FRIENDSHIP SELECTION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS

By

GHYNECEE MARIE TEMPLE

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of GHYNECEE MARIE TEMPLE find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Marianne Barabasz, Ed.D., Honorary Chair

Arreed Barabasz, Ph.D., Chair

Olusola Adesope, Ph.D.

Phyllis Erdman, Ph.D.
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Finally, to myself always remember:

"Freeing [myself is] one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self [is] another."

-Toni Morrison
FRIENDSHIP SELECTION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS

Abstract

by Ghynecee Marie Temple, Ph.D.
Washington State University
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Chair: Arreed Barabasz

Colorism (intra and inter-racial discrimination based upon skin-tone) has been viewed as pervasive among African American women. Substantial research has suggested that there are negative effects of colorism on several life domains. However, the impact of this phenomena on friendship selection (Wilder, 2015) has not been adequately tested. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between skin-tone, self-esteem, and racial identity on friendship selection. This investigation was based on Symbolic Interaction theory (Blumer, 1969) to help determine how participant’s racial identity used that to interact with others.

Participants were 162 African American women and men from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s) and Predominately White Institutions (PWI’s). Participants completed a demographic questionnaire and several measures including: Facebook Facial Profile Instrument (developed for the present study), Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (Falconer & Neville, 2000), Multidimensional Model of Black Identity (Sellers, 1997, 1998), and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

Results of the study failed to yield any significant findings. Contrary to this writer’s expectation and popular lore, colorism was not a significant moderator in friendship formation.
However, data collected provided insight into the importance of social media in establishing and maintaining friendships for African Americans.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 – Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 – Methods</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4 – Results</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5 – Discussion</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Recruitment Materials</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Consent Form</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Demographic Questionnaire</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D: Facebook Profile Instrument (FPI) .................................................................69
E: Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE) .................................................................74
F: Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) ..............................................75
G: Skin Tone Pallet ....................................................................................................84
H: Skin Tone Satisfaction Scale (SCSS) .................................................................86
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant Demographics ................................................................. 37

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations of Study Measures .................. 49
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Marianne Barabasz.

Thank you for guiding me through this process.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Colorism, the intra-racial discrimination based on skin color, has had a profound influence on the well-being of African American women (Hill, 2002; Wilder, 2010). Historically, lighter complexioned African American women have been viewed as more desired and have received more financial, educational, and social endorsements than women of darker skin tone (Hunter, 2002). Despite decades of research across disciplines, several gaps exist in the research literature pertaining to the interplay of racial identity, self-esteem, and racial context on the influence of colorism. Moreover, research literature has not investigated the influence of colorism on friendship selection within this population.

Racial identity has been hypothesized to buffer the negative effects of both intergroup and intragroup discrimination. Despite this hypothesis research literature has generated mixed findings, specifically when considering the role of private racial regard and the influence on skin satisfaction (Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, & Belgrave, 2015). Additionally, the research literature has suggested that higher levels of centralized racial/ethnic identity may lead to increased psychological distress (Lee & Ahn, 2013). Further insights are needed to understand that relationship between the private, public, and central domains of racial identity and their influence on skin tone satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Scholarly research examining the self-esteem of African American women have described it as a potential psychological associate of colorism, and has demonstrated the significance of skin tone appraisal on self-esteem (Mucherah & Fraizer, 2013). Given the current direction of research within this domain, the relationship between skin tone, skin tone satisfaction, and racial
identity on psychological well-being should be further explored (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011).

Researchers have posited that racial context has a significant influence on the importance of skin tone (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005; Wilder, 2015). Specifically, research within this domain has determined that greater emphasis on skin tone would occur in high racial contexts such as historically Black institutions, organizations, etc. (Gassman & Abiola, 2016). Additional studies have also corroborated this notion and found that geographical location could influence the perceived importance of skin tone. Considering the current literature within this domain, the number of studies exploring the current impact of racial context has been limited and a significant number of these studies have been based upon the phenomenological perspectives of participants.

Literature regarding women’s friendships has failed to fully address and describe African American women’s friendships. Research literature exists in regards to 1) the selection of intimate partners between Black men and women, 2) interracial friendship’s, and 3) women’s friendships. However, research into the latter two categories have employed mostly white participants (Shambly, 2012). The literature that exists for Black women, has modestly assessed the establishment of friendships, how they are supported, and what is discussed amongst friends (Shambly, 2012). The literature has failed to adequately describe the phenotypic composition of Black women’s social groups or the dynamics that enable these friendships. The significance of exploring Black women’s friendships was captured through Audre Lorde’s, a well-established Black feminist figure (1984), sentiments:

At this point in time, were racism to be totally eradicated from those middle range relationships between Black women and White women, those relationships might become deeper, but they would still never satisfy our particular Black woman’s need for one another, given our shared knowledge and traditions and history (p.164).
To understand and conceptualize the intersection of race, gender, and relationships the following work utilized the Symbolic Interaction theoretical framework. Symbolic interactionism, derived from sociologist George Herbert Mead’s pragmatist theory and coined by sociologist Herbert Blumer, focuses on how humans within society interpret things as symbols to communicate with each other, how we create and maintain a self that we present to the world and a sense of self within us, and how we create and maintain the reality that we believe to be true (Blumer (1969). Blumer’s (1969) theory presents itself through three basic principles: 1) we act toward people and things based upon the meaning we interpret from them; 2) those meanings are the product of social interaction between people; and 3) meaning-making and understanding is an ongoing interpretive process during which the initial meaning might remain the same, evolve slightly, or change radically. Moreover, the theory enables a micro-level examination of human interaction in specific contexts.

Social interactionism is both useful and relevant to the exploration and understanding the interplay between race, gender, and colorism within America’s society. Given the position of social interactionism, society is constructed through human interpretation and interaction. Race and gender are both social constructs that function based on what we believe to be true about people, given what they look like. For example, colorism is perpetuated by the idea, that lighter complexioned individuals have more positive attributes than compared to their darker counterparts. The social interactionist framework enables an examination of any socially constructed cues that influence or dictate how African American women initiate and maintain close social relations amongst themselves.
Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of colorism on the intragroup selection of friendships by African American women, explore the mediating role of racial identity on skin tone satisfaction, and understand the impact of skin tone and skin tone satisfaction on self-esteem. First, the literature described the negative effects of colorism including: a brief history of colorism, controlling images and social capital, financial and educational success, self-esteem, and identity of African American women. Secondly, the important factors that contributed to the formation and maintenance of relationships between African American women was discussed. The role of social media in understanding the process of friendship selection was also explored. The study was intended to shed light into how deeply colorism had been embedded into Black female culture and explore its role in the initial formation of Black women’s friendships.
The following research questions were generated from Blumer’s (1969) Symbolic Interaction Theory and the survey of literature in Chapter 2.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1) Is there a relationship between skin tone preference of friends and skin tone satisfaction between student’s at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominately White Institutions?

2) Is there a significant difference between skin tone satisfaction and Black racial identity at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominately White Institutions?

