’ experiences based on skin color. Intersectionality theory accounts for race, but it does not discuss how specific phenotypic traits (e.g., skin tone, facial features, etc.) lead Black girls to have unique colorism experiences in the United States. Social identity theory is useful for analyzing conflicts between social groups. African American girls are relegated to the out-group based on their racial group, but some could benefit from in-group privilege by possessing a lighter skin tone, as analyzed in this study.

One theory not commonly used to study colorism is the skin tone bias theoretical model created by Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman (2016). Even though it includes micro, mezzo, and macro level assessments of colorism, the skin tone bias theoretical model is underutilized in the field. This theory is beneficial as it analyzes the target (or victim of skin tone bias) and the perceiver, which are both micro level assessments. It also accounts for mezzo level effects that include skin tone bias and discrimination. Lastly, it examines the consequences of skin tone bias on a macro level. This study draws on the skin tone bias theoretical model, as well as
components of critical race, intersectionality and social identity theories, while integrating developmental considerations, to create an integrative model of colorism (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Colorism Conceptual Model

To investigate how colorism can contribute to traumatic stress among African Americans, Landor and McNeil Smith (2019) created a conceptual model of skin tone trauma. This model accounts for the system of oppression, colorist incidents, health outcomes, and traumatic stress reactions. These specific reactions may include emotional (i.e., shame, guilt, anger), physical (i.e., weight gain/loss, increased blood pressure), behavioral (i.e., isolation/avoidance, suicide behavior), and cognitive (i.e., reexperiencing, internalization) responses. Although this
conceptual model is not integrated into the model in Figure 1, it does inform thought around the potential reactions that African American girls may exhibit or express in this study. This model was not included in Figure 1 because this study does not address the specific emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses employed by participants. Primarily, this study was intended to glean the coping mechanisms that the girls presented to the researcher in order to understand how they specifically buffered against colorism. However, future models could incorporate skin tone trauma to fully assess participants’ responses to colorism.

The above conceptual model is illustrated using examples from this study. First, the orange boxes (1, 4, and 5) are derived from the skin tone bias model. Regarding box 1, the racial and historical context of a situation determines the type of skin tone bias observed. For this colorism study, the population of interest is African American girls, whose racial and historical context of colorism in the United States is unique when compared to other racial and ethnic groups. The PI hypothesized that Black girls would have specific experiences of skin tone bias (Box 4) that result in a unique set of responses (Box 5).

As for the perceiver, or green box 2, the individual characteristics of the perceiver influence skin tone bias. This relates to social identity theory, as the perceiver may identify with the in-group (based on skin tone) or the out-group (based on racial identity), which could lead to skin tone bias. The perceiver is also impacted by racial socialization, as the messages they have received from teachers, community members, family members, and/or their friends related to their racial identity could cause them to enact skin tone bias. Further, other attributes and social identities of the perceiver, such as socioeconomic status and education, may contribute to the activation of skin tone bias.
In green boxes 2 and 6, developmental status considers the age and cognitive ability of the perceiver and the individual who is victimized by skin tone bias. As discovered by Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman (2016), youth may deal with the consequences of colorism (e.g., exclusion from others), but may be unaware that this exclusion is related to skin tone preferences and biases. Thus, an individual’s developmental status and their understanding, or lack thereof, of skin tone bias will ultimately affect how they respond. Moreover, attitudes of social others (green box 7) could contribute to the target’s responses based on the messages they receive from media, politics, school, and other social groups with which they identify. For this study, the perceivers are teachers, community members, family members, and/or friends whose individual characteristics (i.e., developmental status and other attributes) will activate certain types of skin tone bias. The combination of the orange and green boxes will highlight how the targets, African American girls, respond to skin tone bias.

The target is accounted for in the model through blue boxes 3 and 8. These boxes are related to intersectionality theory, as the theory highlights the specific social identities that may result in skin tone bias. In this colorism study, the PI analyzed the unique effects that skin tone bias has on African American girls. Next, phenotypic traits are accounted for in the model, as scholars have found that African Americans possessing pronounced African features (e.g., dark skin, coarse hair, full lips, and wide nose) experience more racial discrimination (Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004). Blue box 8 draws upon intersectionality theory, examining the target’s response, which may be influenced by their racial identity. Target response is included in the model because skin tone bias can influence one’s conception of their racial identity (Adams, Kurtz-Costes, & Hoffman, 2016). In general, this colorism study examines how gender and phenotypic traits contribute to the skin tone bias that African American girls experience.
Yellow boxes 9 and 10 represent CRT, where the intersections of race, racism, and power can yield skin tone discrimination (yellow box 9) and result in certain consequences (yellow box 10). Prior research has pointed to some of the unique consequences that have been associated with colorism and Black girls, such as substance use (Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011), risky sexual behavior (Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010), increased suspension risk, and social stratification in schools (Blake, Keith, Luo, Le, & Salter, 2017; Hunter, 2016).

During the interview component of this study, the PI asked questions regarding the participants self-concept, attraction to others, affiliation with others, and environments. Academic outcomes were also discussed. Each of these components is related to the conceptual model used for this study. Self-concept, or importance of skin tone, is accounted for through racial identity (blue box 8). Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman’s (2016) research indicated that skin tone bias could influence how individuals view their race. The next component, impression formation, or impressions of others, was assessed through the attitudes of social others (green box 7). Attraction, environments, and academic outcomes were investigated through the consequences of colorism (yellow box 10). The PI believes this integrative conceptual model is the strongest when analyzing colorism across various outcomes.

The chapter that follows provides information about the study design and methodology employed in this study. This chapter explores the PI’s rationale for conducting this mixed methods study in the selected manner. It details information about the qualitative and quantitative methods used and provides a justification for this approach. The chapter ends with a discussion of the equipment used to protect the confidentiality of the girls and this research.
Chapter 3: Study Design & Methods

The Washington University in St. Louis Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this research study (IRB ID# 202001083), with researcher Maya Williams listed as the Principal Investigator and a team of four other researchers from the University.

Methodological Approach

Study Design

This study used a mixed methods design. There are potential benefits and five key advantages to the selected approach. As stated by Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), these benefits include triangulation (corroboration of approaches), complementarity (enhancement of approaches), development (influence of one approach on the other), initiation (new framework developed), and expansion (broadening a theoretical understanding). The qualitative interviews add depth to the findings of the quantitative data derived from the survey portion of the study. Mixed methods research integrates qualitative and quantitative data in order to strengthen the current knowledge of a phenomenon (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). For this research study, the PI found complementary data using both approaches. Yet, the next chapter reports observation of some contradictory findings.

Following the mixed methods approach, Rubin and Babbie (2016) identify nine types of research design. This study involved the Qualitative --> quantitative approach with an emphasis on the qualitative method. Furthermore, a convergent mixed methods design was applied (Creswell, 2014a; 2014b). Using this design, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then merged. The benefits of this method include substantiating the data and providing the veracity of the findings (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). This approach was beneficial for learning whether the girls’ verbal responses, which may
have yielded social desirability or biases, coincided with potentially less biased written responses.

**Participants.** The African American girls recruited for this study were cis-gendered, meaning they ascribed to the gender norms associated with their birth-assigned sex and gender identity (Enke, 2012). Thus, there were no transgendered girls in this study. These participants were recruited using convenience sampling. Participants were from an after-school program in St. Louis and were invited to participate by the organization’s leader. We used snowball sampling to recruit additional girls to complete the survey portion of the study. Using snowball sampling, participants from the qualitative study contacted their acquaintances in the desired age range and sent them the consent form and letter about the study. Girls in the study also provided their acquaintances with the PI’s contact information. These additional girls then contacted the PI and were sent the online survey link to complete. The only requirements for the girls to participate in the study were to identify as a Black girl in the desired age range and grade.

**Procedures.** Quantitative survey data were collected via an online Qualtrics survey, and the qualitative data were gathered through Zoom small group interviews. Initially, the PI intended to conduct focus group interviews with the participants, but was unable to do so due to COVID-19 restrictions. Throughout this dissertation, these interviews will be referred to as individual and small group interviews. The reasoning for this is that the largest interview group contained 5 girls. A concrete number of individuals participating in focus groups does not exist, but they usually range from 6-10 participants (Baillie, 2019). None of the interviews reached the optimal range of participants; thus, these will not be considered focus group interviews. Moreover, two interviews were completed with individuals. The number of girls that participated in each of the interviews is presented in Table 1.
**Recruitment.** The president and CEO of the afterschool program reviewed contact sheets from girls enrolled in the program. The president then contacted the parents of girls within the desired age and grade range and selected those girls whose parents consented to their participation in the study. Emails were sent to parents including the following documents: recruitment flyer (See Appendix A), IRB approved consent form, and a parent letter explaining the study (See Appendix B). The emails encouraged parents to contact the president with additional questions and/or interest. After 30 parents consented to the study, the president ceased to email additional parents. Next, the president communicated with parents to obtain verbal consent for their daughter’s participation in this study. The PI then created Zoom interview sessions for the participants based on their age, and the president assigned girls to one of ten interview groups depending on age or availability.

Regarding the extra 30 girls that were recruited to participate in the online survey component of this study, a different consent process was used. After the girls were informed of the study through a snowball sampling approach and received the documents related to the study, the PI spoke with the girl’s parents. The IRB approved of the girl’s parents providing verbal or written consent to the PI to participate in the study. After the PI received consent from the girl’s parents, each participant was sent the online survey link for completion.

**Human Subject Consideration & Protection.** Before the interviews transpired, consent was obtained from the parents since the participants were minors. Interested parents received an email about the online survey, a flyer, a letter about the study, and a consent form. After the parents received this email, they provided verbal consent to the president for their daughters to participate in the study. When the parents had additional questions, they were able to directly contact the president of the after-school program. Due to the online nature of this study, parents
were not required to sign the consent forms, but simply provide consent for their daughter’s participation by replying to the email, text, or verbally consenting via telephone.

**Interviews.** Before the official data collection for this study, the PI pre-tested the interview questions. The PI contacted three parents who were recommended to her by community members she had worked with previously in the St. Louis area. These parents had African American daughters between the ages of 11 and 13. The PI asked for the parents’ consent to pre-test questions with their daughters. Once the parents consented, the PI spoke with the three girls individually and asked all of the questions from Appendix E to assess whether the questions made sense or needed to be altered. Each girl agreed that they understood the questions and felt comfortable responding to them. After the pre-testing, the PI believed that the interview questions would be received well by the actual participants in the study.

The PI conducted Zoom small group interviews for two hours, and all interviews were video recorded. The 11 groups were divided as depicted below (Table 1). Group sizes were determined based on the girls’ school schedules and availability. The president attempted to separate groups by age cohorts, but, due to variability in the girls' schedules, ages varied in different Zoom groups. Online small group interviews were used to acquire more in-depth data from participants than the survey provides. Interview questions were designed to learn: 1) How African American girls understand their skin tone through others’ treatment (e.g., peers, teachers, family, and friends); (2) how messages about skin tone influence the girls’ self-concept, attraction, affiliation preferences, and environments; and (3) which adaptive coping mechanisms the girls use to grapple with instances of skin tone bias, discrimination, and colorism.
Table 1: Zoom Interview Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Groups</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview One</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Two</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Three</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Four</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Five</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Six</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Seven</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Eight</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Nine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Ten</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Eleven</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once all participants logged into their Zoom interview session, the PI introduced herself and the study. During the first 15-minutes of the study, the PI created individual break out groups in Zoom and assigned each participant to their own session. The PI then sent each girl the Qualtrics demographic survey to complete. This online version included demographic characteristic information along with the three scales from the NSAL, Skin-Tone Picture scale, and In-group colorism scale, which are described below in greater detail. After the girls completed the online survey, they regrouped in the main session. The PI then discussed the study in greater detail, obtained assent (See Appendix C) from each participant, and proceeded with the
small group interview. A semi-structured interview transpired for 2 hours using the questions provided in Appendix E. Each girl received a $20 gift card, donated by an anonymous corporation, for participating in the study. A researcher on the team mailed the gift cards to the president of the agency, who distributed them to the girls 5-7 days after the completion of the interview.

**Online Survey Data.** In between the qualitative interviews, the additional 30 girls were recruited. The PI typically scheduled interviews on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. After the girls completed their interview, the PI would ask them to send the documents related to the study to acquaintances who were interested in participating. The PI told the girls that the best contact days were Tuesdays and Thursdays. During those days, the PI was in contact with prospective participants’ parents. After the PI received consent, the girls then received the online survey via text or email. Over the course of three months, 30 extra girls were recruited and completed the Qualtrics survey.

**Measures**

The PI captured demographics, skin tone, and a quantitative assessment of colorism from the participants through the demographic data questionnaire. Membership was included as a variable in this study to determine if there were differences in the girls’ experiences of colorism based on their participation in the after-school program. This was a dichotomous variable with a “yes” or “no” response. Membership was coded as yes=1 and no=2. Coding for grade was 1=6th grade, 2=7th grade, 3=8th grade, 4=9th grade, and 6=other. Race was coded as 1=Black/African American and 2=other. For those girls that selected “other,” they also identified as Black, but were mixed race and preferred to choose the category “other.”
**Skin-Tone Picture Scale.** Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, and Gocial (2005) developed and validated the Skin-Tone Picture Scale by conducting a study on 132 African American students at both predominately Black and White institutions to analyze intragroup stigmatization of skin tone. The purpose of developing the scale was to create a measurement tool that reflected a greater range of skin tones. To complete the scale, the team used 200 color yearbook photos of African Americans at Black universities. The team then narrowed these pictures down to 16 (eight African American men and eight African American women) examples that represented a range of skin tones from light to dark (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005). They also used Photoshop to neutralize skin tone fluctuations such as redness or brightness (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005).

The Skin-Tone Picture scale provides a different way to measure skin tone using photos rather than written self-reports. Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, and Gocial (2005) demonstrated content, construct, and criterion validity for the Skin-Tone Picture scale. During the developmental stages of the scale, a pilot study was conducted, and the scale yielded content validity due to interrater agreement. The authors stated, “A tedious procedure for balancing the skin tone ordinal, attractiveness, and demeanor of the pictures was validated by a high degree of interrater reliability among five judges in a pilot test” (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005, p. 242). However, the researchers were remiss in providing the actual percentage of interrater reliability.

The researchers used the Skin-Tone Picture scale in addition to a nine-point Likert scale to measure skin tone. The Likert scale contained endpoints, where 1=very light brown and 9=very dark brown. After completing the study, the researchers concluded the Skin-Tone Picture scale had construct validity due to its convergence with the Likert skin tone measurement. In
terms of criterion validity, the Skin Tone Picture Scale was significantly associated with constructs such as Skin-Tone Importance, Peer-Group Acceptance, Racial Identity, and Personal Self-Esteem (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005). Unfortunately, no reliability data were reported; nevertheless, Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, and Gocial (2005) asserted that the reliability and validity coefficients were consistent with previous studies. Due to its reliability, validity, and innovation in the field, African American girls in this study used the Skin-Tone Picture scale that includes eight photos of African American women, as depicted in Appendix D. The girls rated their skin tone using numbers that coincided with photos on a 17-point scale ranging from 0-16.

**Measurement Validity.** In an attempt to determine if the dependent variables were associated with one another, correlation tables were computed. Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, and Gocial (2005) checked for measurement validity in their study and proceeded to test these measures on African American adults. Since this study used similar measures, the PI assessed measurement validity before testing the measures on African American girls. Table 2 provides correlations between the dependent variables. As demonstrated below, none of the dependent variables were correlated.

Table 2: Correlation Table of Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SELF-CONCEPT</th>
<th>IMPRESSION</th>
<th>AFFILIATION</th>
<th>ATTRACTION</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SELF-CONCEPT</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPRESSION</td>
<td>0.3029</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>0.0864</td>
<td>0.3670</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFILIATION</td>
<td>-0.0133</td>
<td>0.3692</td>
<td>0.5740</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>0.1952</td>
<td>-0.0716</td>
<td>0.0531</td>
<td>0.1380</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Partial and semipartial correlations.** The PI then obtained partial and semipartial correlations between the dependent variables to assess their correlation. The p-values can be observed in the column titled significance value in Tables 3-7. R-values are reported but not included in tables. All associations mentioned in this section have been determined using
correlation thresholds from Harvey, Tennial, and Banks (2017). We report the r-coefficient for each correlation.

Table 3: Partial and semipartial correlations on Self-concept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>0.2605</td>
<td>0.2455</td>
<td>0.0679</td>
<td>0.0602</td>
<td>0.0503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPRESSION</td>
<td>0.3532</td>
<td>0.3435</td>
<td>0.1248</td>
<td>0.1180</td>
<td>0.0070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFILIATION</td>
<td>-0.1911</td>
<td>-0.1771</td>
<td>0.0365</td>
<td>0.0314</td>
<td>0.1544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>0.0545</td>
<td>0.0496</td>
<td>0.0030</td>
<td>0.0025</td>
<td>0.6873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As demonstrated in Table 3, self-concept had a moderate positive correlation with impression formation and was statistically significant, \( r = .302 \). There was a moderate correlation for self-concept and environment, \( r = .195 \). A weak correlation existed between self-concept and attraction (\( r = .086 \)), as well as affiliation (\( r = -.013 \)).

Table 4: Partial and semipartial correlations on Impression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SELF-CONCEPT</td>
<td>0.3532</td>
<td>0.3187</td>
<td>0.1248</td>
<td>0.1016</td>
<td>0.0070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>-0.2088</td>
<td>-0.1802</td>
<td>0.0436</td>
<td>0.0325</td>
<td>0.1190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFILIATION</td>
<td>0.2732</td>
<td>0.2397</td>
<td>0.0747</td>
<td>0.0575</td>
<td>0.0397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>0.1689</td>
<td>0.1446</td>
<td>0.0285</td>
<td>0.0209</td>
<td>0.2092</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding impression formation, it was statistically significant and had a moderately positive correlation with self-concept (Table 3), \( r = .302 \), and affiliation (Table 4), \( r = .369 \). Impression formation had a moderate correlation with attraction (\( r = .367 \)), but a weak correlation with environment (\( r = -.071 \)).