3) Does skin tone and skin tone satisfaction have a significant influence on self-esteem and/or skin tone satisfaction?
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Colorism has been defined by scholars as the intra and inter-racial discrimination based upon the color of one’s skin and phenotypic features (Wilder, 2010). Although the existence of colorism can be seen across cultures and ethnicities, it has been especially pervasive in the lives of African Americans, specifically women (Wilder & Cain, 2011). When compared with African American males, African American females have experienced a more drastic prejudicial fallout surrounding issues of skin color, facial features, and hair (Hill, 2002: Neal & Wilson 1989). This once taboo topic has influenced African American women’s well-being in various areas such as mental, social, and physical health (Keith, Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2010). Colorism can be traced to early American beginnings. African American’s of lighter skin and Caucasoid features have typically been given preferential treatment when compared to their darker counterparts (Neal & Wilson, 1989). This practice contributed to the belief that those of lighter complexions were genetically superior to those who were darker. These hierarchies were constructed to maintain separation between Whites and Blacks and consequently within the Black community. Although the origins of colorism were initially rooted in the period of European colonization and antebellum slavery practices, scholars have suggested that it remained a prevalent aspect of the Black female narrative in the twenty-first century. According to Hunter (2007), colorism in the United States has been maintained by a system of White racism and the ideals of White supremacy (aesthetic, ideological, and material). Thus, white skin and the ideal of whiteness itself symbolize civility, rationality, beauty and superiority, while on the inverse end dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and ultimately inferiority (Hunter, 2007).
Throughout the history of colorism various terms have been employed to label the different shades of skin tones (Neal & Wilson, 1989). Light skin individuals were referred to as fair, bright, half white, or yellow while those with dark skin were labeled jet black, ink spot, or shine. Individuals with in-between skin tones were called tan, bronze, brown skin, red or olive. Generally, those who were labeled black or yellow were seen as the least desirable. A poem from the early 1900’s sums up the attitude towards varying shades of black:

If you’re white you’re all right
If you’re yellow you’re mellow
If you’re brown stick around
If you’re black get back.

The beliefs behind these terms have persisted into African American women’s current experience and have effected their social and economic mobility, educational attainment and psychological well-being (Neal & Wilson, 1989).

**Controlling Images and Social Capital**

Sociologist Charles Parrish conducted a study in 1946 entitled *Color Names and Color Notions*, to determine the effects of colorism in Black society. Parrish (1946) asserted that color played a significant role in the organization of Black society and that there was ample evidence to support that differences in color received at the very least verbal recognition. He noted that at the time of his work color names had pervaded into Black mainstream culture (songs, ditties, and every day discourse) and included terms such as “high yellow,” “black,” “chocolate,” “high brown,” and “sealskin” (Parrish, 1946). Within this seminal work, Parrish explored the various names Blacks used to describe the variance of skin tones found within the population, in addition to exploring the notions, or perceptions of differing skin tones (Wilder, 2015).
In the research study, Parrish (1946) collected survey data from a community sample, Jr. High School, and college aged participants. First, a group of sixty African American college students were provided an exhaustive list of color names and were asked to indicate the terms they had heard that were used to describe skin tone by other Blacks. Two-thirds or more of the participants indicated knowledge of at least twenty-five of the terms presented. The twenty-five items identified by the students were arranged numerically along a scale ranging from zero (white) to fifty (black) by a group of “qualified judges” (Parrish, 1946). This was done by averaging the color ratings (CR’s) assigned each name by the judges. Following analysis of the various color names, four distinct color clusters emerged and were arbitrarily labeled “High Yellow,” “High Brown,” “Brown skin,” and “Black.” Additionally, Parrish (1946) indicated that a potential “Chocolate Brown” group could be inserted between the “Brown skin” and “Black” groups.

To assess the potential stereotypes associated with skin tone, Parrish (1946) asked a community sample of participants (including eighty-eight junior high school students) to provide physical and personality descriptions of each color group. For the junior high school students, the color categories were written on a board and they were asked to write a true statement about each. Parrish (1946) found that physical descriptions were favorable for those of lighter and medium skin tones, but not for those with darker complexions. Personality traits were typically more favorable for the middle groups (High Brown, Brown skin, and Chocolate Brown), but not for the light or dark extremes. The most prevalent stereotypes were associated with the “High Yellow” and “Black” groups. Three dominant notions that were frequently used for light, medium, and dark categories (listed respectively) also emerged: a) “They think they’re cute
because they look like white”; b) “They’re nice looking and are very lovable”; c) “They’re evil and hard to get along with.”

Parrish (1946) developed a survey that included these dominant notions in addition to others that were randomly selected and distributed it to four hundred people. He found that sixty percent of participants attributed greater physical strength to those with dark skin tone. Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated that favoritism was shown to lighter skin students and another seventy-five percent expressed a belief that darker women were more likely to be discriminated against by sororities. It was also observed that both the extremely light and dark participants showed the same attitudinal tendency even when referring to items derogatory to themselves, thus showing that for the sample, the selected notions were collective. Additionally, Parish (1946) highlighted the disenfranchisement of those who were too dark to “pass” or be considered light, and yet too light to be considered dark or black. Parrish (1946) asserted that the presence or absence of other “negroid” traits, specifically hair texture and facial aesthetics, could determine how these individuals may be perceived. More specifically, those with more salient negroid features may be rated more unfavorably than those with more Caucasoid features.

Wilder (2010), revisited the study conducted by Parrish (1946) to re-examine whether the contemporary language and attitudes regarding skin color had altered since his original study. The study utilized fifty-eight African American participants between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, which were distributed between nine focus groups (Wilder, 2010). Participants were asked to identify their skin tone using the 5-point Likert scale (very light, light brown, medium, dark, and very dark) used in the 1980 National Survey of Black Americans. Three women identified as very light (5%), fourteen as light brown (24%), twenty-five as medium (43%), fourteen as dark (24%), and two as very dark (4%).
Data was collected in two phases between 2005 and 2007. Following the first phase, Wilder (2010) noted several themes and patterns that emerged from the grounded theory work, specifically the predominance of the various names participants used to describe light, medium, and dark skin tones. During the second phase, participants were asked to list and discuss any color names they had heard or personally used to describe other Blacks. Additionally, they were asked to describe the physical and personality traits associated with each skin color category.

Wilder (2010) found that there were forty terms that the participants used to describe themselves and others in their daily lives. These terms were identified by at least three participants and were recognized and understood by all the women. Nine terms shared by the women were an exact match from Parrish’s list. Almost half of the identified terms were related to light skin individuals, which related not only to Parrish’s (1946) data, but to bodies of fiction and scholarly literature. Similar to previous literature, names associated with dark skin held negative connotations (burnt, charcoal, and watermelon child), reinforcing controlling images (socially constructed ideas about Black womanhood that reinforce black women’s subordination) of darker skin women. Specifically, Wilder (2010) highlighted that many of the terms used for Black women that are both racist and sexist, are reintroduced and reaffirmed by colorism.

Wilder (2010) also noted that the names and labels associated with various skin tones influenced the internal scripts of the participants. Many of the internal scripts relating to lighter-skin women were positive and respondents used terms such as “trustworthy,” “amiable,” “nonthreatening,” and “comfortable” to describe these women. The most salient belief expressed by most of the participants regardless of skin color, was that light skin was highly correlated with beauty. As a consequence of this association, light skin women were expected to be superior, and this notion was consistent with Parrish’s (1946) finding that within the Black community conceit
and arrogance are often internalized scripts held by women with lighter skin tones. As a consequence the notion that light skin women were “snobish” had also emerged. Additionally, there was a perception that light skin women held more privilege than those of darker skin, when considering employment, better relationships, more interracial friendships, and overall appeal. On the other end of the color spectrum, darker women were described as ghetto, loud, intimidating, militant, suspicious, unattractive, and less intelligent. These beliefs were expressed by many of the participants regardless of skin tone. The scripts held by these women relate to previous literature including Parrish’s (1946) work, asserting that dark skin is inherently negative. Additionally, Wilder (2010) noted the difficulty that many of the participants experienced invalidating and dispelling these beliefs about being darker skin and that more “internal work” was needed to deconstruct the negativity laid upon them (Wilder, 2010).

The study revealed that medium or brown skin tone may serve as a protective middle ground when considering the binary structure of colorism (extremely light skin vs. extremely dark skin) (Wilder, 2010). In alignment with Parrish’s (1946) findings, those with medium skin received more favorable ratings than their darker and lighter counterparts (Wilder, 2010). Thus, brown skin may signify an area of safety when considering the consequences of colorism. It was duly noted that although, brown skin may act as a buffer, some women reported still feeling constrained in their daily lives as a result of colorism with one participant explaining that skin color is survival of the fittest and that brown skin seems better fit than dark women, but less fit than light women. Another theme that emerges is that many of the self-identified brown or medium participants were more sensitive and particular about being labeled as brown, thus distancing themselves from the label of dark. Through the various stories shared by these women, it was more desirable to be considered brown versus black. Wilder (2010) highlighted
the importance of exploring this theme further to understand why identifying as “brown” is more significant than being considered dark.

Empirical studies examining skin-tone preferences can be traced to the late 1930s, specifically, to the doll studies conducted by Dr. Kenneth Clark and Dr. Mamie Clark (Coard, Breland, & Raskin, 2001). This infamous study concluded that children would associate positive traits and beauty to the white dolls versus the black dolls. This study influenced a plethora of empirical research which was conducted throughout the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s. The findings of these various studies indicated that women of lighter tones and Caucasoid features were seen as more physically attractive than darker skin women with Negroid features (Neal & Wilson, 1989). In recent decades social psychologists have described this societal belief as the “what is beautiful is good” phenomenon, which has played a role in the ideation that those of white and light skin color are “better” than those who have dark skin.

Research has shown that skin color and gender has had a more profound effect on African American women than African American men, especially when considering attractiveness (Neal & Wilson, 1989; Thompson & Keith, 2004; Wilder & Cain, 2011). Specifically, light skin tone has been positively associated with higher levels of self-esteem, particularly for women with lower socioeconomic status (Thompson & Keith, 2004; Wilder & Cain, 2011). Additionally, those with lighter complexions held higher social capital, more access to educational opportunities, earned higher incomes, and were more likely to marry affluent individuals (Wilder & Cain, 2011). Research literature has attributed this phenomenon to how beauty has been gendered and racialized within the United States (Wilder & Cain, 2011). This can be understood by examining the history of colonization by European settlers and the imposition of western ideals of beauty on African and African American enslaved people. Within
Europe and western societies, skin color has been historically correlated with feminine beauty (Hill, 2002). During the period of antebellum slavery, white supremacist ideology purported the link between whiteness and femininity through the myth of “sacred white womanhood”. This ideology associated virtuous qualities with whiteness. This belief system starkly contradicted the reality of the enslaved people, specifically the African/African American women. These women were subjected to masculine work and punishment, thus failing to conform to the ideals of white womanhood (Hill, 2002).

Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005 determined the extent to which racial context mediated the importance and function of intragroup skin tone stigma among African Americans. Their study utilized one hundred and thirty-two Black students recruited from both a predominantly White university (PWI) and a predominately Black university. The participants were assessed on a variety of measures such as the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (adapted version of the short form; 10 items; Phinney, 1990), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (1965), Luhtanen and Crockers (1992) Collective Self-esteem Scale, and a three question measure of skin tone importance each measuring ratings of skin tone, racial identity, self-esteem, racial self-esteem, skin-tone importance, and perceived group acceptance. The authors concluded that African Americans in predominately Black institutions placed greater emphasis on skin tone than those at PWI’s. Participants with darker skin-tones endorsed higher levels of racial identity for both predominantly White and Black institutions (Harvey et. al, 2005). Additionally, both higher perceived peer acceptance and higher self-esteem were correlated with darker skin tone at the predominately Black university, but not at the PWI (Harvey et. al, 2005). Together, these findings show support that the importance of skin tone can be influenced by racial context. One notable limitation highlighted by the authors was the use of a quasi-experimental design. The
participants were not randomly assigned to their respective institutions, which hindered their ability to establish a causal direction between association of skin-tone importance and predominant race of university (Harvey et. al, 2005).

Racial context can also influence how Black women view one another. Specifically, Wilder (2015) investigated the regional color hypothesis and its impact on how Black women view color. The regional color hypothesis suggests that colorism is an obscure insignificant matter in the lives of African American women in the North and Midwest (Wilder, 2015). The purpose of the study was to investigate the counter-narrative (stories or beliefs that challenge dominant ideologies and narratives) associated with colorism. Utilizing a focus group of Black women from Northern, Midwestern, and Southern regions of the United States, themes regarding the perception of skin tone and its relevance emerged. Through these candid discussions there was an overwhelming perception from most participants that the Northern United States was more diverse and progressive in matters of skin color politics. One participant in the study noted that having light skin while residing in the south created more social and economic advantages than compared to darker skin individuals. Additionally, she expressed the belief that skin tone bias was less prevalent in the north due to her personal perceptions. Although a powerful statement, Wilder (2015) noted that the participant’s assertion was not based upon any census or demographic information regarding the number of light skin individuals in the North nor skin tone variation among differing geographical regions. Instead, what the statement did highlight was the tendency to create color scripts to conceptualize overall color narratives. Furthermore, the statements revealed the belief that people residing in the North and Midwest were more comfortable in their skin and more accepting of a variety of skin tones (Wilder, 2015). Another major theme that emerged was that the women in the group felt African Americans in the South
were still “colorstruck”, with one participant sharing that her dark complexion was often a determinant of whether or not a man would approach her, and noted that if he did, there was typically a backhanded compliment given (ex. you are attractive for a dark girl). Conversely, when she resided in the North, the participant shared that men would approach her without providing a rationale based upon her complexion. These experiences support the belief that darker skin is more accepted in the North (Wilder, 2015). Wilder (2015) noted that although participants were more aware of their color in the South, experiences of colorism were not isolated to this region alone and could also be observed in the North and Midwest as well.

This occurrence has also been observed in institutions that have high racial contexts such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s). Today, HBCU’s educate 11% of Black students in the United States and represent only 3% of colleges and universities in the nation (Gasman & Abiola, 2016). Even so, these institutions very much permeated into the fabric of African American culture. Created after the Civil War and the main source of higher education for Blacks until the 1960s, these institutions were established with the goal of uplifting and educating the Black race, but in doing so it unknowingly allowed for some members to differentiate themselves from the general community (Gasman & Abiola, 2016). Historically, these institutions were most patronized by Black society’s elite, who were typically lighter skin African Americans, thus establishing the standard. It was within this social norm that a Black bourgeoisie underlined by skin tone was established (Gasman & Abiola, 2016). This division was most notable and problematic between African American women on campuses. Skin tone was routinely the deciding factor for entry into historically Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs), social clubs, and events. Often, women who were chosen to represent the universities were of lighter complexion and embodied Eurocentric aesthetics. Ironically, during the Civil
Rights movement attitudes towards skin tone shifted and it was light skin individuals who found themselves questioned about their “blackness”, which led to the perception of marginalization within this group (Gasman & Abiola, 2016).

**Educational and Financial Success**

Physical appearance has been seen as an important status characteristic for women, especially when compared to men (Hunter, 2002). Lighter skin African Americans were found to have completed more years of education, earned more money, and had more prestigious occupations than darker African Americans. Hunter’s (2002) study analyzed the effects of skin color on life outcomes for African Americans. After analyzing the data collected from the National Survey of Black Americans, a subset of four-hundred and nineteen African American women were used to assess whether lighter skin women were more likely to marry men of higher status. Hunter (2002) measured skin color, parents’ education, age, marital status, and urban residence. Skin color was measured in five categories: very dark, dark, medium, light, very light. For African American women, for every additional gradient of lightness (where 1 = darkest and 5 = lightest), educational attainment increased by one-third of a year. Skin color was also a predictor of financial earnings. African American women who were medium brown earned $673 less than other women with similar characteristics that identified as light brown. Women who were very light earned $2600 more per year than a woman with a similar background who endorsed being very dark. For every increment of lightness on the color scale, income increased by $673 annually.