Table 5: Partial and semipartial correlations on Attraction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SELF-CONCEPT</td>
<td>0.0545</td>
<td>0.0437</td>
<td>0.0030</td>
<td>0.0019</td>
<td>0.6873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPRESSION</td>
<td>0.1689</td>
<td>0.1371</td>
<td>0.0285</td>
<td>0.0188</td>
<td>0.2092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENT</td>
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<td>-0.0154</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
<td>0.0002</td>
<td>0.8869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFILIATION</td>
<td>0.5023</td>
<td>0.4650</td>
<td>0.2523</td>
<td>0.2162</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attraction had a strong, positive correlation with affiliation (r=.574) and is statistically significant, as indicated in Table 5. There was also a moderate correlation between attraction and impression formation (r=.367). On the contrary, attraction had a weak correlation with environment (r=.053) and self-concept (r=.086).

Table 6: Partial and semipartial correlations on Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SELF-CONCEPT</td>
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<td>0.0365</td>
<td>0.0229</td>
<td>0.1544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.0397</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.0391</td>
<td>0.0245</td>
<td>0.1406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>0.5023</td>
<td>0.4511</td>
<td>0.2523</td>
<td>0.2035</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously mentioned, affiliation and attraction (r=.574) are statistically significant and have a strong positive correlation as shown in Table 6. Affiliation had moderate correlation with impression formation (r=.369), but a weak correlation with self-concept (r=-.013) and environment (r=.138).

Table 7: Partial and semi-partial correlations on Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SELF-CONCEPT</td>
<td>0.2605</td>
<td>0.2557</td>
<td>0.0679</td>
<td>0.0654</td>
<td>0.0503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPRESSION</td>
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<td>-0.2024</td>
<td>0.0436</td>
<td>0.0410</td>
<td>0.1190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFILIATION</td>
<td>0.1976</td>
<td>0.1911</td>
<td>0.0391</td>
<td>0.0365</td>
<td>0.1406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>-0.0193</td>
<td>-0.0183</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td>0.8869</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Environment had a moderate positive correlation and was statistically significant with self-concept (r=.195) in Table 7. Yet, there was a weak correlation between environment and impression formation (r=-.071), attraction (r=.053), and affiliation (r=.138). These findings indicate that, overall, the dependent variables were associated with each other. Some of the
variables had stronger, moderate, or weaker correlations. These data suggested that these measures could be used on the survey when collecting data on African American girls.

**National Survey of American Life (NSAL) Skin Tone Scale.** The NSAL was conducted by the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research’s Survey Research Center in conjunction with the Program for Research on Black Americans between 2001 and 2003 (Keith, Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2010). This study contained variables such as: socioeconomic status, discrimination, psychosocial influences on well-being, and skin tone (Uzogara, Lee, Abdou, & Jackson, 2014). Interviewers asked participants two questions regarding perceived skin tone discrimination during the study, and the interviewer rated the participant’s skin tone once the study concluded (Uzogara & Jackson, 2016). At the start of the data collection process, scholars conducted face-to-face interviews with participants in their home, and later compensated them for their participation (Keith, Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2010). The NSAL self-reported measure of skin tone was used for this research study. This skin tone measure was assessed on a five-point categorical scale: very light brown, light brown, medium brown, dark brown, and very dark brown (Diette, Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2015).

The NSAL scale is a reliable and valid measure. During the beginning stages of this study’s interview process, the research team taped and reviewed interviewer coding for interrater reliability (Jackson, Neighbors, Nesse, Trierweiler, & Torres, 2004). However, reliability coefficients were not reported. Even though researchers did not report on the specific validity of the skin tone measure, there was evidence of convergent and discriminant validity in the NSAL survey (Jackson, Neighbors, Nesse, Trierweiler, & Torres, 2004). The five-point scale from the NSAL was used as one of the measures to determine girls’ self-reported skin tone rating. Each
point was coded as detailed: 1=Very Light Brown, 2=Light Brown, 3=Medium Brown, 4=Dark Brown, 5=Very Dark Brown.

For this colorism study, the PI determined the consistency of participants’ rating of their skin tone on both the Skin-Tone Picture and the NSAL written scales. Results of these ratings are expounded upon in the following chapter. Incorporating the NSAL word scale and Skin-Tone Picture scale was crucial to this study for triangulation purposes. Two of the researchers on the team also rated the participants on both scales. This provided the team with two measurements from the Skin-Tone Picture scale and the NSAL written scale in order to have greater accuracy in the measurement of the actual skin tone of the participants.

In-group Colorism Scale (ICS)

The individual influence of colorism is measured using the ICS created by Harvey, Tennial, and Banks (2017). This 20-item scale measures the importance of skin tone variation across five subscales. Self-concept, the first subscale, is defined as the significance and meaning placed on skin tone with regard to one’s self-concept (e.g., “My skin tone is an important part of my self-concept”). This domain contains five items. Impression Formation, or how impressions are formed of others, is the second subscale containing five items (e.g., “You can tell a lot about a person by their skin tone”). Affiliation, or the people with whom one desires associations and/or friendships, is the third subscale containing five items (e.g., “I’m usually uncomfortable being around people who are a certain skin tone”). Attraction, or what is seen as attractive (e.g., “I’m primarily attracted to people of a certain skin tone”), is the fourth subscale. This scale includes five items. Upward mobility, or beliefs about upward mobility, is the fifth and final subscale containing five items (e.g., “Even if you work really hard, your skin tone matters most”).
The ICS uses a seven-point Likert scale, coded as follows: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat disagree, 4=neutral, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, and 7= strongly agree. After creating the ICS, Harvey, Tennial, and Banks (2017) then conducted two studies in order to determine its reliability and validity. Both studies were online surveys completed by approximately 383 Black Americans. In the first study, the reliability for the ICS ranged from .73 to .90 (Harvey, Tennial, and Banks, 2017). Self-concept yielded good reliability with a coefficient alpha=.87. Impression Formation yielded acceptable reliability with a coefficient alpha=.73. Affiliation yielded good reliability with a coefficient alpha=.80. Attraction yielded good reliability with a coefficient alpha=.81. Lastly, Upward Mobility yielded excellent reliability with a coefficient alpha=.90.

In the second study, Harvey, Tennial, and Banks (2017) tested for ICS criterion validity among a different set of Black participants. To demonstrate criterion validity, the researchers conducted a literature review and found constructs commonly associated with colorism. Meaningful and significant correlations were found relating to six constructs associated with colorism that included socialization, skin tone, stereotypes, racial centrality, and self-esteem. Self-concept, attraction, and upward mobility were positively correlated with socialization, while there was a negative correlation between self-concept and skin tone. Furthermore, all ICS subscales were positively correlated with the assignment of negative stereotypes to dark skin individuals. Racial centrality was positively correlated with self-concept and negatively correlated with impression formation, affiliation, and attraction. Regarding self-esteem, it had a negative correlation with the subscale self-concept for women and no correlation for men. The correlational analyses indicated the criterion validity of the ICS subscales. This scale was included for this research undertaking, as it is a strong measurement of African American’s
attitudes toward colorism. Originally, the ICS was developed for African American adults, but it was applied to African American female youth for the first time in this study.

**Modified ICS.** Using the original ICS, a new qualitative ICS was developed for the purposes of this study that contains seven domains (See Appendix E). Four of these domains were retained from the quantitative ICS (i.e., self-concept, impression formation, attraction, and affiliation). By necessity, two domains were added—physical attributes and coping strategies. The first domain, physical attributes, was incorporated to capture the Black girls’ understanding of their phenotypic features and their connection to colorism. The physical attributes domain contains four items (e.g., “Tell me what you hear on the radio, television, or see in magazines that affects how you feel about how you look.”). The coping strategies domain was added to foster an understanding of the strategies, techniques, language, and/or behaviors the girls employ to combat colorism. This domain contains four items (e.g., “What do you do if people say negative things about your skin tone? Describe that to me”). The initial ICS was also altered to include questions that would better reflect the understanding, development, and age of the girls that completed the survey.

The remaining qualitative questions were developed to parallel the original ICS measure. The next domain affiliation contains four items (e.g., “Do you choose who you are going to be friends with based on the person’s looks? Or skin tone? Describe that for me”). Domain three is impression formation and contains three items (e.g., “Describe how you feel about your skin color? Please explain”). Self-concept, the fourth domain, contains four items (e.g., “Do you believe that your skin tone has affected the way you feel about yourself? If so, describe that for me”). Attraction is domain five and it contains two items (e.g., “Tell me about the types of skin tones you like”). Domain six is environments and it contains five items (e.g., “Does anyone in
your family ever discuss skin tone? Tell me more about that”). Unlike the ICS, this scale does not include the upward mobility domain, as it would not have been relevant for girls that are not employed.

These measures allowed the PI to determine whether the findings from the quantitative and the qualitative measures were contradictory or complementary. The PI and research team developed questions on coping strategies for this study. Given the fact that coping scales already exist in research, an extensive literature review by the PI revealed a lack of coping scales linked to phenotype (e.g., skin tone) that would allow the PI to determine how participants buffer against colorism. Consequently, the PI and research team created questions to elicit information on the coping efforts and strategies employed by African American girls.

Online Survey. The online Qualtrics survey was comprised of three different scales to triangulate the measures of skin tone (See Appendix D). The demographic questions were essential variables for this research study to ensure the participants were the target population based on their race, grade, and age. The Skin-Tone Picture scale was included in the demographic questionnaire, which asked the participants to categorize their skin tone based on the image and corresponding number that they thought best represented their complexion. The NSAL written scale was incorporated for participants to rate their skin tone on a five-point scale. Using these two scales, the interviewer and another researcher also rated the participants’ skin tone. This technique was used to provide another measure of skin tone and to triangulate the data.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis. The quantitative component of this study helps to contextualize response data from the qualitative interviews. Descriptive statistics provide
information on seven independent variables: membership, age, grade, race, school, skin tone word scales, and skin tone picture scales. For the purposes of this study, race and gender are inclusion characteristics and are not included in the analysis because they are essential to the study of African American girls. Additionally, most girls reported that they had a medium skin tone, with few reporting a light or dark skin tone. For this reason, as well as the small sample size, the PI was unable to analyze the data based on skin tone. The descriptive statistics for this study include means, medians, standard deviations, minimums, maximums, and variances. Frequency tables are presented for variables in this study. Previous colorism research has analyzed skin tone using three skin color groups: light, medium, and dark (Coard, Breland, & Raskin, 2001; Mathews & Johnson, 2015; Perdue, Young, Balam, & Vazin, 2015). In order to provide this descriptive data, self-reported skin tone values, along with the interviewer’s ratings, were categorized into one of the three skin color groups used in previous research.

There are five dependent variables in this study: self-concept, impression formation, attraction, affiliation, and environment. The importance of these variables is examined through correlations among colorism measures and the dependent variables. The correlation analysis will allow the PI to determine if the dependent variables were linearly related (positive, negative, or no correlation). This analysis answered the following aims:

**Aim 1:** This study seeks to understand the beliefs and attitudes that African American girls hold toward specific skin tones, their associated behaviors, how African American girls believe their skin tone will impact their future social relationships, and how they perceive these beliefs are shaped through socialization.

**Aim 2:** This study explores the associations African American girls create between themselves and others (family and friends) based on their skin tone.
Qualitative Data Analysis. All interviews were video recorded via Zoom, saved, password protected, and transcribed in Otter.ai. This transcription program assisted in this process but was not without error. After the completion of the interviews and transcriptions, the PI listened to each interview individually and assured the transcript matched the participants’ responses. This process required 30 hours, as there were discrepancies between the girls’ actual statements and the transcription from the selected software. This was because some girls frequently used African American Vernacular English (AAVE). As Champion, Cobb-Roberts, and Bland-Stewart (2012, p. 81) defined it, AAVE is, “culturally, an appropriate term to refer to the language used by some (but not all) African Americans. This type of English is a systematic rule-governed dialect of Standard American English (SAE).” Due to the software’s default programming of SAE, it was unable to accurately transcribe the AAVE used by the girls. Thus, the researcher corrected these errors in the transcription manually.

“Open coding,” or Initial Coding, was used for this study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.102), “initial coding breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and differences.” This strategy was selected to reduce researcher bias when interpreting data and to consider all theoretical directions (Charmaz, 2014). While open coding, a microanalysis took place wherein the researchers code line-by-line (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The open coding technique occurred in three phases: (1) “Process,” where the researchers coded for participants’ actions (e.g., antecedents, causes, consequences, and a sense of temporality); (2) “Properties and dimensions,” where the researchers coded for conceptual ideas connecting previous codes and passages; and (3) “Category-generating method,” or theme development (Saldaña, 2016). One research team member assisted the PI to decrease bias and increase the reliability of the findings. The next
chapter details the findings of the qualitative portion of the study. Interrater reliability was not reported because it was low for this study due to the researchers’ need to adjust the codebook during the coding process. Study Aims 1 and 3 will be answered using this qualitative data approach.

**Aim 1:** This study seeks to understand the beliefs and attitudes that African American girls hold toward specific skin tones, their associated behaviors, how African American girls believe their skin tone will impact their future social relationships, and how they perceive these beliefs are shaped through socialization.

**Aim 3:** The final aim of this study is to examine the adaptive coping mechanisms that African American girls use to overcome skin tone bias in school, at home, and in their community.

The PI conducted Zoom small group interviews in order to highlight themes regarding colorism. Even though individual interviews could have been conducted, the PI was interested in understanding the thematic issues that arose due to group dynamics and discussion. Small group interviews allowed for interplay between the interactions and conversations that the girls were able to have with one another. The small group data were not linked with individual responses, as small group interviews primarily emphasized group themes that emerged as a result of dialogue among respondents. That being said, due to scheduling conflicts, there were two individual interviews conducted in this study.

Chapter Four assesses the results and the findings of this research. This chapter expounds upon the representational quotes from the girls' interviews and the themes discovered in this work. Later, the quantitative portion of the study is explored, and the girls’ demographic information is presented. Relevant findings from the online Qualtrics survey are also reported.
Chapter 4: Results and Findings

Quantitative Final Sample. For this study, 60 African American girls completed the online Qualtrics colorism survey, which contained 8 demographic items and 16 colorism items (See Appendix D). The mean age was 12.65 years-old and, on average, girls were between 7th and 8th grade. The sample included 37 girls that were members of the after-school program and 23 that were not. There were seven independent variables that assessed membership, age, grade, race, school, Skin Tone Word (STW) and Skin Tone Picture (STP) scales. The five dependent variables analyzed were self-concept, impression formation, attraction, affiliation, and environment. Below, each of the variables are detailed; the frequency tables, descriptive statistics, and t-tests follow.

Table 8 introduces the frequency tables for the aforementioned independent variables, which are the number of girls that are members of the after-school program, and the average age and grade of the girls. Included in the frequency table are the girls’ rankings of their skin tone on the Skin Tone Word (STW) and Skin Tone Picture (STP) scales. Of the 60 participants, 35 rated themselves as possessing a medium brown skin tone on the STW. Eight girls rated themselves as dark brown or light brown, and nine respondents rated themselves as very light brown on the STW. In comparison, on the STP, ten girls rated themselves as possessing a dark brown skin tone. However, none of the girls rated themselves as having extremely light skin (0-1) or extremely dark skin (15-16). As for the schools, 43 of the respondents indicated that they attended public school, while 17 indicated they attended private school. Descriptive statistics will be presented after the frequency table.
Table 8: Frequency Table for Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEMB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>61.67</td>
<td>61.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38.33</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>18.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28.33</td>
<td>73.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>98.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21.67</td>
<td>96.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>98.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKIN TONE WORD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.33</td>
<td>28.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>86.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Dark Brown</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.33</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKIN TONE PIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3.33</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>11.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>16.67</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>11.67</td>
<td>28.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>33.33</td>
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<td>15.00</td>
<td>48.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>56.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>73.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>81.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>96.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIVATE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Total</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since a snowball sampling recruitment strategy was used, some of these girls were family members, friends, or peers. For the interview portion, only girls enrolled in the after-school program could participate. This was not a requirement for the online surveys. Thus, there were 37 girls in the designated after school program. Girls ranged between ages 11-14 years old. These participants were in one of the following grades: 6th, 7th, 8th, or 9th. This study assessed the grades of the girls to inform the researcher if differences existed based on grade or age. The racial identity of the girls was an essential characteristic of this study. Every girl identified as Black or African American. Because this variable was an inclusion criteria of the study, it is not included in the below analysis.

The girls in this study attended a range of public and private schools. We examine the data by type of school attended to highlight the experiences of colorism young Black girls have in schools and to understand if there were different experiences of colorism depending on the racial composition of the school. Appendix F lists the schools the girls attended, whether they are

### Statistical Analysis

#### Table 9: Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean (Median)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Level (N=60)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-concept</td>
<td>19.26667</td>
<td>6.380231</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40.70734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression Formation</td>
<td>8.26667</td>
<td>3.900746</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.21582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>6.433333</td>
<td>3.446279</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.87684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>9.866667</td>
<td>4.167943</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.37175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>2.6 (3)</td>
<td>1.102001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.214407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>2.6 (2.5)</td>
<td>1.181783</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.39661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin Tone Word</td>
<td>2.7(3)</td>
<td>.8887241</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.7898305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin Tone Picture</td>
<td>9.4(11)</td>
<td>2.986977</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.922034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
public or private, and the numerical code. The girls reported the schools they attended and the researchers determined which schools were public or private. There girls attended 37 schools.

Table 10-11 show the partial and semipartial correlations between the girls’ reported skin tone measures and the dependent variables. The Spearman’s correlation, or rho, was 0.8029 between the skin tone scales. Findings in Tables 10-11 were not statistically significant.