Skin-tone continues to be an important determinant of opportunity for African Americans. Specifically, income and occupational differences remain between light and dark skin individuals and has been comparable to the differentials between Blacks and Whites as a
whole. Hughes and Hertel (1990) used a color rating scale and data from the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) to assess the correlation between skin-tone and socioeconomic status. The NSBA was a probability household survey of 1,310 Black Americans conducted in 1979 and was thought to be the most representative sample of Black Americans living the United States (data set and sampling was used from Jackson & Gurin, 1987). After controlling for age, gender, and parents’ socioeconomic status variables, light skin tone was found to be a significant indicator of greater levels of education, occupational prestige, personal income, and family income than compared to darker African Americans. Additionally, Hughes and Hertel (1990) assessed indicators of spouses’ socioeconomic status: education of spouses and occupational prestige of spouse after controlling for age, gender, and parents’ socioeconomic status, in addition to the respondent’s education and occupational prestige. The data indicated that individuals with lighter skin had spouses with more education and higher occupational prestige and that these relationships remained significant after adding controls. Hughes and Hertel (1990) concluded that lighter skin African Americans married partners with higher socioeconomic status.

Historically, opportunistic advantages were afforded to African Americans with White lineage, specifically White paternity following the civil war (Keith & Monroe, 2016). Advantages included entry into a small number of predominantly White educational institutions and into the newly-established Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Although there has been a decline in the elitism gained by these bi-racial individuals, lighter skin has continued to remain an intermediary presence between White elites and the black majority (Keith & Monroe, 2016). A notable example includes the presidential success of Barack Obama (Kenyan and White American ancestry) and his appointment of Eric Holder and Valerie Jarrett,
both light skin African Americans (Keith & Monroe, 2016). This is important to consider due to the implications for educational attainment and economic mobility of African Americans.

Researchers have noted relationships between socioeconomic status and skin tone, citing that high income parents can afford to live in neighborhoods that are districted for better public schools and thus better educational facilities and opportunities (Keith & Monroe, 2016). To help conceptualize this phenomena, Keith and Monroe (2016) have postulated that the lightening in the workforce and marriage market have created the economic implications for schooling and educational attainment as previously discussed.

**Racial Identity**

Research has suggested that perceptions of both intergroup and intragroup racism have had a significant effect on the well-being of many African American women. In addition to experiencing everyday microaggressions, African American women have had to navigate through challenges influenced by colorism. Researchers have conceptualized the experiences of African American women with racism as a chronic source of stress (Utsey, 1999). The comprehensive and cumulative effects of perceived racism has been associated with decreased quality of life, negative self-esteem, intrusive thoughts, hypertension, and increased risk for mental and physical illness such as depression, anxiety, or headaches in African Americans (Carter & Reynolds, 2011).

Lee and Ahn (2013) hypothesized that African Americans may be able to successfully cope in response to racial discrimination by the extent to which they identify and affiliate with members of their own racial and/or ethnic group. They identified three related variables that may be linked to discrimination-distress, including racial identity, ethnic identity, and racial socialization. Racial identity is described as identification with groups of people who have been
socialized as belonging to a racial group, whereas ethnic identity is conceptualized as identification and association with groups with shared cultural values and beliefs. Socialization is described as the process in which individuals are taught certain cultural values and beliefs that pertain to their racial group membership (Lee & Ahn, 2013). Each of these components has been hypothesized to buffer the effects of racial discrimination on mental health. These factors provide African Americans with the knowledge that incidences of racial discrimination are not a product of personal deficiency, but of societal injustice. Racial identity, ethnic identity, and racial socialization may offer individuals a sense of belonging and community.

In 1971, Cross developed the Nigrescence model to conceptualize the Negro to Black conversion. This conceptualization was used to describe the process by which African Americans acknowledged and learned to accept their racial group membership within the hierarchical American social structure (Harvey, Blue, & Tennial, 2012). Following a series of revisions, Cross’s theory evolved into the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) which captured the complexities of the development of racial identity.

The model postulated that African Americans progressed through three stages: pre-encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization-commitment (Coard, Brelan, & Raskin, 2001; Harvey, Blue, Tennial, 2012). Cross suggested that within the pre-encounter stage, individuals tended to identify with White culture and rejected or denied membership in Black culture (Coard, Brelan, & Raskin, 2001; Harvey, Blue, Tennial, 2012). In later analyses, Cross and others demonstrated that anti-black attitudes did not necessitate pro-white attitudes. In response to this research, the pre-encounter dimension of the Nigrescence model was dichotomized into Pre-Encounter Assimilation (having pro-White attitudes) and Pre-Encounter Anti-Black. Later, a third dimension Pre-Encounter Self-Hatred (having attitudes that represent
internalized hatred of African American people and subsequently, hatred of one’s self as a African American individual) (Harvey, Blue, & Tennial, 2012).

The second stage, Immersion-Emersion stage was dichotomized into two additional dimensions: Immersion-Emersion Intense Black Involvement (the individual embraces Black culture, learns about Black history, and becomes somewhat an activist in the Black community) and Immersion-Emersion Anti-White (the individual vilifies members of White culture and often fantasizes about harm coming to whites) (Harvery, Blue, &Tennial, 2012). This stage involved the process by which African Americans became submerged in Black/African culture and hostile toward Whites. This feeling tended to manifest as a result of negative or personally challenging experiences within White society. Blacks within the Immersion/Emersion stage navigate through confusion and move toward alignment with their own Black identity (Coard, Brelan, & Raskin, 2001; Harvey, Blue, & Tennial, 2012).

Within the final stage, Internalization/Commitment, individuals abandon anti-black and/or pro-white ideals and focus on activities that promote social justice activism and political involvement. African Americans within this stage acknowledged their affiliation with their racial group and focused on activities that enhance the group. The Internalization/Commitment stage was also dichotomized into the Internalization Black Nationalist (the individual is focused on Black empowerment, independence, and history) and Internalization Multiculturalist (the individual focuses on at least two other identity categories to define him or herself and acceptance of others is important) (Harvey, Blue, & Tennial, 2012).

Maxwell et al. (2015) utilized an intersectionality approach to assess the relationship between perceived skin color, skin color satisfaction, racial identity, and internalized racism. The researchers specifically aimed to assess: (a) whether perceived skin color predicted skin color
satisfaction, (b) whether gender was related to skin color satisfaction, (c) if perceived skin color and skin color satisfaction were related to the private regard or racial identity, and (d) whether internalized racism fostered greater skin color dissatisfaction (Maxwell et al., 2015). The authors did not find any significant relationship between the participant’s perception of their skin tone and their skin color satisfaction. Despite their findings, they did note that about 17% of their respondents self-identified as dark or very-dark which may have skewed the results (Maxwell et al., 2015). Secondly, they found no significant relationship between gender and skin color satisfaction, the private regard dimension of racial identity, or internalized racism. This finding was significant due to its contradiction to earlier works (Thompson & Keith, 2001; Wilder, 2010) that had found skin color biases to be more salient and to create more psychological discomfort among females (Maxwell et al., 2015). The authors postulated that the findings could have been a result of the small number of participants who identified as darker skin or be indicative of a shift in perception of skin color among African American women or an overgeneralization of past research (Maxwell et al., 2015). The researchers did however find a positive relationship between skin color satisfaction and private regard aspect of racial identity. Darker skin participants who were high in skin color satisfaction reported more positive private regard beliefs than those low in skin color satisfaction which supported earlier scholarly findings. Specifically, the findings create an argument for the psychological advantages and importance of being satisfied with one’s skin color (Maxwell et al., 2015).

Recent literature regarding skin tone has postulated that racial context may be a salient determinant of racial identity. Specifically, skin tone may be ignored in predominantly White contexts because these contexts emphasize racial intergroup comparisons (i.e. black vs. white), when compared to predominantly Black contexts where intragroup comparisons (i.e. black vs.
black) are salient (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005). Within their study, Harvey, et al., (2005) suggested that racial identity was heightened in the White contexts and that overall, the importance of racial identity is more prevalent in contexts where the proportion of one’s own group is minimally represented.

Another important aspect of racial identity to address pertains to racial identity attitudes. Helms (1990), postulated that racial identity was an ongoing process of ego differentiation where an individual’s racial identity status attitudes could shift from externally defined to internally defined statuses as a result of exposure to racial messages and experiences in the environment (Forsyth & Carter, 2012). Specifically, in response to experiences between the individual and several factors including parental, family, school, and institutional influences (Harvery, Blue, & Tennial, 2012).

Researchers tried to better conceptualize Black women’s identity development by exploring the intersectionality of gender and race in their lived experiences. Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011), posited that racial and gender models did not independently account for intragroup differences and thus did not fully conceptualize the cultural identity development of Black women. Focusing on either the importance of gender or racial identity, ignores the complexity of identity development in African American women (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Through focus on the intersectionality of these two constructs, researchers have coined the term “gendered racial identity” to better understand and conceptualize the social identity development of women within this population. Gendered racial identity addresses the question “what does it means to be an African American woman?” (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). By understanding the salience of gendered racial identity for Black women, researchers have moved towards a more thorough understanding of how oppression and stereotypical images have
influenced identity development, self-concept, and self-esteem (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Theorists have postulated that for Black women and girls to be psychologically and mentally healthy, they must recognize the reality of racism and sexism in their lives and that identity development occurs simultaneously with these experiences (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011).

On the other side, racial/ethnic identity and socialization have also been hypothesized to be linked to perceptions of discrimination, ultimately leading to distress (Lee & Ahn, 2013). Individuals that have strong racial and ethnic identities may be more susceptible to perceiving experiences as discriminatory. African Americans have been found to endorse race as a central aspect of their identity which may result in the likelihood of attributing ambiguous negative discriminatory experiences as racism. Despite this information, additional inconsistencies remain in the literature regarding the aforementioned factors and the discrimination-distress link.

**Self-esteem**

Self-esteem, or one’s self evaluation of their worth, has been considered a potential psychological associate of colorism (Harvey et al., 2005). Self-esteem encompasses a variety of personal values and judgments, but is also heavily influenced by external criteria (Pearson-Trammell, 2010). These external criteria include, family values and beliefs, perceived accomplishments or failures, and societal judgements and assumptions (Pearson-Trammell, 2010). Studies have shown that appraisal of skin-color can determine identity and attitudes toward self-worth (Mucherah & Fraizer, 2013). Additionally, lower satisfaction with skin tone was also related to greater adoption of general societal norms regarding beauty (Mucherah & Fraizer, 2013). Within recent decades’ scholars have asserted that people of color possess a racial self-esteem, based upon how an individual feel’s belonging to a particular racial group. Studies
exploring ethnic/racial identity have found that positive racial identity was related to positive outcomes in Black youth, including positive self-esteem, reduced psychological symptoms, specifically depression and depression and anxiety, and higher levels of academic achievement (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011).

Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011) conducted a study aimed at teasing away the aspects of gendered racial identity from the phenomenological perspectives of the participants. Their study utilized data from seventeen African American female participants between 15-22 years old. Utilizing dyadic focus groups, participants were asked to discuss the meaning and salience of race and gender in their lives. The findings from the study supported the notion that Black women and girls’ experience reflect a greater degree of saliency for issues of gendered race over experiences of race and gender as single constructs (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Additionally, the participants in the study identified with negative stereotypes and images of African American women, issues of colorism, and standards of beauty (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Moreover, the participants in the study disclosed that gender and race played an important role in how they viewed themselves and cited the need and importance of self-determination in overcoming their obstacles. The authors did note several limitations including the small sample size which may have worked to hinder the study’s generalizability. Additionally, it was noted that the study may not have adequately addressed additional identity issues such as the influence of social class or sexual orientation and it’s interaction with race and gender to form identity (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). The authors suggested that measures should be developed in the future to assess both racial and gender identity developmental experiences of Black women and girls (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011).
Despite the daily experiences of racism, classism, and sexism that African American women encounter, literature has shown these women to exhibit high levels of self-esteem (Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013). Black feminist literature has posited that although Black women face daily stressors, they have been able to utilize sociocultural aspects and strategies to maintain a healthy sense of self (Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013). A notable aspect has been the postulation that Black women may utilize intragroup self-evaluations and appraisals (Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013). As previously mentioned, our self-judgement is largely based upon external criteria (family, friends, values, etc.). Within the African American female community, self-esteem is heavily influenced by the Black church, family, friends, and general community (Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013).

**Friendships**

The available literature surveying African American women’s friendships has researched the differences in women’s and men’s friendships, interracial friendships, and women’s friendships (Shambly, 2012). Despite the literature examining varying types of friendships, the aforementioned categories have utilized mostly White samples and focused on comparative differences between genders and ethnicities (Shambly, 2012). The comparative friendship literature that includes women of color, have not adequately addressed the cultural values and relational identity of African American women (Hughes & Heuman, 2006). The limited friendship literature that has focused on Black women, has articulated a difference in how they relate to each other compared to women from other ethnic backgrounds, focused on how the friendships were initiated, how they supported each other, and what was discussed amongst
friends (Shambly, 2012). This narrow focus has inhibited exploration of the factors that permit or hinder friendships between African American women.

Research literature pertaining to the potential influence of colorism on the initiation and maintenance of friendships has also been relatively scarce. Wilder (2015) conducted a focus group study of African American women examining the implication of skin-tone on interpersonal relationships and observed that colorism did play a role in friendships between women. Although insightful, the study did not explore this theme in more depth.

Literature regarding friendship has highlighted the need for strong relationships for psychological and personal well-being, providing emotional support and help for one another (Hughes & Heuman, 2006). Viewing friendships from a relational dialectics perspective, “friendships are dynamic, ongoing, social achievements, involving the constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individual, interpersonal, and social factors” (Rawlins, 1998 as cited in Goins, 2011). According to Davis (2015), Black women’s friendships play an important role, helping to navigate the “injustices as a group of marked “others” sitting in the margins of American Society.” The mere presence of other Black women creates a safe space, enabling these women to remove themselves from outside oppression and communicate in an authentic and genuine way. Furthermore, these intimate relationships allow Black women to express and reaffirm each other’s strength, independence, self-reliance, and invulnerability (Davis, 2015). Black women tend to seek each other’s friendships because “[W]e need Black girl friends more than other races of women need friends who are the same race… We share a history and experiences different from other women of other races. Our color is more than just similarity, it is a bond” (Hughes & Heuman, 2006; Davis, 2015).
Cultural factors and communication practices influence how women initiate and maintain close friendships. Cultural differences have been shown to influence several friendship processes, including self-disclosure, preferences for dealing with conflict, as well as cultural definitions of the friendship (Hughes & Heuman, 2006). In addition, culture was shown to influence relational dynamics such as the development of intimacy and how intimate messages are communicated and interpreted, as well as perceptions of the importance of affective skills between friends (Hughes & Heuman, 2006). Although there has been growing evidence to support the importance of cultural dynamics on friendship development and maintenance, much of this research has relied on comparative research focusing on how each culture is distinct in regard to specific friendship variables, rather than emphasizing an appreciation of the culture itself (Hughes & Heuman, 2006). Additionally, in terms of relationship development, much of the research has been conducted through a White heteronormative lens, involving mostly White participants (Hughes & Heuman, 2006).