Table 10: Partial and semipartial correlations on Skin Tone Picture Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>-0.0285</td>
<td>-0.0277</td>
<td>0.0008</td>
<td>0.0008</td>
<td>0.8349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELF-CONCEPT</td>
<td>-0.0035</td>
<td>-0.0034</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.9795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPRESSION</td>
<td>0.0737</td>
<td>0.0718</td>
<td>0.0054</td>
<td>0.0052</td>
<td>0.5892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFILIATION</td>
<td>0.1911</td>
<td>0.1892</td>
<td>0.0365</td>
<td>0.0358</td>
<td>0.1582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>-0.1842</td>
<td>-0.1821</td>
<td>0.0339</td>
<td>0.0332</td>
<td>0.1741</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Partial and semipartial correlations on Skin Tone Word Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>0.0116</td>
<td>0.0114</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.9322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELF-CONCEPT</td>
<td>-0.0664</td>
<td>-0.0650</td>
<td>0.0044</td>
<td>0.0042</td>
<td>0.6266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPRESSION</td>
<td>0.0709</td>
<td>0.0694</td>
<td>0.0050</td>
<td>0.0048</td>
<td>0.6036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFILIATION</td>
<td>0.1675</td>
<td>0.1660</td>
<td>0.0281</td>
<td>0.0275</td>
<td>0.2171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>-0.1252</td>
<td>-0.1232</td>
<td>0.0157</td>
<td>0.0152</td>
<td>0.3579</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**T-test.** The PI used a two-sample t-test with equal variances to analyze the quantitative data. A t-test with unequal variances was completed, producing only a slight difference compared to the t-test with equal variances. Thus, we present the test with equal variances. These tests were used to understand whether there were developmental differences between the girls’ age cohorts and how they responded to the colorism questions. In addition, these tests were run to determine if there were programmatic variations depending on their participation in the after-school program. In the below tables 1=age 11 and 2= age 12.
Table 12: T-test Self-concept by Membership (Ages 11 and 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18.72973</td>
<td>1.093009</td>
<td>6.648511</td>
<td>16.51301  20.94645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.13043</td>
<td>1.243647</td>
<td>5.964321</td>
<td>17.55127  22.7096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>19.26667</td>
<td>.8236843</td>
<td>6.380231</td>
<td>17.61848  20.91486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.400705</td>
<td>1.698747</td>
<td>-4.801116</td>
<td>1.999706</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

diff = mean(1) - mean(2)  
Ho: diff = 0  
degrees of freedom = 58

Ha: diff < 0  
Ha: diff = 0  
Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.2065  
Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.4130  
Pr(T > t) = 0.7935

Table 13: T-test Impression by Membership (Ages 11 and 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.243243</td>
<td>.6288908</td>
<td>3.825393</td>
<td>6.967794  9.518693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8.304348</td>
<td>.8561214</td>
<td>4.105814</td>
<td>6.528861  10.07983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8.266667</td>
<td>.5035841</td>
<td>3.900746</td>
<td>7.258997  9.274336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.061046</td>
<td>1.044619</td>
<td>-2.152136</td>
<td>2.029927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

diff = mean(1) - mean(2)  
Ho: diff = 0  
degrees of freedom = 58

Ha: diff < 0  
Ha: diff = 0  
Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.4768  
Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.9536  
Pr(T > t) = 0.5232

Table 14: T-test Affiliation by Membership (Ages 11 and 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9.972973</td>
<td>.7264692</td>
<td>4.41894</td>
<td>8.499625  11.44632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.695652</td>
<td>.7963225</td>
<td>3.81903</td>
<td>8.04418  11.34712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>9.866667</td>
<td>.5380792</td>
<td>4.16794</td>
<td>8.789973  10.9433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>.2773208</td>
<td>1.115613</td>
<td>-1.955821</td>
<td>2.510462</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

diff = mean(1) - mean(2)  
Ho: diff = 0  
degrees of freedom = 58

Ha: diff < 0  
Ha: diff = 0  
Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.5977  
Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.8046  
Pr(T > t) = 0.4023

62
As indicated in the above tables, the dependent variables were not statistically significant when compared with the independent variables membership in the after-school program and ages 11 and 12. The girls in this study did not differ in their responses based on these age cohorts. The PI then computed similar t-tests for the girls based on the same dependent variables (Tables 17-19). The difference in these t-test is that they were calculated to observe if there was a difference solely between ages 11 and 12 and their responses to the colorism questions.
Table 17: T-test Self-concept on Ages 11 and 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17.63636</td>
<td>1.453977</td>
<td>4.822297</td>
<td>14.3967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>1.578501</td>
<td>6.314006</td>
<td>14.1355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.8645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17.55556</td>
<td>1.087789</td>
<td>5.65232</td>
<td>15.31957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19.79154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>.1363636</td>
<td>2.257549</td>
<td>-4.513146</td>
<td>4.785873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

diff = mean(1) - mean(2)
t = 0.0604
Ho: diff = 0
degrees of freedom = 25

Ha: diff < 0  
Ha: diff != 0  
Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.5238  
Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.9523  
Pr(T > t) = 0.4762

Table 18: T-test Impression on Ages 11 and 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.45455</td>
<td>1.422952</td>
<td>4.719399</td>
<td>7.28401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.9375</td>
<td>.9851766</td>
<td>3.940706</td>
<td>5.837646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.03735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.962963</td>
<td>.8413825</td>
<td>4.371952</td>
<td>7.233477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.69245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.517045</td>
<td>1.672162</td>
<td>-.926836</td>
<td>5.960927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

diff = mean(1) - mean(2)
t = 1.5053
Ho: diff = 0
degrees of freedom = 25

Ha: diff < 0  
Ha: diff != 0  
Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.9276  
Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.1448  
Pr(T > t) = 0.0724

Table 19: T-test Affiliation on Ages 11 and 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.63636</td>
<td>1.658437</td>
<td>5.500413</td>
<td>6.941136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9.9375</td>
<td>1.159988</td>
<td>4.639953</td>
<td>7.465043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.40996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.22222</td>
<td>.9463279</td>
<td>4.917264</td>
<td>8.277017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.16743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>.6988636</td>
<td>1.95913</td>
<td>-3.33604</td>
<td>4.733768</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

diff = mean(1) - mean(2)
t = 0.3567
Ho: diff = 0
degrees of freedom = 25

Ha: diff < 0  
Ha: diff != 0  
Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.6379  
Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.7243  
Pr(T > t) = 0.3621
The above tables indicate the dependent variables were not statistically significant when compared only with the independent variable ages 11 and 12. The girls in this study did not differ in their responses based on these age cohorts. The PI ran a final t-test for the girls based on the same dependent variables. The next t-tests includes observations made between the girls in the 13 and 14 age groups. For these tables, 3=age 13 and 4=age 14. The below tables are also two-sample t-tests with equal variances.
### Table 22: T-test Self-concept on Ages 13 and 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21.41176</td>
<td>1.209821</td>
<td>4.988221</td>
<td>18.84706 - 23.97647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20.53125</td>
<td>1.191354</td>
<td>6.739314</td>
<td>18.10147 - 22.96103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.878431</td>
<td>2.402483</td>
<td>-3.028094</td>
<td>6.784957</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

`diff = mean(3) - mean(4)`

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ha: diff &lt; 0</th>
<th>Ha: diff != 0</th>
<th>Ha: diff &gt; 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pr(T &lt; t) = 0.7798</td>
<td>Pr(</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ho: `diff = 0`

degrees of freedom = 30

### Table 23: T-test Impression on Ages 13 and 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.470588</td>
<td>0.607052</td>
<td>2.502939</td>
<td>6.183696 - 8.757481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>1.08584</td>
<td>4.205439</td>
<td>5.271106 - 9.928894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7.53125</td>
<td>0.592262</td>
<td>3.350343</td>
<td>6.323323 - 8.739177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.1294118</td>
<td>1.206233</td>
<td>-2.592868</td>
<td>2.334044</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

`diff = mean(3) - mean(4)`

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ha: diff &lt; 0</th>
<th>Ha: diff != 0</th>
<th>Ha: diff &gt; 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pr(T &lt; t) = 0.4576</td>
<td>Pr(</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ho: `diff = 0`

degrees of freedom = 30

### Table 24: T-test Affiliation on Ages 13 and 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.235294</td>
<td>0.745227</td>
<td>3.07265</td>
<td>7.655483 - 10.8151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.733333</td>
<td>1.034945</td>
<td>4.008325</td>
<td>7.513597 - 11.95307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9.46875</td>
<td>0.617265</td>
<td>3.491782</td>
<td>8.209828 - 10.72767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.4980392</td>
<td>1.254104</td>
<td>-3.059262</td>
<td>2.063183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

`diff = mean(3) - mean(4)`

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ha: diff &lt; 0</th>
<th>Ha: diff != 0</th>
<th>Ha: diff &gt; 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pr(T &lt; t) = 0.3470</td>
<td>Pr(</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ho: `diff = 0`

degrees of freedom = 30
Pr(T < t) = 0.7102  Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.5795  Pr(T > t) = 0.2898

Ha: diff < 0                 Ha: diff != 0                 Ha: diff > 0
Ho: diff = 0                                     degrees of freedom = 30

diff = mean(3) - mean(4)                                      t = 0.5602
degrees of freedom = 30

Ha: diff < 0                 Ha: diff != 0                 Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.6057  Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.7885  Pr(T > t) = 0.3943

Table 25: T-test Attraction on Ages 13 and 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.647059</td>
<td>.8086898</td>
<td>3.334314</td>
<td>4.932713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.333333</td>
<td>.8261596</td>
<td>3.199702</td>
<td>4.561397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>.569734</td>
<td>3.222902</td>
<td>5.33802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>.3137255</td>
<td>1.159158</td>
<td>-2.053591</td>
<td>2.681042</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

diff = mean(3) - mean(4)                                      t = 0.2706
Ho: diff = 0                                     degrees of freedom = 30

Ha: diff < 0                 Ha: diff != 0                 Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.6057  Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.7885  Pr(T > t) = 0.3943

Table 26: T-test Environment on Ages 13 and 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>[95% Conf. Interval]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.94118</td>
<td>1.180325</td>
<td>4.866603</td>
<td>13.439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.93333</td>
<td>1.371362</td>
<td>5.311264</td>
<td>11.99205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.46875</td>
<td>.8878485</td>
<td>5.02243</td>
<td>13.65797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.007843</td>
<td>1.7992</td>
<td>-2.666614</td>
<td>4.682301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

diff = mean(3) - mean(4)                                      t = 0.5602
Ho: diff = 0                                     degrees of freedom = 30

Ha: diff < 0                 Ha: diff != 0                 Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.7102  Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.5795  Pr(T > t) = 0.2898

Note: the PI was unable to compare the girls’ self-reported measure of skin tone, interviewer’s ratings of skin tone, and dependent variables because the online survey was anonymous. Therefore, this analysis was only completed for the qualitative portion of this study detailed in the next section.

Qualitative Findings

Skin Tone Ratings. Thirty girls provided self-reported skin tone ratings online. The girls used the NSAL 5-point scale for their Skin Tone Word (STW) rating in column 1 of Table 27.
The Skin Tone Picture Scale (STP), Figure 2, represents the ratings in column 2 of Table 27.

Figure 2: The African American Woman Skin Tone Picture Scale (STP)

Table 27: Girls’ STW and STP Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skin Tone</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Later, two researchers assessed the girls’ skin tone using the video-recordings. One of the researchers self-identified as medium brown skin tone and the other self-identified as dark brown skin tone. The researchers met twice to decide the final skin tone ratings for the girls. Table 27 shows the girls’ ratings compared to the researchers’ in Table 28.

Table 28: Researchers’ STW and STP Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skin Tone</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Dark Brown</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Dark Brown</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Dark Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 29: Skin Tone Word (STW) Aligned with the Skin Tone Picture Scale (STP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skin Tone</th>
<th>STW Ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>0, 1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>4, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>10, 11, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Dark Brown</td>
<td>13, 14, 15, 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously mentioned, the girls rated themselves on the STW scale. These ratings are provided above in Table 29, but also below so that they can be analyzed separately from the STP scale. Table 30 and 31 demonstrate a comparison between the girls’ STW ratings and those of the researchers.

Table 30: Girls’ STW Rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skin Tone</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Dark Brown</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 31: Researchers’ STW Rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skin Tone</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Dark Brown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the researchers determined their ratings of the girls in Table 13, they compared this with the girls’ ratings in Table 12. The STP had some discrepant findings. The majority of the
girls rated themselves higher, or darker, on this scale (Table 29) and the researchers rated them lower, or lighter (Table 30). There were 4/30=13% of girls that rated their skin tone the same as the researchers on the STP. Yet there were 17/30=57% that rated themselves as darker while the researchers rated them as lighter. There were 9/30=30% that rated themselves as lighter while the researchers rated them as darker. The findings suggest an 87% discrepancy in the girls’ compared to researchers’ ratings of skin tone, with only 13% consistency. These inconsistencies could be the result of the wide variation of skin tone on this scale.

As demonstrated above, the STP is a numbered scale not a written scale; thus, the researchers constructed a new STP and STW alignment scale (Table 31). Since the NSAL scale consisted of five categories (i.e., very light brown, light brown, medium brown, dark brown, and very dark brown), the researchers aligned this with the 17-point STP scale in Figure 2. Four numbers were assigned to the extreme categories (i.e., very light brown and very dark brown), while three numbers were assigned to all of the categories in between. The researchers did this in an attempt to evenly distribute the picture scale along the word scale.

The girls’ and researchers’ rankings were almost identical for the very light brown and light brown categories. Only one inconsistency existed, as the researchers rated one additional girl as light brown. Yet more girls rated themselves as medium brown (Table 30), while the researchers rated many of the medium brown girls as dark or very dark brown (Table 31). Using the number of girls who ranked themselves in a specific skin tone category divided by the total number of girls in the study resulted in the following discrepancies by skin tone. The calculations are reported as 10/30=33% of girls rated themselves the same as the researchers, 5/30=17% of the girls rated themselves as darker while the researchers rated them as lighter, and 15/30=50% of the girls rated themselves as lighter while the researchers rated them as darker. These findings
highlight the fact that 67% of the girls in this sample had a discrepant rating with the researchers, and most of the girls reported a medium brown skin tone, which was lighter than the researchers perceived them.

Interview questions were divided into seven key domains: physical attributes, affiliation, impression formation, self-concept, attraction, environments, and coping mechanisms. The aforementioned domains mirror those selected for the ICS by Harvey, Tennial, and Banks (2017). Two additional subscales were included (i.e., physical attributes and coping mechanisms) to address the aims of this study as described in Chapter Three. Each theme corresponds with a specific domain and set of small group questions. Most themes run parallel to those in the conceptual model in Chapter Two but some themes were added based on the girls’ responses. This section is organized to address the domains, questions, and themes while highlighting relevant quotes from the girls’ interviews. We provide the interview questions for this study in Appendix E, and questions are addressed in this chapter in chronological order.

In this study, the participant population included 30 African American girls from the after-school program for the qualitative interview portion. These girls also completed the quantitative survey. In addition to their responses, another 30 girls who lived in Missouri were recruited to complete the online surveys. Between the qualitative interview, 30 girls, and quantitative interview, 60 girls (30 of the girls in the interview also completed the survey), there were N=60 girls in the study. The girls in this study ranged in age from 11 to 13 years-old, in grades 6 through 8. The additional girls who completed the survey ranged from 11 to 14 years-old, in grades 6 through 9. Table 32 lists the pseudonyms, skin tones, and ages of the girls in this study.
Table 32: Demographics of Girls in Qualitative Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Self-Reported Skin Tone</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Erika</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Natasha</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. India</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Margaret</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Olivia</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dejah</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Alexis</td>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Corinne</td>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Tia</td>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Stacey</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Courtney</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Monica</td>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Stephanie</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Brandy</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Trina</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Miranda</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Danielle</td>
<td>Light Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Eva</td>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Tiffany</td>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Skin Tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Gabrielle</td>
<td>Dark Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Janee</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Jada</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Tamika</td>
<td>Medium Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Shanelle</td>
<td>Very Light Brown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 30 girls

Light Brown = 7*
Medium Brown = 20
Dark Brown = 3

* Age 11 = 10
* Age 12 = 10
* Age 13 = 10

* Note: Very light brown and light brown have been combined into one category

Table 33: The Eleven Themes for this Qualitative Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Brief Explanations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Discussion of Physical Features: Description of other physical characteristics besides skin tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Assessment of Skin Tone: Appreciation or disapproval of their or other’s skin tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Limited Experiences of Skin Tone Bias: Lack of recognition and articulation of colorist experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. **Seasonal Variation of Skin Tone**: Acknowledgment and explanation of skin tone variability

5. **Pride in Social Status Symbols**: Mention of hairstyles, clothes, education, etc. as positive attributes or aspects

6. **Decisions Based on Attraction**: Expression of attraction to others based on skin tone

7. **Experiences of Racism**: Conversations around racial experiences; Recognition of racism in school settings

8. **Understanding of Skin Tone Influenced by Others**: Discussion of other people’s skin tone in relation to their own or how other’s perceive their skin tone

9. **Consequences of Colorism**: Describing colorist incidents reflected in one of the following realms: psychosocial, romantic partnership, health, legal, economic, and/or academic

10. **The Target’s Response to Skin Tone Bias**: The thoughts, replies, or behaviors articulated due to colorist comments

11. **Resilient Attitudes and/or Behaviors**: Recognition of colorism in society, but ability to ignore it or remain unphased

The following content will discuss personal stories from participants regarding their perception and understanding of skin tone collected during the interviews. It is important to note that some girls made certain statements about skin tone, but may not have actually believe them. Sometimes statements are made that may misalign with unconscious beliefs. The assumption of this work is that the girls’ assertions are consistent with their thoughts and behaviors. However,
it should be noted that this is not always the case and this study does not account for social desirability or the incongruence of the girls’ responses to the girls’ actions.