In terms of everyday communication practices of African American women, womanhood and culture influence how they provide social support for one another. Specifically, it was found that African American women place less emphasis than White women on the pursuit of emotion-focused goals (support that attempts to reduce another’s hurt or disappointment) when discussing another woman’s distress (Davis, 2015). It was also observed that Black women were less attentive to person-centered comforting strategies (paying attention to needs and feelings versus the individual’s problem) than White women (Davis, 2015). It was also observed that African American women placed a significantly lower value than their White counterparts on affectively oriented skills such as comforting their conversational partners, making their conversational partners feel better about themselves, and expressing feelings in a way that is accessible to others
(Davis, 2015). Additionally, it was concluded that African American women do not value communication skills that enable friends to work through their emotional states to the same extent as White women, but instead attach more importance to a friend’s ability to get others to modify their thoughts and behaviors (Davis, 2015).

Although research into exactly why Black women may provide social support in this manner is scarce, Davis (2015) postulated that it could be attributed to the need to emphasize strength in one another. Davis (2015) hypothesized that African American women in general, may endeavor to help restore self-esteem, self-identity, and strengthen the other’s sense of self. Their “refusal” to acknowledge or accept weakness or vulnerability is an attempt to reaffirm strength and navigate away from social support that exposes weakness and vulnerability (Davis, 2015).

Friendships between African American women serve as a refuge away from oppression and as a source of empowerment. Within these social circles, African American women can relax, share stories, gain strength, maintain harmony, and empower themselves and one another (Goins, 2011). Utilizing both relational dialectics theory (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, 1998) and Black feminist thought frameworks (Collins, 2000), Goins’ (2011) examined the stories shared amongst a friendship group of Black women. The aim of the study was to identify salient themes or topics in the dialogue between Black women and observe how they navigated the unique tensions these themes created in their lives. Through non-participant observation, Goins (2011) identified four distinct themes with their own set of contradictions: finances (spending/saving), language (good/bad), appearance (satisfaction/dissatisfaction) and race (acceptance/rejection of otherness), but unfortunately did not consider skin-tone. The overall results showed that interaction of the previously discussed tensions enabled the friend group to
engage in group segregation and integration which ultimately led to the freedom to express their culturally based truths without fear of marginalization (Goins, 2011). It was noted that although these specific themes may not be exclusive to only discussions between Black women, many of the values expressed reflected were. This study shed further light on the importance of friendships between African American women, specifically in terms of creating a “homeplace” where they can be authentic, supported, and safe.

African American women’s friendships can very much be influenced by how they perceive one another. According to Collins (2000), African American women’s perceptions of each other are closely tied to the controlling images set forth by White society. Controlling images which include the mammy, matriarch, welfare queen, Black lady, and the jezebel/hoochie; each work to reinforce stereotypes and specifically reinforce racist, sexist and other negative attitudes towards Black women. These controlling images affect how African American women see each other and contribute to whether or not they will initiate a friendship with a woman who may exemplify one of the aforementioned images (Shambly, 2012). The standards placed forth by white society created a wedge between Black women and hindered their ability to forge relationships with one another. Specifically, it was the desire to meet the criteria of White beauty that reinforced the stereotypes and dominant messages which ultimately led to an established hierarchy within the Black community and most visibly between Black women (Shambly, 2012).

**Social media**

Social media, specifically Facebook has been a rapidly growing social platform for people from around the world to connect. Currently, Facebook is the most visited social media site with over 1.3 billion active users (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015).
Facebook users contribute over 300 million photos uploaded to the site each day and generate roughly 3.2 billion “likes” and comments per day, in addition to 125 billion friendships or connections between people (Sage, 2014). Over 65% of U.S. internet subscribers used Facebook, while younger cohorts and females were more likely to utilize the site. Facebook creates a platform where its users can share a plethora of information including their mood, interests, and other internet content (e.g. videos, news stories, blogs, etc.). Overall, people spend more time connecting on Facebook than any other website.

Friendship connections are important both for generating offline benefits, often referred to as social capital (elastic construct used to describe the benefits one receives from one’s relationship with other people), and for psychosocial development (Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Social capital has been constructed into two broad types: bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital describes the relationship between emotionally close and tight-knit relationships, often including family and close friendships. Bridging social capital refers to “weak ties”, or loose connections between individuals who may provide useful information or new perspectives for one another, but typically not emotional support. Scholarly research into the connection between Facebook usage and formation and maintenance of social capital, found evidence that self-esteem may operate as a moderator of the relationship between social network site use and social capital. Specifically, young people with lower self-esteem may benefit more from their use of Facebook than those with higher self-esteem. Facebook and other social networking sites seem to offer a different way for younger people to develop and maintain relationships. Additionally, research has demonstrated the importance of various forms of social capital, including ties with friends and neighbors, were related to indices of psychological well-being, such as satisfaction with life and self-esteem.
Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe (2008) explored the relationship between Facebook use, measures of psychological well-being, and bridging social capital. The authors conducted two in-depth interviews one year apart with eighteen college students, and assessed general internet use, Facebook use (Facebook Intensity scale developed by Ellison et al. 2000), and two measures of psychological well-being: Satisfaction with Life Scale and Rosenberg’s Self-esteem. Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe (2008) found that bridging social capital had a relationship with self-esteem, and that the use of Facebook interacted with self-esteem to influence bridging social capital. The results also demonstrated that Facebook could help address the relational and developmental needs of young adults as they transitioned into differing life roles (i.e. moving to college). Specifically, Facebook played a role by facilitating the maintenance of close and distant relationships that helped create bridging social capital. Additionally, Facebook provided the technical and social infrastructure for social interaction through in site applications such as messaging, pokes, status likes, etc. Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe (2008) cautioned that although the large connections made via Facebook could be considered shallow, those connections could have real potential for creating benefits for the site users.

Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2010) assessed the connection strategies students employed to gain social capital through peer interaction using Facebook. The study utilized data from a survey of undergraduate students (n=450) from a large Midwestern university. The survey assessed self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale), Facebook use, friends on Facebook, connection strategies, and bridging and bonding social capital (adapted from Ellison et al. 2007). Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2010) found that students used three differing modes to interact with others online: initiating, maintaining, and social information seeking. Initiating pertained to behaviors aimed at meeting strangers through Facebook. Those utilizing Facebook to initiate
relationships wanted to use Facebook to “meet new people,” which included browsing, contacting, friend requesting, and meeting strangers in person. Those who endorsed the maintaining style of connection typically used Facebook to browse, communicate, friend request, and meet with close friends. The maintaining behavior was the most commonly used strategy. The final strategy, social information seeking, included behaviors aimed at using Facebook to discover more information about another user with whom the primary user shared some form of an offline connection with. Additionally, it was suggested that “friends” who were not considered actual friends were unlikely to provide social capital benefits. In terms of limitations, concern regarding participant self-report and the difficulty of measuring social capital were mentioned.

Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, and Hutton (2015) assessed how young adults who utilized social networking sites such as Facebook to make sense of these online friendships in addition to exploring how Facebook interacted with their friendship practices. To assess the participants’ conceptualization of online friendships, Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, and Hutton (2015) utilized a social constructionist approach to explore this practice through twelve friendship group discussions. Purposeful attention was focused on how the participants used language to describe their friendships and Facebook activities. Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, and Hutton (2015) identified four primary themes from the discussions which were described as “fun times together,” an “investment,” “protection,” and “self-authenticity.” Participants described “fun times together” as interactions that included posting humorous video clips, photos, and jokes. Additionally, participants also noted fun times involving stalking other user’s profiles. Specifically stalking behavior was described as gossip which reinforced friendship as a shared sense of fun. The theme of investment included participants’ willingness to invest time and effort into their
friendships while enabling them to maintain connections 24/7 even at great distances. Friendship protection included unconditional caring and safeguarding across a range of experiences (i.e. verbal attacks, life threatening events, etc.). Finally, considering self-authenticity participants described the importance of genuineness, transparency, vulnerability, and the ability to be themselves within their friendships on Facebook. Moreover, participants noted negative feelings when others posted updates about life successes, describing it as “showing off” and “inauthentic.” Overall, Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, and Hunter (2015) findings support the notion that Facebook friends are authentic “real” relationships which young people invest a considerable amount of time in.