**Discussion of Physical Features**

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked questions about their physical attributes. This theme was included in the original conceptual model as other phenotypic traits and references the characteristics of the target of skin tone bias. Participants described other physical traits (i.e., facial and body features) that they felt strengthened their self-esteem and allowed them to feel good about themselves. The girls frequently expressed pride in their other physical attributes that did not include their skin tone. When asked to expound upon the physical feature they liked best about themselves, Brandy explained, “My nose…because of the way it is shaped.” Tia responded, “I like my eyes and my lips a lot a lot. And I like my hair a lot, a lot.” Tamika commented, “I like my hair and my lips because they are a beautiful part of me.” In another interview, Kelly echoed, “My hair, my eyes, and my hands.” Tiffany also described, “One thing I like about myself is my hair and my eyes.”

Hair texture was a specific physical attribute discussed in the interviews. Various girls commented on their hair texture and some listed the reasons they enjoy their specific hair texture. Amber plainly stated, “I like my curls.” Gabrielle expounded, “I love my hair. It is one of my favorite features just because of how versatile it is. And how you could do literally anything with it. And…it makes me…I’m proud of my hair.” Jada believed, “I think people look good in natural hair.” Janee explained, “I love my hair cuz [my] hair has its own personality and like, it has like, my hair got two different textures two different lengths.” Eva revealed, “a physical feature [I] like [about] myself is my smile and my hair.” When Kenya was asked how she feels about her hair texture she expressed, “I like it. It’s like frizzy and curly at the same time.” Along
with this theme, the girls exhibited an appreciation for their phenotypic traits and their hair in particular.

**Assessment of skin tone**

A theme obtained from the data indicated that the participants loved all skin tones. The Black girls showed appreciation of various skin tones even when discussing their affiliation with others. The following quotes represent the responses the girls gave when asked what type of skin tones they liked or were attracted to. Miranda stated, “I like all skin tones.” Brandy exclaimed, “light skin, dark skin, all shades.” Kelly asserted, “I don’t have a set skin tone that I just mainly like…” Amber conveyed, “Yeah, everybody’s the same at the end of the day like everybody has blood, everybody has DNA. It’s just like you’re a different shade... I don’t understand the difference.” Courtney insisted, “I would never try to rate someone on [their] skin tone.” Approximately seven girls claimed they appreciated all skin tones.

Some participants also believed that they did not select their friend group based on their appearance. Corinne exclaimed, “I will never choose somebody cuz of their skin color. I think that’s really weird.” In another interview Gabrielle said, “My aunt is really dark skin, and she has very dark skin and her skin is very pretty.” According to Shanelle:

> It’s like no one [should] bully someone over their skin tone and they shouldn’t. Because why bully someone because they look different than you and the color of their skin is different. It doesn’t make sense. It’s like we are all created equal Adam and Eve. God made different people for different reasons. They shouldn’t be put up to fight just for that.

Tia recognized, “Well, um, I really wouldn’t be friends with somebody just because of their skin tone…you can’t really use stereotypes to justify somebody, um, just so you could be friends with
them, or based on what everybody else says.” Dejah noted, “It’s no [specific] skin tone, like, even my friends like, I don’t pick and choose like, which friend I want to be with because of their skin tone.” In these girls’ opinion, it was strange to affiliate with others based on their skin color.

Furthermore, participants mentioned their love for their skin tone. Numerous girls responded positively about their self-reported skin tone of medium except for Kayla, who reported a very light skin tone. Kayla began, “I like my skin tone…I’m happy with it…it really like, looks good with who I am.” Shanelle agreed, “I like my skin tone,” and April expounded, “I like my skin tone cuz it kind of, well, my skin kind of shines.” During another interview, Miranda proclaimed, “I feel good about my skin color.” Courtney expressed, “I honestly like my complexion.” Dejah informed the group, “I really like my skin tone. Like, it’s really nothing wrong with it.” Erika proclaimed, “I like my skin tone and I wouldn’t change it at all. I just like it.” Margaret admitted, “I love the skin tone that I’m in.” When Brandy was asked how she felt about her skin tone she beamed, “I feel good about it…Because I like the way it looks.” When asked to describe how they felt about their skin tone, some girls had the following responses. Kelly explained, “I feel that it says something about me like I hey, I’m out there. I’m different and I’m proud of it. And I love it.” Asia echoed, “I like it and I think that it has like a meaning behind it like, the roots and all the pain behind skin color.”

On the other hand, not all respondents had a positive view of their skin tone. Two participants with lighter skin tones discussed how others perceive them. During the interview, Monica revealed that people claimed “That I look White…and then I tell them that I’m not…” Although people misperceived the participant’s racial group, she later disclosed in the interview that she strongly identifies as African American. When asked about her skin tone, Amber
admitted, “I feel fine about it. But my friends they used to tease me about it and call me twinkie because I am light or light skin.” Shanelle mentioned people often inquire about her skin tone: “…I have been asked questions multiple times…like, what skin color are you? Are you this? Are you that?” When the PI asked how she identifies, Shanelle explained, “I refer [to] myself as African American Black, but I am mixed.”

In contrast, other respondents felt an aversion toward their skin tone or desired to be a different skin tone. Natasha disclosed, “When I was younger, I wanted to be lighter…cuz I didn’t like my skin color.” When probed to find out whose skin tone she would have preferred to possess Natasha stated, “I [wanted] to look like me, but just lighter.” On the other side of the spectrum Kenya mentioned:

I used to wish like I was a bit bigger, and also I sometimes still wish that I was dark skinned but like it’s kind of like dark skinned with straight hair and also bigger, so it was yeah that’s basically what I wish a lot of times.”

Whether participants wanted to be lighter or darker, two participants expressed preferences for skin tones other than their own.

The girls were aware that skin tone does not determine a person’s character. A few of them acknowledged that personality had a greater influence on how they selected their friend group. Kelly admitted, “I really like people based on their personality.” Asia expounded, “I go off their personality. And if they’re funny.” India also commented:

I choose my friends from how they act, and how they act around people, and their personality. Because I feel like that’s a big part of it. Because sometimes some people are not good friends, like good people to be friends with.

**Limited Experiences of Skin Tone Bias**
The original conceptual model contained this theme but discussed it from the viewpoint of the perceiver of skin tone. This theme demonstrates the developmental status of the target of skin tone bias, which was included in the conceptual model. When Courtney was called a “monkey” by her male classmate and the PI asked why she was called this name, she responded, “I really honestly don’t know what he called me that for.” Amber, who identified her skin tone as very light brown, disclosed that her grandmother calls her “Sally.” When asked why, she responded, “I don’t know why she does [that]…They used to call me a lot of names when I was like seven, but I don’t remember because it’s been such a long time.” These examples demonstrate the participants’ limited ability to fully comprehend that their skin tone could be the cause for derogatory comments from classmates and family members. One participant noted there was a lack of discussion regarding her skin tone in her family. Monica explained, “I never heard my family say anything about my skin color.” Even when asked if she had heard people talk about her skin tone, India verbalized, “No. No, I haven’t really…nobody really has said anything. Like they haven’t said, “Oh, you this tone, you’re mean.” No, not really not at all.” These participants were unaware of colorism and some believed that others did not treat them differently based on skin tone preferences.

**Seasonal Variation of Skin Tone**

The research findings revealed girls indeed understand skin tone variation based on the season and how these differences impacted their interactions with others. Even though the original conceptual model does not have a concept that reflects this theme, the PI added it because this theme was commonly discussed among participants. According to Dejah, she noticed her skin color varies:
Like, it’s really nothing wrong with it. Um, in my opinion because, like, in the summertime, I get darker. Because you know, if I’m in the sun, because you know I run track, and then in the wintertime I get my color back and I get light.

Amber also observed changes in her skin tone:

Me and my mom we used to go to Florida like almost every summer, because I was born there and it’s like…I get dark. And then my skin starts to peel on my face…I do get light sometimes, when I’m not outside enough.

Stacey mentioned:

During the high day, I get darker. But [during] like a cold day I get lighter. So you know, it depends. And a lot of people see me…that I look like my mom. She looks a lot like me. Sometimes I don’t see it, but sometimes I do. Guess it depends on the weather.

Jada noted:

During the summer, I used to, like, get dark. And so at my old school…when I came back from like summer camp and all day and school started, people would be like, “Why are you so dark?” ‘I thought she was light,’ and they would be like, “you’re burnt” and all that…it just happened sometimes like, you get dark.

The observations of others sometimes made the girls more conscious of their skin tone. The participants’ experiences with sun exposure and other’s advice demonstrated their ability to cognitively assess the shade of their skin tone. As a result, some of the girls desired to maintain the skin color that others expected them to possess.

Pride in Social Status Symbols

Regarding the original conceptual model, other attributes were assessed through the lens of the perceiver. In this study, other attributes refer to the target’s perception and this theme has
been named pride in social status symbols. The girls were asked what things in life made them feel good about how they look. Some of the participants mentioned social status symbols defined in this research as clothing/outfit, hairstyles, and education. Note that this theme distinguishes between hairstyles (i.e., how participants’ hair is managed, manipulated, and styled) and hair texture (i.e., participants’ natural grade of hair without any type of manipulation). The pride in social status symbols theme refers to hairstyles, while the discussion of physical features theme references hair texture.

Dejah explained her friends’ evaluation of her physical appearance: “Like if something, like say, for instance, an outfit that’s really cute. [They] will tell me it’s cute and tell me it look good.” As stated by Olivia, “I think the best thing I like about myself is my style the way that I dress myself.” When Kayla was asked about the things that make her feel good about herself, she responded, “…my hairstyles and the clothes that I wear, make me feel better about myself.” Various participants revealed that they took pride in their appearance due to their hairstyles and clothing. Olivia mentioned, “…my friends tell me that my hair is cute, especially when I wear it like this when I take my hair down. And it’s all curly and stuff and [they] tell me my hair is cute.” Eva also commented, “…people say they like my hair. Cuz every time I get my hair done, they like ‘oh your hair cute.’” The girls in this study felt that these symbols made them feel better about themselves, and they were even recognized by others for these status symbols.

**Decisions Based on Attraction**

This theme was not accounted for in the original conceptual model. It was added when the girls expressed their attraction to others based on skin tone. During this mid-portion of the interviews, respondents were asked questions related to their perception of their own beauty, others’ perception of them, and their attraction to other people. Four girls expressed their distaste
for dark skin in terms of their own romantic partnerships. Kayla insisted, “…I still like dark skins, but if I had a choice, I really would go for brown skin first.” When the PI inquired why she would choose brown skin over dark she giggled. Then Kayla replied, “Because like, if I were to ever have kids, I don’t want them to be like, I don’t…I really wouldn’t want to maybe like a darker, like, dark skin tone.” She continued, “Because…I think I just like, like, lighter but not too light, but like in the middle, because that’s how I am so I’m used to it.” Shanelle admitted, “I’m not a big dark-skinned person. I just don’t know why. It’s just not my preference.” April echoed, “I agree too…like more of a light…I like light skin sometimes if they not…self-absorbed.” Tamika bashfully responded:

It doesn’t really matter to me about your skin. But if I’m being completely honest, and I have to choose one, it will probably be like light skinned people. I don’t know why. I’m just like, more attracted to them.

In various interviews, girls stated they did not have a preference for skin tone in terms of attraction, but four girls adamantly expressed their preferences as demonstrated above. One participant also confessed that light skin was grounds for popularity at her school. Tamika recounted a male classmate “…just got really known in my grade for kind of no reason, just because he had a lighter skin tone and stuff.”

**Experiences of Racism**

This theme aimed to address how experiences of racism impacted the target’s response to skin tone bias, which is accounted for in the conceptual model. An overwhelmingly large number of girls in this study addressed racism instead of colorism when discussing their school environment. Although this study focuses primarily on colorist experiences, the girls often grappled with daily experiences of racism in their school environment and community. This is
connected to the theme of colorism, as some of these experiences could have been the result of skin tone bias and/or discrimination.

The participants habitually mentioned that White teachers exhibited preferences for White students and held negative perceptions of Black students in schools. This theme was found across school environments and was common in almost every Zoom interview that was conducted. The experiences of racism theme and recognition of racism in school settings also occurred regardless of age. Kenya exclaimed:

There’s this teacher who was in my older brother’s grade…when he was in sixth grade. She said a lot of racist things. And the teachers even talk about it sometimes, like she said, Black people started slavery, and how she expressed how she didn’t like when, like, Black people flat iron their hair or dyed it blond.

Kayla even expressed:

My fifth-grade science teacher. She was a little racist. Like she used to target the Black kids all the time. And I didn’t really like that. And she used to, she used to hurt us. She used to hurt us…I feel like my school, well, my vice principal and my teacher was racist. Because she hit…well she hurt some of the kids in my class. And she never got in trouble for it. And they used to talk about us…you could see they were pointing at us everything. So I felt like they were being racist. And then my sixth-grade year, I think that one of my…math teachers in my grade were racist because she used to pick on Black kids and stuff like that.

Janee also spoke about her teacher:

She was a White lady. She was really cool at first… I thought, because I was little. And as I got older, I think toward the fourth grade, because we had these little reading groups
in our school. And she will always like, treat the kids like me like the darker colored kids like the brown kids...But she would always treat us like we’re less fortunate. And she will never call on us. And every time we didn’t answer the question or read, she will always act as though our answers or whatever were wrong. And the other students that weren’t Black, were right, even though we were right. And nobody would ever do nothing about it. And she will always treat her daughter like the queen of the world, everybody else was lower class.

Gabrielle recounted:

In the second grade, I was still going to the all-White school I was talking about. And I had this second-grade teacher. And she used to, she used to make me read books about segregation from a White person...White person point of view. And like, even when I was like six and seven, that didn’t make sense to me. And I remember I literally had to go to our principal to tell her what was going on. And nothing happened. I just feel like that entire situation because it had been going on all year. And I had been trying to tell people about it and they wouldn’t listen. And they had also put me in a special reading group. Even though I was testing higher than a lot of other kids in my class.

The PI then asked Gabrielle about the race of the students in the other class, and she exclaimed:

They were all White. There was nobody else there. And it was, it was really interesting because we had three classes and they would always switch...split up all the kids for math and for English learning. And my brother went to the school, so I had been like watching him do his homework all the like for the past few years. So I knew what we were learning already. Like I had already retained it. But I was still put in the slower learning classes every year.
Jada spoke to her experiences with teachers and students who exhibited racial biases. She bemoaned:

This girl, we were playing basketball and she threw the basketball at me. And I don’t [want to] sound racist or anything, but she’s White. And so I had gotten mad at her. And I had just like, looked at her and rolled my eyes and walked out class. And I got in trouble. But when she was laughing at me, because she threw the basketball, and then she went around saying how she was going to do so to me. She didn’t get in trouble, but I did. And so I got sent to the office. And so then my mom had called up there because she says she didn’t think it was fair. Because that same girl, I always get in trouble. But she never does. And my mom said, she doesn’t feel like it’s fair that she never gets in trouble. But I do. And she said, and she told the principal that she felt like at the moment that they were like, she don’t well, she didn’t want to say that she felt like they were being racist. But she said that she felt like they were just picking between us two. And they should make both of us get consequences after what we did.

When asked if the girl received a consequence she lamented:

No, she didn’t. They didn’t tell her parents and she didn’t get in trouble. But they told my mom and sent her an email. And…my mom came up…my grandma came to the school and said something to the principal instead, because my grandma had got tired because I kept getting in trouble. So usually, when we take tests and stuff, my teacher makes [us] spread out, and she will talk to me. But if I tell her to stop talking to me or something, I would get my name put her on a board and she wouldn’t, and I will get an email home instead. And she never got in trouble. And my mom got mad because she didn’t feel like it was fair.
One participant even recalled experiences of racism in her community. Gabrielle remembered:

In my neighborhood, I live around a bunch of White people. And I will, I don’t want to say unfortunately. But whenever...me and my brother are literally the only kids on our block. So he plays basketball all the time...in our driveway. And I always walk to like, the little ice cream shop that’s down the street from us. So we always have to leave the house together and go places together. And like, whenever we go anywhere, there’s always people like coming out onto their porches to just like sit there. And it’s weird. And then like all the dogs on the way bark at us and it’s uncomfortable.

Overall, the girls often mentioned their relation to White people rather than mentioning colorism and their relation to other Black people of different skin tones. Even though this study is primarily about colorism, it is also important to create awareness around the girls’ daily racialized experiences in their respective academic environments and communities.

**Understanding of Skin Tone Influenced by Others**

Using the original conceptual model, this theme was designed to discuss how the target was impacted by the opinions of others when combating skin tone bias. The majority of the girls described their skin tone in relation to other people in their lives, and especially their friends and family members (e.g., mothers and sisters). To demonstrate, Courtney confessed, “...I honestly really like my complexion because my mom...she’s a caramel. And I’m like, okay, well then I’m a Hershey Kiss.” Stacey also explained how she was accosted and questioned about her skin tone:

This one girl who’s like a lot darker than me...she was like, “Oh, are you mixed?” And I was like, “No, no, I’m Black.” She’s like, “But you’re light skin.” And I was like, “Well,
my mom’s light skinned.” So then she said “Is she mixed?” And I was like “No, she’s not mixed, she’s just light skin from her parents.”

Natasha was the victim of such bias due to skin tone preference exhibited by her mother between her and her sister. She observed:

My sister is light skin, and I don’t get as much…I’m not gonna say freedom or something…when I do something to her, and she doesn’t like it and she says “stop,” and I don’t stop, then my mom has something to say. But when she does the exact same thing to me my mom says nothing.

One participant explained that her family members are a variety of shades and they use this variation to compare people’s skin tones. Stephanie articulated:

Since [my siblings and I] have a White dad and a Black mom. So like, a lot of us are different. So like, our brothers, our younger brothers, like mainly Black. And like, a lot of us are…yeah, like he’s darker skin than a lot of us are, like, a little bit lighter and stuff. And like, we’re all pretty much different colors. So sometimes we just, like, bring it up in like necessary things. So like, we’ll be like, it’s hard to explain, but like, we will be talking about like we’re talking like, we’re saying, there’s this person over there. I forgot his name, but he was kind of this color, then we’ll say like, one of our family member’s name. They’re kind of like their type of color.

Tia noted she feels self-conscious about her skin tone around her family because:

Whenever [my sister and I] are like over my great grandma’s house and it’s like a family gathering, and then they keep calling us the light skins and stuff like that. That’s when I know it’ll be pointed out at some time of the night.
On occasion, the participants would discuss their friend group and whether members are lighter or darker. This was crucial, as the participants also observed judgment from others based on the skin tone of their friends compared to their own. A few participants mentioned that their friends may be mistaken as their family members due to similar skin tones. Erika observed:

Like some of my cousins, um, they’re not biological cousins, but we still call each other cousins. They’re very light skinned and stuff. And when we go out together, people ask are we sisters, or are y'all like not really related at all? Y'all friends? We just don’t answer we just…walk off.

Alexis noted:

But the friend group that I had since elementary school…we only have one light skinned girl in our group. And the majority of us are usually are a little bit darker than her. She just...She kind of stands out more like when people see us. [They’re] like, “Oh, why do you not have more lighter people your group?” or “Why do you not have this, or you do not have that?”…It all depends on who you are as a person. She’s funny, she’s smart. She’s crazy. Like, we’ve also known each other for so long. So we all really [don’t] pay attention to why there’s only one light skinned [in our] group or why [we] don’t talk to more light skinned people.

Corinne mentioned:

I have like two other friends who are like very light skinned like me. So like, whenever we’re around, they’re like they call us brothers and sister….sisters because like we look alike, and then [it] gets on my nerves because they don’t have anything else to say. They just, just referring to me as like a light skin.
In a similar way, some people believe that individuals are not related if they have a different skin tone. Tia recalled, “People are always like…you’re darker than your sister or say to [my sister] you’re lighter than your sister.” In another interview, Amber acknowledged a similar experience with her grandfather, as people were surprised, they were related due to his skin tone. Amber recounted:

Sometimes I go in public with my grandpa, he’s Puerto Rican and he’s like, he’s like a white color. And I just feel like everybody kind of stares, but I feel like they don’t have time. Because my mom was darker than me and it just feels weird because I feel like people just stare at you. Or when I went to my elementary school, um, and my grandpa picked me up and nobody expected him to be that color.

Some girls were even taunted due to their skin tone. Stephanie was asked why people tease her due to her light skin and believed: “I don’t know, they just like to make fun of people who are different than them.” Amber remembered being teased for her skin tone and described a female classmate: “So she actually used to bully me. So she was like, I don’t know what she I can’t really remember what she used to say. But I know she used to make fun of my skin tone.” Kenya experienced, “A lot of times, like, people will like make fun of, like, how I’m not like super dark compared to them.”

Furthermore, the term “microaggressions” was introduced by Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Willis (1978, p. 66), who defined it as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges, which are put-downs.” Girls in this study conceded that microaggressions stemmed from family members, even if they justified or attempted to ignore them. For example, Amber recounted interactions with her family:
Nothing about…it’s just like, they call me names. But it’s like, it’s not an offensive way, like a playful way. Like, “oh, you got light.” Or it’s like the way they say it that makes it not offensive for me.

Gabrielle heard offensive comments in her family directed from her grandmother to her aunt. She observed:

My brother’s grandma used to call her Toto when she was younger. Like the dog from [The Wizard of Oz]…Yeah, I know it’s really bad. So she like...she tried to call me that when I was younger. And my mom shut it down…But I like give her a pass because of the way that she grew up in her mindset because she is a very fair skin woman.

Janee echoed similar sentiments about her grandmother: “…she’ll always [say] you’re yellow like your father…I just kind of laughed it off cuz I can’t say [anything] because [it’s] my grandma.”

**Consequences of Colorism**

This theme is reflected in the original conceptual model and is a result of skin tone discrimination. A myriad of the girls were able to recognize the fact that colorism exists in greater society. Their intuition led to discussions about how colorism has, or could, impact them in various realms. First, the girls discussed the psychosocial effects or emotional consequences of colorism and how it affected their level of self-esteem. Kenya realized that other’s perception of her skin tone impacts how she feels: “Let’s say I was another skin tone. And then if people said something, it would make me feel bad.” Kenya also remembered that she had been teased about her skin tone. The PI asked why, and Kenya continued:

I don’t know why they made fun of me for being light skinned I don’t know, you know? I think it like has something to do with back in slavery days how they would treat people...
with different skin tones differently so that played like a big role in how...how we view that to this day and like we basically like they created like a diversion between Black people and now that’s how we can talk to each other.

In this way, Kenya realized that the societal consequences of colorism, which date back to skin tone hierarchies during slavery, have real implications today.

On a larger scale, the girls noticed the gendered consequences of colorism. Erika insisted, “I’ve heard that darker skin tones...have to wear makeup and stuff to get married, or like, get a perfect person [or] whatever. Um, but they have to look pretty by wearing makeup, they can’t be their selves.” When probed and asked why she felt this way, she continued, “Um, it’s because that we’re different and that we have [a] darker skin tone. And that we look different than them. So then they think that we have to get dressed up, just to go out or look nice.” In this way, she understood there were different expectations for women with dark complexions. India echoed similar sentiments; she believed dark skin Black women have been stereotyped due to only a few people’s perception of them. She gave the example, “maybe cuz a dark skin that they probably...they could have...came across could have been mean and then from that one person doing it they could have been like, well, oh, all dark skins is mean.” Kenya also noted, “I feel like you see in media...in magazines, they’ll always have lighter skinned people...like these really famous rappers and sports players they always go for the lighter skin women...” Tia echoed a similar observation when discussing prominent Black men in society, “…most of them have wives that are lighter than them but they’re still Black.”

A final realm where one participant discussed colorism was in academic settings. One girl in particular noted the skin tone discrimination exhibited by her teacher between African American students based on skin tone. Corinne observed:
If we were…in a classroom, if I raised my hand and a dark-skinned person raised their hand, I will be picked on first. Not the dark-skinned person. I will probably had a better relationship with the teacher instead of a dark-skinned person.

While discussing academic settings, Tia also continued, “…they treat the dark-skinned people like, terrible” when discussing her teacher’s treatment of African American students. Ultimately, the girls are aware of the consequences that colorism can have on their perception of self and how their skin tone may impact their dating options and treatment by teachers in academic settings.

The Target’s Response to Skin Tone Bias

In the original conceptual model, the target’s response is a main concept that assesses the girls’ reaction to skin tone bias. Specific questions were asked that involved the participants’ response to colorist behaviors, resulting in the target’s response to skin tone bias theme. This theme represents how the participants respond positively or negatively to skin tone bias and extends current colorism literature by unearthing the responses (e.g., verbal and physical) that African American girls use when confronted by skin tone biases.

Participants were first asked how they would respond if people said negative things about their skin tone. Trina proclaimed, “I honestly wouldn’t care what they think about my skin color.” Stephanie admitted when people comment on her skin tone:

I usually just laugh and then usually somebody will say something else about it…and then I’ll be like, “thank you.” I was …wanting to say that, but I didn’t really want to say anything. So yeah…Like I just be like I don’t really say anything about it…I just think about it for a while and then I just like feel better later.
Brandy simply responded that she would, “Ignore them.” These students demonstrated their ability to disregard negative comments about their skin tone. However, Olivia revealed:

Um, I will probably cry, because I’m a very emotional person. And I can, like, if I try really hard, I can hold back my tears, but sometimes I just don’t want to and I just want to cry sometimes.

Participants were then asked how they would respond to positive comments about their skin tone, and the girls frequently responded that they would thank the person. Alexis said she would, “…say thank you. And then I’d give them a compliment. Because I feel like that’s the right thing to do.” India believed, “I would say ‘thank you.’ Because…like when people give you compliments, you should just say thank you.” Olivia beamed, “I would just smile and say thank you cuz it’s just like the nice thing to do.” Even though the girls would most likely thank the person, one participant noted that, depending on the compliment, she may feel hesitant when accepting it. Tia believed she would, “Just say thank you. But like, if they have to bring another person’s skin tone down, just to praise somebody else’s…and I’ll be like, ‘Oh, no, thank you. That’s not very accurate.’”

The final question the girls were asked was, if they saw someone being made fun of for their skin tone, how would they respond? Some girls claimed that they would intervene if others were being bullied or teased based on their skin tone. Natasha began, “For me, I will help boost their confidence up and defend [them] because nobody should [be] bullied in general, but it’s just people like that that does that to people. But I…[would] just help them.” Brandy insisted, “I would tell them that they’re beautiful and not to listen to what anybody else says.”

Some participants mentioned that they would remove a person from the situation or talk to them. Margaret admitted, “Um, I will go to da person that’s getting bullied and take them with
me and then go talk to them about it.” When asked what exactly she would say, Margaret asserted, “Don’t listen to what they’re saying. Because you’re beautiful in your own skin.” Others explained that they would confront or educate the perpetrator of the offense. Stephanie believed, “I always tell the person who’s making fun of them they need to stop. And it’s really rude.” Amber claimed:

   I feel like, sometimes you have to say up for people cuz everybody gets made of, unless you’ve always been pretty…everybody gets made fun of at some point in their life, like there will always be that one person. So I feel like if someone is getting bullied, I would just go in there and help them and defend them and tell them they're all right. Like, there's nothing to be ashamed of your body or yourself.

Kelly explained she would confront the perpetrator: “I probably would ask them really not to say that because it can be offensive to some people...”

**Resilient Attitudes and/or Behaviors**

The final theme, resilient attitudes and/or behaviors, was not included in the conceptual model. It has been added as a theme due to the frequency with which girls exhibited resilient thoughts or behaviors in this study. Resilient attitudes and/or behaviors were noted when the girls conveyed that society’s beauty standards did not influence them. Asia noted, “I don’t really let what people say on TV affect me…I don’t really watch TV that much. But when I do...what they say really doesn’t affect me.” Stacey proclaimed, “Nothing on TV or magazine affects me about how [I] look. Because I don’t really get affected by it.”

Moreover, the girls exhibited general coping strategies to deal with negative comments. For Danielle, being young allowed her to not be bothered by comments. When asked how it made her feel when people said negative comments about her features, she recalled, “When I
was younger… I didn’t really care…” Brandy believed, “I would think positive about it…look on the brighter side,” if she were confronted with negative remarks about her skin tone. Gabrielle realized:

Unfortunately, for myself, I’ve become really numb to it. So it’s just like, they’re probably just ignorant like, in my head, it doesn’t really hurt me. It’s just, I just kind of brush it off, because I hear it so often, everywhere.

According to Tia, “…I will just simply brush it off, not many things like get under my skin like that. So it wouldn’t be much of a problem.” Kelly acknowledged her own thought process:

I don’t think you should have to work hard…I really think that you should be self-confident and really not have to care what other people think cuz we should be who you are not have to put on a mask and hide behind it.

Other girls mentioned that religion was a buffering factor to the rigid beauty standards maintained by others. Natasha recalled how she felt about her skin tone, “But when I had to get older, I learned, like, start liking it because this is how God made me, and I can’t really do anything about that.” Amber realized, “…there’s nothing to be ashamed of…Because everybody is different at the end of the day and that’s how God created us.” One participant explained that her mother was influential in her understanding about herself. Jada expounded:

My mom told me you should be proud of how you look. Because some people…she said that…some people might want to look just like you. And she told me I should have confidence in myself. Because when people will make fun of me then that person could be jealous of me.
Resilient attitudes and/or behaviors and experiences of racism were two of the few themes that were present in nearly every interview. The resiliency theme indicates that most girls have heard negative comments or witnessed colorist behaviors but have found ways to overcome them.

The next chapter duplicates the outline of this chapter, but introduces a discussion of the findings. In this chapter, the qualitative and quantitative findings were presented. Chapter Five provides context and explanations for the reports from the girls’ interviews and surveys. It guides the reader to connect the lived experiences of the girls with previous and current colorism literature.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Limitations

An overwhelming amount of colorism literature focuses on African American adult populations. This study aimed to expand current research by exploring the effects of colorism on Black adolescent girls. In this chapter, these aims are discussed in terms of current findings and relevant colorism literature. Quantitative data in this research study were inconclusive, as there were no relevant associations. However, qualitative data that suggest the ways African American girls cope with the impacts of colorism contribute to the literature and recommends areas of future research. To ground this chapter, we present each aim again. Note that Aims 1 and 3 framed the qualitative portion of this research, while Aims 1 and 2 guided the quantitative portion of this work.

**Aim 1:** This study seeks to understand the beliefs and attitudes that African American girls hold toward specific skin tones, their associated behaviors, how African American girls believe their skin tone will impact their future social relationships, and how they perceive these beliefs are shaped through socialization.

**Aim 2:** This study explores the associations African American girls create between themselves and others (family and friends) based on their skin tone.

**Aim 3:** The final aim of this study is to examine the adaptive coping mechanisms that African American girls use to overcome skin tone bias in school, at home, and in their community.

In this section, each of the themes are discussed. The themes that correspond with the above aims are addressed through the quantitative discussion. Even though this study provides a strong foundation for interpreting these colorism findings, there are limitations that are discussed.
at the end of the chapter. This section closes with future directions that could advance colorism research.

**Research Support of Qualitative Findings**

**Discussion of Physical Features**

On a global scale, Black individuals possessing more Afrocentric features (e.g., wide nose, full lips, and darker skin) are subject to harsher sentencing in the criminal justice system (Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004; Dixon & Maddox, 2005). Additionally, the ubiquitous perception that African physical features are not preferred can have deleterious social and psychological effects, especially on African American females (Hunter, 2005; Wilder, 2010). Research also details that Black girls who possess pronounced Afrocentric features are more likely to be stereotyped (Maddox & Gray, 2002). The findings in this study contrast previous studies, as the girls expressed excitement or contentment regarding Afrocentric physical features such as their hair texture, nose, and lips. Even with these Afrocentric attributes, some participants still believed they were pretty or felt that these features made them unique when compared with others.

**Assessment of Skin Tone**

For this theme, a myriad of girls that self-reported a medium skin tone liked the color of their skin. These girls’ satisfaction with their skin tone aligns with Uzogara and Jackson’s (2016) work indicating Black women with medium skin tones have varying experiences with colorism. Wilder (2010) suggested a reason for this is that the in-group (i.e., African American community) has not historically ascribed derogatory terms to individuals with medium skin tones, thus this hue may serve as a buffer against negative stereotypes. It could also be a reason
why 20 girls in this study self-reported a medium skin tone rather than a lighter or darker skin tone.

In contrast, there were some girls, who mostly self-reported light skin tones, that disliked their skin tone. According to Cunningham (1997, p. 375), light skin is “…defined on the basis of personal experiences, i.e., having been perceived as mixed, Latino or White, and/or not feeling Black enough.” Some girls who reported light skin tones in this study felt shame due to their skin color. This could be a surprising finding, as colorism research indicates light skin is preferred among African Americans (Bond & Cash, 1992; Averhart & Bigler, 1997; Hunter, 2007). Although unexpected, Cunningham (1997) acknowledged that light skin African Americans could experience both privileges and liabilities due to skin tone, as individuals may feel ostracized or antagonized by members in their own community. The girls in this study discussed how family members often taunted, teased, or critiqued them due to their light skin tone. These anecdotes support previous studies indicating that skin tones that appear “too White” are not accepted among African Americans (Maddox & Gray, 2002; Neal & Wilson, 1989). Overall, lighter skin participants in this study were proud of their Black identity even when other people questioned their connection with the Black community due to the hue of their skin. A dearth of literature exists on these types of findings, which could potentially be a new area for future colorism scholars to explore.

In terms of how the girls perceived others based on skin tone, a plethora of participants mentioned that they liked all skin tones. They explained that they did not affiliate with others based on their skin tone, and that personality was more of a determining factor in their interactions with others. These findings parallel with previous work where Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) noticed personality was one aspect that youth used to
distinguish between members within their racial group (Averhart & Bigler, 1997). Wade and Bielitz (2005) reported that there were inconclusive findings when testing the association between skin color and personality among African American adults.

**Limited Experiences of Skin Tone Bias**

This theme occurred during the interview process when the girls were unable to articulate the biases they experienced. This theme aligns with Aim 1, as it addresses the girls’ beliefs about their skin color. Some girls in the study were mocked due to skin color, but were unaware that their physical appearance was the reason for the taunting. This coincides with current literature from Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman (2016) that indicates youth may recognize mistreatment from others but are unable to articulate the source of this bias. On the other hand, not every girl resonated with these experiences. As mentioned in the previous chapter, two participants felt that family members or people outside of their family unit did not treat them differently based on skin tone. Due to the limited experiences of these participants, they may have had a narrow conceptualization of skin tone bias or have truly not been personally affected. It should be noted that not every girl expressed the same experiences when discussing their skin tone.

**Seasonal Variation of Skin Tone**

Contrary to the limited experiences of skin tone bias theme, the seasonal variation of skin tone theme highlighted the fact that skin tone bias was a real experience for participants. In some ways, the girls were able to discuss the variety of skin tones among people in the African American community. The girls also expressed that other people would taunt or critique them when their skin color changed due to more or less sun exposure. These instances ultimately affected how the girls perceived themselves—whether they desired to be lighter, darker, or
maintain their current skin tone. This theme also aligns with Aim 1, since girls held certain beliefs about their skin color based on the perception of others. These findings are relevant even though all the girls did not articulate their understanding of skin tone variations.