When considering social networking site users, social media use is most prevalent amongst young women (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). Research has demonstrated that women often evaluate their appearance by comparing themselves to each other. On average, about 10 million new photographs are uploaded to Facebook each hour, which provides women with an outlet to engage in self-comparison behavior (Fardouly et al., 2015). This ability to engage in social comparison behavior can contribute to body image concerns among young women. Fardouly et al., (2015) sought to determine whether social media comparisons could influence how women felt about their appearance, focusing specifically upon face, skin, and hair-related comparisons versus body comparisons. The study utilized female students and staff members (n=112) between 17-25 years old. Participants were asked to browse a fashion magazine website, their own Facebook account, and an appearance-neutral control website. The participants completed pre- and post-exposure state measures of negative mood and body dissatisfaction (computer based visual analog sales or VAS and the Upward and Downward Appearance Comparison Scale or UPACS/DACS) and a post exposure state measure of
appearance-discrepancy (the state version of the Self-Discrepancy Index or SDI). After one week participants completed an online survey containing a trait measure of appearance comparison tendency. Consistent with previous research, Fardouly et al., (2015) found that women reported higher levels of negative mood when exposed to Facebook versus an appearance-neutral site. The increase in negative mood was attributed to individual’s tendency to compare themselves on a wide spectrum of dimensions, such as social status and perceived life experiences (Fardouly, et al., 2015). In summation, women may be evaluating whether other women are happier or having better life experiences than themselves. In terms of face, skin, and hair-related judgments, women who were exposed to Facebook images reported higher levels of dissatisfaction. Despite the finding, more research was needed to understand why face, hair, and skin are salient aspects of appearance on Facebook (Fardouly, et al., 2015).

Appel, Gerlach, and Crusius (2016) reviewed several studies examining the causal relationship between Facebook usage, social comparison, envy, and depression. One study reviewed found that constructed social networking profiles which portrayed a highly attractive comparison standard, worsened mood and influenced a decrease in satisfaction with one’s own appearance than compared to unattractive standards. A notable limitation to the study was that social comparison was not directly measured, which only provided indirect evidence. Additionally, the authors noted that personal relevance may be an important pre-requisite for social comparison and envy (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016).

Additionally, Greitemeyer and Kunz (2013) determined the influence of name-valence on physical attraction ratings using Facebook. Specifically, Greitemeyer and Kunz (2013) investigated the influence of “positive” names and perceived physical attractiveness on friendship acceptance via Facebook. Previous literature noted that both a person’s first name and
physical attractiveness was associated with how people judged and behaved toward them; and were assumed to have other desirable personality characteristics. Greitemeyer & Kunz (2013) did not specify what attributes determined a positive name. The study utilized a mockup Facebook profile which contained information of the target person which was assigned either a positive (e.g., Maximilian) or negative (e.g., Uwe) first name. Additionally, the mockup profile displayed either an attractive or moderately attractive picture. Greitemeyer and Kunz (2013) selected the stimulus names based upon earlier research that had participants rate the valence of a large number of first names. To determine the attractiveness of the target profiles, a pilot study of university students rated the profiles using a scale from 0 (very unattractive) to 9 (very attractive). Additionally, the target sex of the mockup profile was varied. Greitemeyer and Kunz (2013) found that name-valence significantly influenced friendship acceptance, specifically participants were more willing to accept the request from the profiles with positive names. Additionally, friendship acceptance was higher when the request came from an attractive versus moderately attractive profile. Greitemeyer and Kunz (2013) also found that physical attractiveness significantly predicted friendship acceptance when the request came from a person with a negative name. One notable limitation was the author’s ability to extend the findings to real-life social interactions.

Because social media is a continuously growing utility, many users engage in processes of self-comparison and friendship selection. These sites offer an avenue for connection building based on specific contexts (school, work, church, etc.) and opportunities to foster new connections with complete strangers. Considering the importance of identity, self-esteem, and the controlling images imposed on African American women, social media may act as platform to explore how these dynamics influence whom they choose to befriend.
CHAPTER III:

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of (n= 142) women volunteers, a cis-gendered woman (n= 1), and men (n= 19) who self-identified as African-American, or of African descent. Participants were at least 18 years of age and attended either a Predominately White Institution (PWI) (n= 117) or historically Black College or University (HBCU) (n= 35). Several participants did not indicate their type of learning institution (n= 11). Study participants ages ranged between 18 to 69 years old and the median age was 28 years old. Participants were recruited through listservs, private Facebook groups, and student organizations serving African American students.

Instruments

Demographic data sheet

The self-report demographic data sheet included items pertaining to age, educational status, and year in college. The data sheet also contained questions relating to social media platforms including preference (Facebook, twitter, snapchat, etc.), usage, and importance. Participants were asked to describe other non-digital methods of social connection. Questions regarding friendship selection, maintenance, and types (good or actual friendships). Additionally, participants were asked to rate their skin-tone on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 = very light skin, 2 = light skin, 3 = medium brown, 4 = dark skin, and 5 = very dark skin. The distribution of selected demographic information is summarized in Table 1.
Table 1

Demographics of the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>18-23-years-old</td>
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<td>24-29-years-old</td>
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<td>30-35-years-old</td>
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<td>36-40-years-old</td>
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<td>41-69-years-old</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Importance of Black friendships</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facial Profile Instrument

The Facial Profile Instrument (FPI) was developed for the study to mock Facebook profile images. Images were collected from fifty women with their permission. The additional two pictures were taken from a photo site which allowed access to their licensed images. Facial images and social media profile mock-ups were edited utilizing the Adobe Photoshop application. Adobe Photoshop is a photo editing tool that enables users to crop and straighten photos, improve lighting and color, remove unwanted content, add creative effects, and sharpen...
and save images. This measure was created for the present study due to the lack of a formalized instrument to assess colorism and friendship selection.

Sixty pictures of African American women reflecting the five shades of skin tones (10 pictures of each shade; 1 = very dark skin, 2 = dark skin, 3 = medium brown, 4 = light brown, and 5 = very light) were generated. Colors were selected from a widely used standardized color system (Pantone Matching System, PMS, Bond & Cash, 1992). In addition to the fifty generated pictures, ten additional pictures featured the face of two women (five pictures for each woman, one at each of the five skin tone levels), but with differing hairstyles and facial expressions. The generated pictures reflected women aged between 18-40 years old, with diverse facial structures, and facial expressions. Participants were instructed to select the photos of the top five women that they would befriend. After the participants selected their top five selections, they were asked to select from a list which factors influenced their choice (hairstyle, clothing, facial expression, facial aesthetic, skin tone, other) with the additional option of writing in a brief explanation.

The instrument was administered to 162 African American participants aged between 18 to 69 years old. The sample was comprised of 142 females, 19 males, and one participant that identified as a cis gendered female. Participants were asked to select five pictures from the available sixty. Each picture was assigned a value based upon the skin tone of the woman depicted (1 = very light skin, 2 = light skin, 3 = medium skin, 4 = dark skin, 5 = very dark skin). The scores for the FPI were totaled and then averaged for each participant. Scores between specific cutoff ranges indicated skin tone preference (1-5 = very light skin preference, 6-10 = light skin preference, 11-15 = medium skin preference, 16-20 = dark skin preference, and 21-25 = very dark skin preference). Cronbach’s alpha was .24 for the instrument.