Researchers have considered that an individual’s skin tone may vary due to sun exposure or seasonal variations (Borrell, Kiefe, Williams, Diez-Roux, & Gordon-Larsen, 2006; Branigan et al., 2013). Kerr (2005) revealed some African American folklore evokes humor as a means to interpret skin color variations. She discovered in this folklore that darker skin tones have been referenced as being “burnt in God’s oven” or “forgotten under God’s sun” (Kerr, 2005, p. 280). This is supported in Jones’ (2000) article and Golden’s (2004, p. 4) memoir, where the authors recalled experiences where friends or family members advised them to limit sun exposure. Jones (2000) was warned to avoid the sun so that she would not appear “too dark,” while Golden (2004) was cautioned about sun exposure “for the sake of [her] children.” Participants in this study also heard jokes from others regarding their skin tone.

**Pride in Social Status Symbols**

At various times in the interview process, the girls mentioned that they felt good about social status symbols related to their appearance. They enjoyed being complimented by others based on their hair and way of dress. This research is supported by Goffman (1959), who asserted skin color, clothing, and hairstyles contribute to one’s physical appearance and are evaluated in human interactions (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001). Ichheiser (1970) argued that appearance represents how individuals present themselves, as well as assess themselves and others (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001). Hall (2018) stated that status is bestowed not only based on skin tone but on dress and cultural practices. Morris’ (2005) research introduced the idea that clothing is a form of cultural capital signifying middle or high socioeconomic status.
Participants also mentioned hairstyles as a primary factor in other’s perception of them. As described in the literature, Boyd-Franklin (2013) documented that both Black and White society consider Black women’s hairstyles as symbols of Afrocentricity, White identification, and/or socioeconomic status. In a study about Black women and gendered expectations, Davis Tribble, Allen, Hart, Francois, & Smith-Bynum (2019) found participants’ hairstyle choices were influenced by Eurocentric beauty standards, family, friends, and institutions that encouraged certain hairstyles. Through Robinson’s (2011) study on the politics of Black female hair, participants agreed their understanding of “good” and “bad” hair valuations (e.g., combing, styling, managing, and straightening) stemmed from adults, peers, and males. Therefore, the girls understanding of themselves based on their physical appearance and other’s perception of their appearance is consistent with current colorism literature.

**Decisions Based on Attraction**

Even though the girls did not discuss gendered colorism as much, they were aware that there are different expectations for men and women regarding their skin tone. Some participants were aware that popularity could be garnered in school if an individual simply possessed a light skin tone. A common theme in the qualitative research was that girls did not discriminate or expressed no preference for specific skin tones. In contrast, four participants disclosed that they preferred lighter skin in romantic partnerships. These findings are consistently indicated in colorism research. Williams and Davidson (2009) revealed that, among African American children, evidence showed they often perceived darker complexions as unattractive and even “ugly.” Light skin is also perceived as more attractive among African Americans (Hunter, 2007). In adult relationships, light skin is a coveted status symbol in the Black community due to the historical association between skin tone and socioeconomic status (Hughes & Hertel, 1990).
Experiences of Racism

As previously mentioned, this study does not focus on racism but rather colorism; nevertheless, discussions about race occurred in every interview. Distinguishing racism from colorism is essential to realize that people of color may have varied experiences of racism due to the hue of their skin (Hunter, 2002). Despite this, various studies have revealed significant limitations even in the legal system and abroad, as racism and colorism are often conflated (Data, 2019; Glenn, 2009; McCray, 2012; Monk, 2014; Stepanova & Strube, 2012). Some colorism scholars may argue that the girls in this study confused racism and colorism. On the other hand, based on Jones’ (2000) definitions of the levels of racism, the girls’ interpretation of colorism could be included under the category of institutionalized, personally mediated, or internalized racism. Participants mentioned various experiences of racism and may have desired to have conversations about racism rather than colorism. Sometimes it was challenging for the PI to differentiate between racism and colorism during the study interview.

When discussing racism, the girls frequently acknowledged it occurred in academic settings. To combat injustices in schools, the girls maintained good grades and were well behaved to win their teacher’s approval. Allen, Telles, and Hunter (2000) postulated that racism, racial prejudice, and skin color discrimination are persistent problems in the United States. Moreover, skin tone hierarchies are reinforced by racism and colorism as they privilege Whiteness in relation to phenotype, aesthetics, and culture (Hunter, 2002). Future research could explore individual occurrences of both racism and colorism to capture how these forms of oppression impact Black youth.

Understanding of Skin Tone Influenced by Others
This theme supported Aim 1, which analyzed how the girls’ beliefs around skin tone bias were shaped through socialization. The girls in this study learned about skin tone from friends and family members. With regard to their friends, the girls discussed how individuals actively criticized their friend groups based on skin tone. This was demonstrated when friends were assumed to be related if they possessed the same skin tone. In other instances, girls were questioned if they did or did not have friends of similar skin tones. For example, they were accused of being exclusionary for only associating with friends of similar skin tones. Likewise, girls were critiqued for having friends that possessed a different skin tone than theirs, as individuals may not have understood what they had in common.

Current colorism research has not assessed comments made about Black women’s or girls’ friend groups based on skin tone. Yet, Neal and Wilson (1989) found that Black women described that issues with their skin color and facial features stemmed from the Black community and those individuals who consistently commented on their physical appearance. This was reflected in the girl’s anecdotes when discussing other’s comments about their friend group. More scholarship could be explored regarding people’s perception of Black girls based on the skin tone of their friends.

Approximately five participants in this study revealed that their skin tone was a topic of discussion among their family members. Numerous family members would openly comment on the fact that the girls were lighter or darker than other family members. Some members also used offensive language to describe the girls’ and other family members’ skin tone. These girls noted skin tone differences between their sisters and mothers, as well. In some cases, they noticed they received different treatment than their sisters based on skin tone. They also realized that others compared their skin tone with that of their sister’s. A few girls elaborated on the difference in
skin tone between themselves and their mothers, too. Some were proud of their skin tone, as it mirrored their mother’s or parents’. Others explained how their mother’s skin tone may be preferred if she was perceived as possessing lighter skin. Another participant mentioned that she was darker than her mother and people often stared at them.

In line with colorism research, scholars have acknowledged that family members are significant influencers in skin tone preferences and biases. In essence, skin tone is associated with beauty and can yield gendered consequences for women when they are criticized based on their physical attributes (Uzogara & Jackson, 2016). The comments that Black women hear from friends and others related to their skin tone can lead to stress or mental fatigue (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018). The girls in this study agreed that they were exhausted by family due to their constant comments about their skin tone. Hall and Crutchfield (2018) suggested colorist microaggressions in families were ubiquitous among Black women in their study, causing negative impacts on their social, relational, and emotional welfare. It is important to note that the girls in this study strived to overcome these colorist microaggressions, but if they continue to occur, it may impact them as youth or later as African American women.

Furthermore, African Americans tend to assess themselves in relation to culturally preferred Eurocentric features, like thin noses and narrow lips, in opposition to Afrocentric features, such as thick lips and wide noses (Hunter, 2005; Maddox & Chase, 2004; Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, & Belgrave, 2014). These comparisons can result in bias when coupled with skin tone hierarchy, leading to discrimination and acts of colorism (Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, & Belgrave, 2014). From the academic literature, Bond and Cash (1992) found that when youth are deemed as the “dark” or “light” child, it may represent a positive or negative connotation in the context of the familial unit. Wilder and Cain’s (2011) findings indicated the variation in skin
tone between Black mothers and their daughters influenced whether the daughters had a negative or positive perception of their skin color. Situating this research within the current literature demonstrates that the various girls understood their skin tone in relation to their mothers and sisters. This was harmful to participants who felt mistreated or not as attractive to other members in their family due to the fact that their skin tone was a different shade. In general, the girls were primarily socialized regarding their skin tone by friends and family. This occurred regardless of the person’s age, as girls heard negative comments from peers, teachers, young adults, and even their grandparents.

**Consequences of Colorism**

Aim 1 was also created to gauge how the girls felt their skin tone affected their relationships with others, and this was exhibited through the consequences of colorism theme. The girls recognized the societal preference for lighter skin in romantic partnerships, which they thought was especially prevalent among African American male celebrities. Other girls articulated the hesitancy for people to build relationships with dark skin women due to the stereotype that they are uncompromising or mean. A few participants also discussed the different expectations assigned to dark skin Black women, such as wearing makeup or dressing up to be perceived as beautiful. Given that the girls were well informed of societal expectations, they seemed to overcome these stereotypes and felt their ability to maintain relationships in the future would not be impacted by their skin tone.

The observations made by the Black girls in this study align with colorism research on dating and mating. In the African American community, light skin tones are deemed more attractive than dark skin tones (Bond & Cash, 1992; Averhart & Bigler, 1997; Hunter, 2007). Literature on mate selection suggests African American men prefer light skin women as partners
Eminent African American men, such as rappers and musicians, may perpetuate colorist stereotypes in their music by degrading dark skin women and expressing a preference for their light skin counterparts (Mathews & Johnson, 2015). Russell-Cole, Wilson, and Hall (2013) argued that among high-profile Black celebrities, such as Jay-Z (hip-hop artist), John Legend (R&B singer), Spike Lee (actor/director/producer), and Chris Bosh (NBA player), all have married light skin women. Youth may also experience skin tone bias in the dating realm due to the colorist gendered expectations that presume dark skin girls are less attractive and less desirable (Gullickson, 2005). These findings parallel with what girls experience in dating.

During the interviews, some girls spoke about colorism in the academic environment. One girl discussed how White teachers preferred lighter skin African Americans students over their darker counterparts. Teachers’ preferences for light skin students has been explored in colorism literature. Generally speaking, Latinx and African Americans possessing Eurocentric features are perceived as more intellectual (Lynn, 2002). As a result, teachers from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds may perceive intellect on the basis of skin tone (Webb, 2019). An array of studies investigating the effects of skin tone on academic achievement indicated light skin African Americans obtain more education than their dark skin counterparts (Glenn, 2009; Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Hunter, 2005; Monk, 2014). In addition, teachers’ exhibited favoritism toward White and light skin students (Hunter, 2016), especially light skin African American girls (Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013).

The Target’s Response to Skin Tone Bias

The girls' behaviors regarding skin tone bias were demonstrated through the target’s response to skin tone bias. This was listed as one of the girls’ coping mechanisms and is
supported by Aim 3. A myriad of girls discussed their ability to advocate for themselves and others if/when they witnessed comments about skin tone. Most of the girls believed they would thank a person who made positive remarks about their skin tone. However, some girls would question the intention of the comment. In terms of negative remarks, the girls would ignore them, but most stated they would speak up. These girls expressed a need to educate the perpetrator or to advocate for themselves and their emotions. Even when witnessing others’ experiences of skin tone bias, most of the girls would intervene and talk to the perceiver and/or the victim.

Compared to other racial and ethnic groups, African Americans are relatively more conscious of skin tone variations (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). In the spirit of this understanding, scholarship has discussed microinsults, microaggressions, and invalidations from friends, family, and community members regarding African American women’s appearances (Boyd-Franklin, 2013; Davis Tribble, Allen, Hart, Francois, & Smith-Bynum, 2019; Hall, 2017; Hall & Crutchfield, 2018). This research affirms previous findings, as the girls articulated the microaggressions and microinsults that they heard and witnessed from others regarding their skin tone. Yet, they were able to cope with these negative experiences through advocacy.

**Resilient Attitudes and/or Behaviors**

During the interviews, the girls did not reveal explicit coping mechanisms (Aim 3) that they employed to overcome skin tone bias. The PI surmised implicit buffering strategies they used based on the girls’ responses. At school, the girls acknowledged that they would have an emotional reaction, reject, or confront skin tone bias from their peers. In their home environments, they seemed less likely to discuss skin tone bias due to the deference they demonstrated in the presence of authority figures in their household, such as their grandmother.
The girls justified, laughed, or had emotional responses to these comments. These responses included sadness, anger, and sometimes fear.

As described in Fergus and Zimmerman’s (2005, p. 399) literature, resilience is “the process of overcoming the negative effects of risk exposures, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding the negative trajectories associated with risks” (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten & Powell, 2003; Rutter, 1985; Werner, 1992). Promotive factors are assets or resources (Beauvais & Oetting, 2002) that aid adolescents in counteracting, buffering against, or mitigating the adverse effects of risks (Luthar, 2006; Masten, Reed, Snyder, & Lopez, 2002). Assets are intrinsic to an individual and may manifest in the form of competence, coping strategies, and self-efficacy (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Interviews revealed that the girls used internal assets, such as competence and self-efficacy, to combat exposure to colorist microaggressions. Respondents also used religion as a coping mechanism. Stevenson’s (1994) research study confirmed religiosity and spirituality as tools that empower and strengthen the African American community. In a study regarding skin tone and unemployment among African American women, the majority of the resilient sample stated religion was a crucial component in their household during their youth (Diette, Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2015). This reflects a research study that demonstrated a positive relationship with God was associated with greater optimism (Mattis, Fontenot, Hatcher-Kay, Grayman, & Beale, 2004), which a few of the girls in this study seemed to display.

Further, the resiliency theme provided evidence regarding the girls’ attitudes about their skin tone. Through this theme, it was clear that most of the girls attempted to ignore or disregard negative comments concerning the hue of their skin. An overwhelming majority of the girls reported they were unaffected by the media’s portrayal of people who possessed their skin tone
and people’s perceptions of specific skin tones. They also spoke to the fact that they discounted comments from others regarding skin tone bias. This theme demonstrates the girls’ understanding of skin tone inequalities, but ability to overcome hurtful remarks.

**Strength of Aim 2**

Although the PI expected aim 2 to be answered quantitatively, the qualitative findings addressed this aim. In some of the interviews, the girls did compare their skin tones with that of their family members and friends. However, the girls indicated that they did not associate with others based on their skin tone. The PI surmised that girls learned to understand their skin tone through their interactions with others and the comments people made regarding their skin tone. However, this did not seem to have a negative impact on the girls’ associations or affiliations with others.

**Limitation of Aim 3**

One realm that was not addressed in this study was community influence on the girls’ perception of skin tone. The participants never spoke about neighbors or community members projecting skin tone bias. Only one participant mentioned her neighborhood, but that was in relation to the racism she and her brother experienced living in a predominately White community. This is not to say skin tone bias does not occur among community members, but the girls neglected to mention this aspect of their lives.

**Alignment of This Study with Previous Work**

Generally, this research study is nested in current colorism literature, as it has demonstrated that African American girls do indeed recognize skin tone differences. These findings align with research from Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman (2016), which states that youth conceptualize skin tone differences at early ages. This research study also explored how
girls are socialized around skin tone preferences, as well as the effects of colorism on their self-concept and racial identity. Previous scholars have investigated the impacts of colorism on African American girls’ identified ethnic identity, academic self-concept, and racial socialization as buffering mechanisms (Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010; Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011). In this way, this research study has corroborated earlier work in the field of colorism involving African American girls and their coping mechanisms.

**Contribution of This Study to the Literature**

The findings outlined in this dissertation have added to recent literature on colorism. This study aimed to explore the adaptive coping mechanisms and strategies employed by young African American girls (ages 11-14) to buffer against colorism. In particular, the PI analyzed the effects of colorism on the population of interest in regard to their self-concept, affiliation with others, attraction to others, and environment. There were a few coping mechanisms ascertained from this study, including the focus on social status symbols as a strength, the target’s response to skin tone bias, and resilient attitudes/behaviors. As explained above, the girls used hairstyles, clothing, and education as a buffer in their academic environment. These factors allowed them to take pride in their appearance and/or feel good about themselves. Moreover, when the girls were confronted with colorism directly, they used verbal responses or direct action to combat harmful comments or negative behavior. The final coping strategy the girls employed involved ignoring or disregarding these comments, leading to their own forms of resiliency. Current colorism research has not explored these coping mechanisms in depth among African American pre-adolescent girls, and in this way, this research attempts to add to the literature.

**Limitations**
Due to COVID-19, the PI was limited in the number of participants and available organizations when recruiting girls for focus group interview sessions. Since the recruiting organization predominately serves low-income girls, variability due to socioeconomic status was not assessed. This organization was also one of the few that still allowed data collection with its participants during a pandemic. The PI was in contact with another organization whose founder had COVID-19 and was not able to move forward with approving focus group interviews. This led the PI to continue pursuing data collection with one organization.

The Zoom interviews posed an additional challenge in the study. Initially the plan for this study was for it to be conducted in a room at the after-school program with only the participants and the researchers present. However, since the interviews were conducted via Zoom most of the girls were at home with their parents or grandparents. The presence of their family could have impacted the honesty of the girls responses especially when they were asked questions about how their family members treated them based on skin tone. There was no way for the interviewer to ensure that the girls were alone because even when they were in separate rooms sometimes their family members entered during the interview process. The participants also had not been in school for six months due to the pandemic and this may have impacted their responses. Perhaps the girls would have responded differently if they were interacting with teachers and peers on a daily basis.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that it focuses on the experiences of African American girls in Missouri and predominately in St. Louis. Colorism research has indicated that there are regional variations that may result in different perceptions of skin tone. In this way, Black girls growing up in the northern, eastern, southern, or western regions of the United States may have varied understandings of skin tone variations. These girls may also classify light,
medium, or dark skin tones differently based on their geographic location and the frequency of 
exposure to the sun. This may also be the case for girls that have an array of social class 
backgrounds. Some neighborhoods where girls reside and/or attend school may use different 
measures to assess both race and skin tone. In addition, girls’ who may have a more upwardly 
mobile family may view skin tone in a different way, as some social organizations may reinforce 
or challenge skin tone biases. Overall, region and socioeconomic status may contribute to girls’ 
understanding of their skin tone, and this was not accounted for in this study.

The self-reported measure was an additional limitation in this study, as it did not provide 
a large variation of skin tone. For example, in the quantitative survey, none of respondents rated 
themselves on the lightest end of the STP scale (0-1) or darkest end of the STP scale (15-17). 
When reviewing the STW rankings, there are similar findings; few of the girls rated themselves 
as dark brown, and none of the girls rated themselves as very dark brown. This limitation is 
supported by previous literature stating that self-reporting is susceptible to measurement errors, 
as participants’ written responses may not correspond with reality (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). The 
researchers experienced this discrepancy when rating the girls’ skin tones and comparing it with 
the girls’ self-reported skin tones.

A final possible limitation of this study is the age of the participants. Since participants 
rangle in age from 11-14 years-old, they may have been unaware of colorism’s consequences. As 
stated by Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman (2016), youth could lack cognitive awareness of 
skin tone bias during interactions, which could protect them from psychological and/or 
emotional consequences. However, children still categorize others based on skin tone as early as 
their preschool years (Kurtz-Costes, DeFreitas, Halle, & Kinlaw, 2011; Quintana, 1998). Even 
though young children may not be cognitively aware of skin tone bias, they may still suffer the
consequences of this bias through exclusion from activities and friendships (Adams, Kurtz-Costes, & Hoffman, 2016). The implications of skin tone may arise early in development, so this study strives to understand these effects among adolescent African American girls. Admittedly, these middle school girls are subject to fewer life consequences such as employment, housing, and marriage due to their age and social standing. As such, this study seeks to understand consequences that most likely affect these girls such as psychological, emotional, relational and/or social concerns.

**Future Research**

This research accentuated various factors that contribute to Black girls’ understanding of colorism that should be explored in further work. One other aspect mentioned by the girls was body size. It might be useful to explore this factor further in future research. Even though questions in this research study did not assess body size perception, there were girls who admitted that their skin tone and body size were issues in their interactions with others. Research illustrates that body image can be greatly influenced by social and physical changes that occur during and after puberty for adolescent girls (Wertheim & Paxton, 2011). Exploring body image could be a key in recognizing how colorism impacts girls’ self-image. Bond and Cash’s (1992) research points out that African American women who reported dissatisfaction with their skin color were more likely to have a negative body image evaluation. Future work could explore the correlation between body image and skin tone satisfaction among youth. Especially in this study, some girls articulated concerns with their body image in addition to those about their skin tone, indicating that this could be a real issue for young Black girls.

As a new way forward, scholars should observe the media’s perpetuation of colorist stereotypes through comments, depictions, and representation. With regard to the media’s
influence, the Black girls in this study spoke to this as one of the primary avenues where skin color stereotypes were maintained and reinforced. One research study that attempts to address this issue is Jankowski, Tshuma, and Hylton (2017), which examined the representation of Black women in mainstream magazines. Jankowski, Tshuma, and Hylton (2017) lament that depictions of Black women are often of models that possess Eurocentric features (e.g., straight hair, narrow nose, and light skin). The omission of varied representations of African American women had psychological effects and contributed to the body dissatisfaction of their participants. It is suggested that conceptual models for colorism research include media depictions in the consequences of colorism section. Together, researchers could explore the media’s preference for certain skin tones and disregard for specific body types among African American women. This work could shed light on the fact that limited depictions and negative imaging ultimately affect the way that Black women feel toward their appearances and themselves.

Though media representations of African American women and girls have been fraught with skin tone biases and hierarchies, the changing media landscape has recognized the beauty of all skin tones. For example, children’s books have embraced African American girls with medium and darker skin tones. Actress and producer Lupita Nyong’o’s book Sulwe discusses the challenges faced by a young Black girl due to her darker skin tone (Nyong’o & Harrison, 2019). Throughout the story, the girl gains awareness about her skin color and ultimately develops a love for her unique beauty. Hair Love created by director, writer, and producer Matthew A. Cherry is a book and short film that won an Oscar featuring a brown skin Black girl as the protagonist. In the book and film, the main character embraces her kinky hair texture along with her family (Cherry & Johnson, 2019). Actor and activist Grace Byers also wrote a children’s book called I Am Enough to help girls that have been bullied (Byers & Bobo, 2019). In this
story, a young Black girl recognizes her own power and value based on her many talents. There are currently countless tales about young Black girls learning to appreciate their hair, race, and skin tone. These stories provide hope for the future and allow Black girls to see themselves as beautiful and represented through positive imaging. Writers should continue to create stories that encourage Black girls to love their skin tones, which may build self-esteem at a young age.

Future work on this topic could include family socialization. Prior research indicates that family is the primary mechanisms where youth learn about skin tone preferences. Additional studies on colorism should incorporate other family members to provide a wholistic perspective. In this way, family members will be able to speak to the ways in which they socialize kids about their skin tone. This will be an important component in understanding how young children feel about their skin tone and other’s skin tone. It could also shed light on some discrepancies between family member’s perspective and the children’s perspective on skin color.

This study has presented some ongoing measurement issues that could be addressed in further research. The quantitative online survey items were developed from previous work on colorism and African American adults. Even though the researchers attempted to tailor the items for African American girls that findings were inconclusive. This could be a result of the research focusing on older populations. Research tools should be established that center the experiences of African American youth so that concrete conclusions can be made.

In closing, this study emphasized the experiences of African American middle school girls, but additional studies could explore these issues with males, youth in other age cohorts, and children from different developmental stages. These studies could specifically include girls and boys of color ranging from 4-10 years old. Additionally, future research could also investigate similar colorism measures and examine other attitudes and social outcomes, particularly among a
high school age group. Scholars should also broaden the scope by studying African American girls from a greater range of socioeconomic backgrounds. During the data collection process, it is recommended that scholars separate participants in skin color groups. If there are homogenous groups of participants that identify as light, medium, and dark skin they could potentially respond more honestly to questions about their skin tone. Also the researchers should be the only adults present while the respondents are interviewed. This could allow them to feel more comfortable knowing that they will be de-identified and their responses will be confidential. Advancement in this research study area could strengthen literature on the consequences of colorism among various age groups.

This chapter discussed and clarified the findings, limitations, and further considerations for this research study. The final chapter of this dissertation will highlight the social work implications of this work. Chapter Six is crucial to this dissertation because it establishes the significance of this work for practitioners, social work educators, and researchers.
Chapter 6: Social Work Implications

An extensive body of colorism literature exists that details the experiences of African American men and women. This research study affirms the necessity of analyzing the consequences of colorism on the lives of African American girls. The main purpose of this work was to provide evidence that colorism has daily impacts on the selected population. Situating this study within colorism research gives voice to Black girls and confirms the issues they grapple with (e.g., self-concept, attraction, and affiliation) concerning their skin tone. As a result, social work practitioners, researchers, and educators must be prepared to tailor their approaches to meet the needs of Black girls who are often ignored, overlooked, and understudied. This chapter outlines recommendations to disrupt the individual and societal perpetuation of colorist thoughts, behaviors, and practices at every level of the field.

Colorism Healing

A major implication of this work is that colorism healing is necessary on an individual, collective, and systemic level. To accomplish this goal: (1) individuals need to address their mental health consequences/trauma and reassess their implicit biases regarding specific skin tones; (2) groups should also work to amend their relationships; and (3) every facet of society needs to be structurally altered (Webb, 2021). This dissertation could aid in the healing process. On an individual level, Black girls should openly discuss their skin tone and recognize how their hue has impacted their self-esteem and interactions with others. Alongside family and community members, these girls should be supported to build strong and healthy relationships that value all skin tones. Globally, these girls’ anecdotes could ignite conversations to dismantle practices and institutions that reinforce both racism and colorism. The following sections of this
chapter will discuss how social workers can mitigate the negative effects of colorism in their daily practice.

Social Work Practitioners

Social workers are at the forefront of social change. These professionals are crucial for intervening and mitigating the effects of colorism through clinical interventions. Since social work practitioners assist an array of clients by working with individuals, families, and communities, they are challenged with addressing skin tone issues. Social workers can also work on a macro level by assisting communities and advocating for social policy changes. To demonstrate, social work practitioners could work with their clients by expanding clinical guidelines to not only confront racism but colorism as well. Since both racism and colorism can occur together or separately, social workers should integrate an intersectional approach in their practice. Using intersectionality and skin tone bias theories, practitioners should recognize the cumulative effects of colorist oppression that may present daily obstacles for their African American clients.

Clinical Interventions

Individuals. As stated by Ya Azibo (2014, p. 93),

Colorism is so vitiating of living in a manner that affirms the humanity of African descent people that practitioners are entreated to make it part of their gestalt for African-U.S. clients and most likely African descent clients everywhere. It may be helpful, nay imperative to know just where colorism comes from for optimal combat of it in schools, practice, and community.

Colorism also has phenotypic and internal consequences, meaning individuals are affected by their physical attributes, which may result in low self-esteem or self-efficacy. Therefore, social
workers should be prepared to create and implement intervention strategies (Montalvo, 2005). To this end, the girls in this study articulated that their skin tone was associated with meaning and contributed to how they felt about themselves. This work reveals the significance of skin tone on the overall understanding of self for African American girls, which should be addressed within the field of social work.

Due to the lack of concrete interventions, social workers should integrate colorism into discussions regarding evidence-based clinical approaches. These strategies would respond to the psychosocial needs of African American youth and offer practitioners the opportunity to receive education and training regarding colorist occurrences and skin tone trauma (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). When practitioners are aware of the sociocultural perceptions of skin tone, it could provide these professionals with the context needed to understand their client’s choices, such as their reason for engaging in certain intimate relationships and/or engagement in risky behaviors (Landor & Halpern, 2016). Another suggestion is for practitioners to create treatment goals with clients to address the negative biopsychosocial effects of colorism (Crutchfield & Webb, 2018). As evidenced by the biopsychosocial model, racism is a substantial environmental stressor for African Americans that causes negative physical and psychological health consequences (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999).

This body of work elucidates the significance of colorism on the lives of African Americans. As previously noted, this research may be important in developing wholistic interventions for African American middle school girls. Scholars lament the fact that some Black girls who endorse colorist ideas and behaviors engage in unsafe sexual practices or substance abuse (Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010; Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011). Studies that focused on these maladaptive coping mechanisms point to these factors as the
detrimental consequences of colorism on African American girls. Social work practitioners should thus be prepared to discuss these challenges with Black female clients and develop treatment plans through clinical interventions.

A final consideration for social work practitioners is education around skin tone variations, as this uniquely impacts the African American girls they encounter. An exhaustive amount of literature affirms that African Americans of darker skin tones are more likely to be associated with destructive stereotypes and experience prejudice, discrimination, and deleterious life outcomes (Allen, Telles, & Hunter, 2000; Hall, 1995; Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Mathews & Johnson, 2015; Thompson & Keith, 2001; Uzogara & Jackson, 2016). Few studies have analyzed the adverse effects of colorism on light skin Black Americans. Therefore, practitioners should learn about the complex history of miscegenation and one-drop rules in the United States to gain awareness about the fact that light skin can be both a privilege and liability for some Black girls (Cunningham, 1997). These girls may even be mocked or teased due to their light skin tone (Baxely, 2014). In this study, various girls who identified their skin color as very light brown or light brown have faced criticism from others regarding the authenticity of their Blackness. Depending on the circumstances, light skin Black girls experienced privilege within the school system when interacting with teachers, but sometimes felt the need to prove their Blackness around their peers. Practitioners should be prepared to not only address the mistreatment of medium and dark skin Black girls but realize that light skin Black girls may be subject to prejudices and biases as well.

**Families.** Practitioners may assist family members by exploring the impacts colorism has on the familial unit and African American girls in particular. Families should engage in conversations with practitioners to explore how they were personally affected by colorism in
order to develop viable solutions (Monroe, 2016). As Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman (2016) point out, loved ones influence youth, as children’s first introduction to the meaning of skin tone usually stems from their family. In order to buffer against the adverse effects that skin color can have on self-esteem, Landor, Simons, Granberg, and Melby (2019) provided evidence of parental support serving as a buffering mechanism for young African American women. Consequently, discussions among Black families are one of the primary ways that African American girls can express their feelings and comprehension of skin tone preferences. Even though families can positively influence youth about their skin tone, there may be some occurrences where they project harmful colorist stereotypes onto Black youth.

Sanders Thompson (2013) reminds us that there is a type of gendered colorism that results in boys and girls being socialized differently. Unfortunately, family members’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors may have damaging effects on their loved ones. For example, some family members may advocate for African American women to alter their appearance for status acquisition (Sanders Thompson, 2013). In accordance with these findings, African American girls in this study reported that they were often criticized or received differential treatment in their family on the basis of skin tone. When an authority figure, such as a grandmother, perpetuated colorist stereotypes, the girls often felt stifled due to their perceived helplessness or inferiority in the familial unit. These findings problematize challenges around discussions within Black families that must be unpacked to accurately combat and disentangle the pervasiveness of colorism among these members. Practitioners engaging in family therapy should make this a priority when acknowledging and interpreting family behaviors and interactions. To start, social workers should educate themselves on the skin color variations within families to understand
how this may link to family dynamics and feelings of self-worth, as this is critical for therapeutic interventions (Coard, Breland, & Raskin, 2001).

Another suggestion involves education and parenting workshops to increase families’ awareness of the color-conscious attitudes and behaviors they exhibit toward other family members (Breland, 1998). Social workers should encourage, educate, and recommend strategies for community members to implement these workshops. This would give social workers the ability to support community members by providing the foundational tools necessary to unpack feelings that Black family members may have toward certain skin tones and the preferences that they may express. After the conclusion of these workshops, Black families could create an atmosphere at home that reduces the effects of colorism. Monroe (2016) suggests colorism intervention strategies that involve participating in Black-identified and validating events, such as creating posters, engaging in social media, and reading books around this issue. As indicated by the girls in this study, they perceived their skin tone positively when their family members reminded them that they were beautiful or encouraged them to ignore negative comments. Davis Tribble, Allen, Hart, Francois, and Smith-Bynum (2019) recommended family members be privy to the impacts of their comments, while being sensitive and aware when mentioning youths’ physical appearance, thereby providing an opportunity to develop educational interventions to avoid the negative impacts of familial comments and behaviors. Social workers can aid Black families with feasible solutions such as these to foster appreciation, care, and love surrounding skin tone variations among family members.

Communities. The cascade of colorism is rooted in the manifestation and reinforcement of skin tone preferences in African American families, which continues to harm the Black community (Wilder & Cain, 2011). As a result, social work practitioners should develop
community interventions to eradicate colorist thoughts and behaviors among community members. These professionals must first be educated on the appropriate responses to clients’ experiences of colorist biases and actions. As endorsed by Craddock, Dlova, and Diedrichs (2018), practitioners can work with community members to create counter-narratives that reflect the legitimacy of marginalized groups and people of all skin tones, which can be promoted through media literacy. As discussed by the girls in this study, media is a powerful tool that was discussed in the interviews with the girls and is significant in their understanding of skin tone preferences. Creating counter-narratives could be crucial in presenting imagery that contradicts the prevalent Eurocentric beauty standards and values the array of skin tones in the Black community. This could also improve Black girls’ understanding and perception of themselves and others based on skin tone and other physical attributes.

As eloquently stated by Walker (1983, 290-1), “[U]nless the question of Colorism...is addressed in our communities and definitely in our black ‘sisterhoods’ we cannot, as a people, progress.” In addition to creating counter-narratives, the community can help Black girls explore how the media impacts their decision-making around colorism. According to Wingood et al. (2003), youth’s behavior can be influenced by the media. Specifically, media depictions and validations of “western” features, such as long hair and light skin, could encourage girls to align their physical features with these standards (Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011).

Although not unexpected, the African American girls in this study attested to the relevance of the media in their awareness of skin tone bias and stereotypes. They admitted that media depictions have reinforced color hierarchies that were maintained in their interactions with others.

**Interventions.** Prevention and intervention programming may serve as a feasible solution to mitigate the effects of colorism on Black girls. Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, and Jackson
(2010) postulate that an intervention involving the acknowledgment of stereotypes, discrimination, and colorism through self-assurance can provide a strong foundation to increase self-concept and cultural appreciation among Black girls. Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, and Ojie (2011) also suggest prevention programs for Black girls that recognize the effects that media imagery, influenced by colorism, have on their behavioral health. Ultimately, Hochschild and Weaver (2007) documented historical evidence that proves reducing racism does not decrease colorism; only through meaningful interventions and political organizations will this issue be amended. This research affirms these scholars’ findings, as the girls that participated in this selected after-school program reported strong self-concept and appreciation of their skin tone.

**Social Work Educators**

Education is a primary equalizing agent and may act as a vehicle for change in the field of social work. On a university level, social work educators could facilitate discussions and teach students about colorism by integrating these lessons into undergraduate, masters, and doctorate level education in the classroom. Current diversity initiatives were fostered to celebrate racial and ethnic variations; however, regrettably, these initiatives have not accurately celebrated the array of physical characteristics among these populations. For example, darker skin tones continue to be stigmatized and diversity initiatives seldom acknowledge physical variations among skin color, hair textures, and body size (Thompson & McDonald, 2016). Properly addressing skin tone issues can begin within social work curriculum with intentional colorism context included in syllabi and course texts (Crutchfield & Webb, 2018). Incorporating colorism teachings into curriculum and lesson plans could eventually shape social workers’ thinking
around this subject (Ya Azibo, 2014). These active changes to social work education could also promote future discourse around colorist microaggressions (Hall & Crutchfield, 2018).

To initiate colorism discussions, social workers must be educated, which will require that this issue is integrated into coursework on human diversity and social justice (Hall, 2006, 2009). Hall (1992) asserts that minority content has emphasized the need to bring attention to the latent biases European American students have that will impact their interactions with African American clients. The author recognizes that African American students must address their potential biases when working with this community as well (Hall, 1992). As stated by Webb (2019, p. 23), “regardless of student’s race, ethnicity, nationality, or cultural background, having critical education about colorism helps them become more empowered, responsible global citizens who can help redress color-based social inequalities.” This is critical, as social workers advocate for domestic and international equality by working on micro, mezzo, and macro levels to ignite social change. Learning about the background and current implications of colorism on the lives of African American individuals, groups, and families can allow students, within or outside of that community, to provide necessary interventions.

To begin this process, social workers should be educated on the historical context of colorism, which is rooted in colonial practices that distinguished indigenous populations based on phenotype and skin color (Crutchfield & Webb, 2018). Reviewing the historical underpinnings of colorism would allow future social workers to explore how the issue affects communities of color today. Educators should encourage social work students to scrutinize racially charged images stemming from popular music, literature, and media to understand how they perpetuate color hierarchies (Baxley, 2014). Providing social work students the space to address colorism within popular culture would afford them the opportunity to become self-aware
and learn when depictions are harmful to others. Within the realm of social work education, instructors should engage in dialogues with their students about the ways in which racism, anti-blackness, and White privilege influence the daily experiences of racial and ethnic minorities (Monroe, 2016). These conversations could create a culture of discussion, openness, and understanding of the experiences of people of color that would prepare future social workers for work with clients, families, and the broader communities they serve.

**Social Work Researchers**

Robinson (2011) bemoaned that there is a paucity of colorism studies highlighting the daily experiences of young Black children. As evidenced by this work, and that of Taylor (1999), adults may have issues regarding the color complex that influence their interactions with African American youth. Researchers have often observed the effects of racial trauma stemming from racism, but rarely investigate the trauma caused by other vehicles of oppression like colorism; yet, it impacts the daily lives of African Americans (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). To expand the role of social work in this area, social work researchers should partner with social scientists in history, anthropology, and sociology in order to think about creating macro level interventions that might address colorism and the effects it has on individuals and communities living within the racially conscious United States (Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, & Organista, 2014). This increased body of literature would equip social work practitioners and educators with the appropriate knowledge when working with clients and teaching students about skin tone bias and discrimination.

**Moderating and Mediating Variables**

Few colorism studies have considered the influence of moderating and mediating variables on specific outcomes. According to Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman (2016),
scholars have not given critical attention to the assessment of these variables in relation to skin tone bias. Rubin and Babbie (2016, p. 125) explained that mediating variables “…can be the mechanisms by which independent variables affect dependent variables.” Moreover, “moderating variables are those that are not influenced by the independent variable, but that can affect the strength or direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables” (Rubin and Babbie, 2016, p. 125). In the colorism conceptual model (Figure 1) that framed this research, both mediating (e.g., target’s response) and moderating (e.g., developmental status, other attributes, attitudes of social others, and racial identity) variables were included.

Questions in the interview portion of this study accurately assessed the impact of the target’s response in the face of colorism. The participants in this study actively disclosed how they would respond in the face of colorist comments and behaviors. In terms of the moderating variables, each impacted the girls’ responses to skin tone bias. Developmental status served as a buffer, as some girls were unaware of experiences of skin tone bias. Other attributes or social status symbols allowed girls to feel good about themselves with regard to their clothing, hairstyles, and education. Depending on the attitudes of others, skin tone made girls feel better or worse about themselves. Lastly, experiences of racism was an essential component in their understanding of skin tone bias, as those girls with a stronger identity did not feel as impacted by skin tone bias. Yet, future colorism research could analyze the effects of other concepts, which may act as mediating and moderating variables to colorism outcomes.

Future theoretical models of colorism, might consider integrating racial identity and racial socialization as mediating variables. Telzer and Vazquez Garcia (2009) found that there is a moderating relationship between racial socialization and ethnic identity, which has the
potential to influence how individuals’ feel toward their skin tone. Similar to their research, this study’s colorism conceptual model included racial identity as a moderating variable. This study did not include racial socialization in the conceptual model; however, socialization was reviewed in Aim 1. Bond and Cash (1992) recommend that scholars consider examining racial identity as a mediating variable to determine whether it affects individuals’ perception of skin tone. Overall, researchers are charged with extending current literature by coming to understand the association between skin tone and racial socialization, as well as racial identity, to discover if these variables consistently act as mediating or moderating factors.

Another concept that could be integrated into future research as a mediating variable is racial discrimination. Pager and Shepherd (2008, p. 2) define racial discrimination as “the unequal treatment of persons or groups on the basis of their race or ethnicity.” Research states that dark skin is correlated with increased racial discrimination (Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004; Klonoff & Landrine, 2000). Consequently, racial discrimination could serve as a mediating or intervening variable between individuals and their perception of their skin tone. Adams, Kurtz-Costes, and Hoffman (2016) report that adolescents with heightened awareness of their racial group and of racial discrimination may have a greater sense of pride in their skin color. African Americans with darker skin tones (who potentially experience more racial discrimination) may perceive skin tone differently than those with lighter skin tones. This study did not account for racial discrimination, even though the girls mentioned this as a factor in their understanding of their school environment, and it was exhibited by some of their teachers. As a new way forward, researchers should consider exploring the relationship between racial discrimination and skin tone perception.
Across research studies, scholars have acknowledged that racial identity can serve as a protective factor against racism; racial pride assists by promoting an individual’s self-esteem in the midst of the prejudice, discrimination, and stigma associated with their racial group (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991; Cross & Strauss, 1998; Miller, 1999; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Two research studies have attempted to assess the relationship between colorism and racial pride (Telzer & Vazquez Garcia, 2009; Udry, Bauman, & Chase, 1971). Hughes and Hertel (1990) reported a dearth of studies evaluating the relationship between skin color and Black consciousness, also known as racial pride. However, the two studies demonstrated the importance of assessing the effects of racial pride on skin color perception. Nevertheless, more scholarship is needed to substantiate whether this is a mediating or moderating factor in colorism literature. Previous literature suggests that racial pride could be a moderating factor, similar to racial socialization and ethnic identity, as it could help individuals buffer against the effects of skin tone bias. The girls in this study articulated their pride in their racial identity. Future research could investigate the significance of racial pride when exploring colorism outcomes.

The present research study has contributed to current colorism research by focusing on the experiences of pre-adolescent middle and early high school girls. These findings consistently indicate that, in addition to racism, Black girls are impacted by colorism in similar and different ways. To better serve this population, every aspect of the field of social work should be prepared to address the unique needs of African American girls. Using an intersectional approach and the colorism conceptual model could provide future solutions to these pressing issues. To this end, colorism should remain a primary action item to be discussed, reduced, and one day eliminated domestically and internationally.
Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

**WHO:** Girls Inc. attendees in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade

(Must identify as African American/Black girls)

**WHY:** To discuss how girls feel about their skin tone and how they are treated by peers, teachers, and family

**WHAT:** 2 hour Group Interviews

**WHEN:** October 2020

**WHERE:** Online (Zoom interviews)

**Contact:** If your child would like to participate in this study please contact Professor Kim Norwood at norwood@wustl.edu or contact Maya Williams at maya.williams@wustl.edu or 248-979-7889
Appendix B: Parent Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Maya Williams, I am a fourth-year doctorate student at the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. I will be conducting research for my dissertation regarding colorism in different settings. The name of this research project is titled “Colorism Protection: Analyzing how African American female students buffer against colorism in school, home, and the community.”

My research team consists of five people. I am the Principal Investigator, or lead researcher, on the team. My advisors for this project, Dr. Vetta Sanders-Thompson and Professor Kimberly Norwood, will oversee this project. A trained researcher, Phylicia Bediako, and another graduate student, Grace Reid, will assist with the interviews. I will be responsible for conducting the online Zoom interviews that will be video recorded. The research team will conduct three interviews (per grade level) with 6th, 7th, and 8th grade African American girls from Girls Inc. Each grade will be separated into their own interview group. These interviews will last for 2 hours and your child will receive a $20 gift card after the interview is completed.

Your child will only be asked to participate in one interview. On the day of the interview, the ten girls assigned to their interview group will fill out an online demographic sheet that asks the students their age, grade, race, and self-reported skin tone on a picture and word scale. Next, the girls will be asked questions regarding how colorism has impacted their self-identity, attraction, affiliation, and how they think it will affect their future. There will also be questions regarding how their family members perceive their skin tone along with their teachers and peers.

Ultimately, this study is being conducted to understand how young African Americans girls are able to cope with people’s perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding their skin tone. This research will help future educators and social workers to reduce the impacts of colorism in school settings. It will provide new research from the perspectives of African American girls, as colorism literature often highlights the experience of African American women.

We thank you in advance for considering your child’s participation in this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly at maya.williams@wustl.edu or 248-979-7889. Or contact Professor Kim Norwood by email at norwood@wustl.edu.

Sincerely,

Maya Williams
PhD Candidate
Chancellor’s Graduate Fellow
Brown School of Social Work
Washington University in St. Louis
Appendix C: Verbal Assent Interview Script

“Hello, my name is Maya Williams and I working on my graduate degree at Washington University in St. Louis. I am conducting a study to learn what African American girls think about their skin color. I have some questions to ask you. Feel free to comment on these questions or bring up things you want to discuss if you feel that I have missed anything. There are no right or wrong answers. I am not looking for particular responses. Do you have any questions?”

After this, the PI will listen and respond to any questions that the potential participants have. Then, the PI will obtain verbal assent using the following script:

“In a minute, if you respond ‘yes,’ I will interview you for two hours regarding your experiences. You do not have to say ‘yes’ if you do not want to be a part of this study. You do not have to feel pressure from your parents or me to be a part of this study. If you do say ‘yes,’ you only have to answer questions that you would like to answer, and you are free to stop at any time. Would you like to be a part of this study?”
Appendix D: Qualtrics Colorism Survey

1. Are you a member of Girls Inc. St. Louis? Yes  No

2. This survey should take 15-20 minutes to complete. It will ask you questions about your skin tone and how your skin tone impacts how you are treated by family, friends, and teachers. Do you assent (agree) to participate in this study? Yes  No

3. How old are you?  11  12  13  14  15  Other

4. What grade are you in?  6th  7th  8th  9th  Other

5. What is your race?  Black/African American  Other

6. What school do you attend? _______________________________________

7. The pictures above are in order of skin color from light to dark. Please take some time to think about the complexion of your skin. Try your best to ignore how attractive the pictures may be and concentrate only on skin color. Please circle the number below that closely resembles how you feel others and yourself would rate your skin tone. If you feel that these pictures do not represent your skin tone, you can choose a number in between.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

8. Please circle the choice that best describes your skin tone:

Very Light Brown  Light Brown  Medium Brown  Dark Brown  Very Dark Brown

For researchers only:

Researcher 1: The skin tone of the participant is: ___________________________________ (using the above photograph scale), ___________________________________ (using the above word scale)

Researcher 2: The skin tone of the participant is: ___________________________________ (using the above photograph scale), ___________________________________ (using the above word scale)
These questions have 5 parts. This is Part 1 of 5.

Read each sentence below and choose the number that best represents how you feel about each statement. Please be as honest as you can.

These questions are about the place where you attend school.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Agree Agree Strongly Agree

1. My teachers call on me about the same number of times as other people in my class.
2. I get into trouble about the same number of times as other people in my class.
3. My teacher says nice things to me about the same number of times as other people in my class.
4. My classmates tease me about the same amount as other people in my class.
Read each sentence below and choose the number that best represents how you feel about each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as honest as you can.

These questions are about your ideas, behaviors, and how you view yourself.

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<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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_____ 1. My skin tone is an important part of how I see myself.
_____ 2. My skin tone is an important part of who I am.
_____ 4. My skin tone is a big part of how I describe myself.
These questions are about what you think about others when you meet them.

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
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_____ 5. You can tell a lot about a person by their skin tone
_____ 6. African Americans or Black people with lighter skin tone tend to be more pleasant people to deal with.
_____ 7. African Americans or Black people with darker skin tone are more difficult to work with.
_____ 8. There are real differences between light skin and dark-skinned people
This is Part 4 of 5.

Read each sentence below and choose the number that best represents how you feel about each statement. Please be as honest as you can.

These questions are about who you spend time with.


_____ 9. Most of my friends tend to be the same skin tone
_____ 10. I usually choose who I’m going to be friends with by their skin tone
_____ 11. The majority of my current friends are the same skin tone as me
_____ 12. I mostly like people of a certain skin tone
LAST QUESTIONS OF THE SURVEY! (Part 5 of 5)

Read each sentence below and choose the number that best represents how you feel about each statement. Please be as honest as you can.

These questions are about the people that you like.

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Somewhat Disagree 4 Neutral 5 Somewhat Agree 6 Agree 7 Strongly Agree

_____ 14. I prefer light skin over dark skin when thinking about a future person to go out with
_____ 15. I prefer a future partner who has the same skin tone as me
_____ 16. Lighter skin tone makes others look better
Appendix E: Small Group Interview Questions

Hello, my name is Maya Williams and I working on my graduate degree at Washington University in St. Louis. We are coming together today to discuss the feelings you have about yourself and others in different places and situations. Feel free to share what you think, or have seen or heard as we discuss topics. You can bring up things you want to discuss if you feel that I have missed anything. There are no right or wrong answers. I am not looking for particular responses. Do you all have any questions? Ok, let’s begin.

First, tell me a little about yourself. What do you like to do and what do you like about yourself?

Domain #1: Physical Attributes
   1. Describe the physical features you like best about yourself?
   2. Now describe or discuss the features that you like least about yourself.
   3. Tell me what you hear on the radio, television, or see in magazines that affects how you feel about how you look.
   4. Tell me about how the things you hear from friends and family affect your feelings about how you look.

Domain #2: Affiliation
   Now we will talk about your friends and other people.
   5. Tell me about your group of friends. How long have you been friends? How did you all become friends?
   6. Do people make comments or tease you because of your physical appearance? Why? Tell me more about that.
   7. Which of your physical features do your friends and others comment on the most? Why? Tell me more about that.
   8. Do you choose who you are going to be friends with based on the person’s looks? Or skin tone? Describe that for me.

Domain #3: Impression Formation
   Now we will go deeper and think about how you feel toward your appearance.
   9. When thinking about your physical features, how do you feel about yourself? Let’s take a few of your physical features one at a time.
   10. Describe how you feel about your skin color? Please explain.
   11. Describe how you feel about your hair texture? Please explain.

Domain #4: Self-Concept
   Let’s talk about your feelings related to physical appearance.
   12. What things in your life make you feel good about how you look?
   13. Do you believe that your skin tone has affected the way you feel about yourself? If so, describe that for me.
   14. Where are you most likely to think about or get self-conscious about your looks?
15. Where are you most likely to think about or get self-conscious about your skin tone?  
**Domain #5: Attraction**  
Now I will ask you questions about your appearance and the person you like.

16. Do you think other people find you pretty? Do you work hard to make sure people think you’re pretty?  
17. Tell me about the types of skin tones you like.

**Domain #6: Environments**  
Finally, I will ask questions about your family, school employees, and your future.

18. Describe the kids in your class that teacher(s) seem to like. What do they do? What do they look like?  
19. What do you think makes your teacher like you?  
20. Have you ever seen a school employee (teacher, administrator, or coach) treat someone better because of their skin tone? Please give an example or tell me more about that.  
21. Does anyone in your family ever discuss looks? Tell me more about that.  
22. Does anyone in your family ever discuss skin tone? Tell me more about that.

**Domain #7: Coping Mechanisms**  
Let’s talk about how you respond to comments about your appearance.

23. If you heard negative comments about your skin tone on the television, the radio, or from others, how would you deal with that?  
24. What do you do if people say positive things about your skin tone? Describe that to me.  
25. What do you do if people say negative things about your skin tone? Describe that to me.  
26. If you saw someone else being made fun of for their skin tone, how would you respond?

That concludes the questions for this interview. Now we have 30 minutes left to chat about the interview. Does anyone have any questions or concerns? Is there anything else you all want to talk about? As I have mentioned, there were no right or wrong answers during the interview. I was interested in learning your feelings about your skin tone. Thank you so much for your participation.

Note: If necessary, I will provide resources (poetry, blogs, books, etc.) to parents to support their daughters regarding this topic. If any girl in this study has an emotional reaction to this topic, I will notify the CEO and the parents. I will also refer the parents to counseling services offered at Wash U.
## Appendix F: Schools of the Participants

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Private Schools</th>
<th>Public Schools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1=Atonement Lutheran</td>
<td>12=Brittany Woods Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>2=Blessed Teresa of Calcutta</td>
<td>13=Central</td>
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<td>3=Cardinal Ritter College Prep</td>
<td>14=Compton Drew Middle School</td>
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<td>4=Holy Spirit Catholic School</td>
<td>15=Cross Keys</td>
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<td>5=John Burroughs</td>
<td>16=East Wake Academy</td>
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<td>6=Kingdom Collegiate Academies</td>
<td>17=Fulton Junior High</td>
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<td>7=Principia School</td>
<td>18=Grand Center Arts Academy</td>
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<td>8=Rosati-Kain</td>
<td>19=Hazelwood Central</td>
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<td>9=St. Ann Catholic School</td>
<td>20=Hazelwood East</td>
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<td>10=St. Rose Philippine Duchesne</td>
<td>21=Hazelwood North Middle School</td>
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<td>11=The College School</td>
<td>22=Hixson Middle School</td>
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<td>23=Hollen Beck Middle School</td>
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<td>24=Lucas Crossing Elementary</td>
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<td>25=Madison Junior High</td>
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<td>26=Maplewood Richmond Heights Middle School</td>
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<td>27=McKinley Classical Leadership Academy High School</td>
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<td>28=Normandy High School</td>
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<td>29=Pattonville Heights Middle School</td>
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<td>30=Remington Traditional</td>
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<td>31=Ritenour Middle School</td>
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<td>32=Riverview Central Middle</td>
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<td>33=Soldan International Studies High School</td>
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<td>34=Steam Academy Middle School</td>
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<td>35=University City High School</td>
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<td>36=Wake Forest High School</td>
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<td>37=Woodland Middle</td>
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