**Skin Color Satisfaction Scale**
The Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (SCSS; Falconer & Neville, 2000) is a seven-item measure designed to assess the perceptual dimensions of skin color. The first three items of the scale were adapted from the Skin Color Questionnaire Scale (SQC: Bond & Cash, 1992), which was developed to assess skin color satisfaction, self-perceived skin color (light-dark), and ideal skin color. The three items taken from the SQC include the following: (a) “How satisfied are you with the shade (lightness or darkness) of your own skin color?” Response alternatives range from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 9 (extremely satisfied); (b) “Compared to most African-American people, I believe my skin color is…” Responses range from 1 (extremely light) to 9 (extremely dark); high or low scores indicate a perception that one’s skin color is darker or lighter than other African Americans; and (c) “If I could change my skin color, I would make it lighter or darker.” Responses ranged from 1 (much lighter) to 9 (much darker); high or low scores reflect a desire to be a different skin color. Falconer and Neville (2000) included four additional items, also on the nine-point scale, to further assess skin color satisfaction. The items included: (d) “Compared to the complexion (skin color) of members of my family, I am satisfied with my skin color”; (e) “I wish the shade of my skin was darker”; (f) “I wish my skin was lighter”; and (g) “Compared to the complexion (skin color) of other African Americans, I am satisfied with my skin color.” Items (e) and (f) were reversed scored to reflect a respondent’s dissatisfaction with their skin tone if they indicated a desire to be darker or lighter skin.

Falconer and Neville (2000) administered the SCSS to 124 African American female participants attending a large southern historically Black university. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 51 years old. The sample consisted of 23 freshmen, 53 sophomores, 23 juniors, and 19 seniors (20 did not report). Falconer and Neville (2000) analyzed the Cronbach’s alpha for items (a), (d), (f), and (g), which was .71.
To assess the reliability and validity of the SCQ, Bond & Cash, (1992) utilized a sample of 66 females, African American undergraduates as a southeastern, urban university. Participants were aged between 18-37 years old. Pearson correlations ($df = 58$) were conducted to assess the convergence among the Skin Color Questionnaire (SCQ) and the Skin Color Assessment Procedure (SCAP). Mean judges’ ratings correlated with the participants’ SCQ light-dark self-ratings ($r = .74, p < .001$) and with their SCAP self-ratings ($r = .66, p < .001$). The two self-ratings also correlated significantly ($r = .63, p < .001$). The levels of congruence among the two self-ratings and the judges’ ratings reflect the concurrent validity of the SCQ. Specifically, the inter-rater reliability of the judges’ 9-point ratings of subjects’ skin color was indicated by a reliability coefficient of .90.

Assessments of discrepancy from personal skin-color ideals included the self-ideal discrepancy index of the SCAP (scored darker to lighter) and the 9-point SCQ rating of desire to change one’s skin tone (scaled lighter to darker). These two measures converged significantly ($r = -.57, p < .001$).

The measure is appropriate for the current study due to its ability to reliably measure skin tone satisfaction among African Americans. The SCSS was normed within samples of African American women attending higher learning institutions which is directly applicable to the participants of the present study.

**Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity**

The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers, 1997, 1998) is a theoretically derived instrument which measures three stable constructs of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI; Sellers, 1997, 1998). The MIBI contains 56-items assessing the three stable dimensions of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity: centrality,
ideology, and regard. The MIBI utilizes a 7-point Likert type response scale with 1= strongly agree and 7= strongly disagree.

The MMRI was developed to address the inconsistencies in the research literature on racial identity. The MMRI defines racial identity as that part of the person’s self-concept that is related to her/his membership within a race. The model focuses on both the significance the individual places on race in defining him/herself and the individual’s interpretations of what it means to be Black. Although only three dimensions of the MMRI are measured by the MIBI, the MMRI contains four dimensions of racial identity with the inclusion of the salience dimension. Racial identity salience pertains to the extent to which a person’s race is a relevant part of her or his self-concept at a particular moment in time. Centrality of racial identity assesses whether race is a core part of the individual’s self-concept. The ideology dimension of racial identity assesses the individual’s beliefs, opinions, and attitudes regarding how other members of the race should conduct themselves. The MMRI consists of four ideologies: (a) a nationalist philosophy, characterized by a viewpoint that emphasized the importance of uniqueness of being of African descent; (b) an oppressed minority philosophy, characterized by a viewpoint that emphasizes the commonalities between African Americans and other oppressed groups; (c) an assimilationist philosophy, characterized by a viewpoint that emphasizes the commonalities between African American and the rest of American society; and (d) a humanist philosophy, characterized by a viewpoint that emphasizes the commonalities of all humans. The final dimension of the MMRI, regard, pertains to a person’s affective and evaluative judgement of her or his race (private and public regard). The first two dimensions (salience and centrality of Black identity) address the significance of race in the individual’s self-definition; the second two dimensions (ideology and
regard of Black identity) assess the qualitative meaning that the individual attributes to being Black.

To determine the reliability and validity of the MIBI, Sellers (1997), utilized a sample of 474 African American college students who were enrolled at two-medium sized universities in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. Participants that identified as African American, Black, or Negro were included in the study. One hundred eighty-five were enrolled at a predominantly Black university, and 289 were enrolled at a predominantly White university. More than half of the participants were female (68%). The sample consisted of 286 freshmen, 111 sophomores, 39 juniors, and 18 seniors (20 did not report).

Sellers (1997) conducted a factor analysis to provide support for the proposed factor structure of the three dimensions of the MIBI (i.e., Centrality, Regard, and Ideology) for the entire sample. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was utilized to assess the factor solution. The KMO for a factor solution for the items from all three scales taken separately were adequate (KMO = .86, .83, and .61 for Ideology, Centrality, and Regard, respectively). The results suggest that the MIBI represents three interrelated constructs as opposed to one single construct with three interrelated factors. A promax rotation was used to reduce the number of MIBI items. Items that had factor loadings below .30 were eliminated from the scale and as a result, a 51-item revised version of the MIBI was produced.

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to test for mean differences in the six MIBI scales and subscales by school. The test was significant, $F (6, 467) = 21.93, p < .01$. Each of the univariate $F$ tests, except Centrality, was significant at the .01 significance level. The revised MIBI scales and subscales demonstrated adequate internal
consistency. Cronbach’s alphas for the subscales ranged from a low of .60 (Private Regard) to .79 (Nationalism).

Bonferroni correction was used for each group of analyses (i.e., for the full sample and for each school). The patterns across the schools were identical. The correlation matrix supports the predicted pattern of relationship. As hypothesized, individuals for who race was central were also likely to have positive private regard for African Americans ($r = .37$) and endorse nationalist attitudes ($r = .57$). High central individuals were also less likely to endorse assimilationist ($r = -.19$) or humanistic attitudes ($r = -.29$). Expected patterns of association were also evident among the other ideology subscales. Humanist and assimilationist attitudes were positively correlated ($r = .55$). The oppressed minority ideology was positively correlated with endorsement or assimilationist ($r = .28$) and humanist ($r = .27$) ideologies.

Predictive validity between the MIBI subscales and several race-related behaviors were assessed. Sellers (1997) used a one-way MANOVA to test mean differences between individuals who had an African American best friend and those who did not with the 6 MIBI subscales as dependent variables. The multivariate $F$ statistic was significant $F (1, 472) = 9.74, p < .01$. Participants with a Black best friend had higher scores on the Centrality scale, and the nationalist subscale, but lower scores on the Assimilationist, Humanist, and Oppressed Minority subscales, than did those participants without an African American best friend. There was no effect found for Private Regard.

Sellers (1997) reported Cronbach’s alphas for scores ranging from .55 to .79 in samples of students from African American students from both predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).
The measure was selected for the study given the relevance to the research questions posed by the investigator and its ability to reliably measure the private regard, public regard, and centrality domains of racial identity of African Americans. The SCSS was also normed within samples of African American’s attending both Historically Black and Predominately White Institutions of higher learning institutions.

**Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale**

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965) identifies global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale contains 10-items on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The ten scale statements pertain to self-worth and self-acceptance. Scores range from 0-30, with scores of 15 or less indicating low self-esteem. The scale was originally designed to measure self-esteem of high school students, but has since been used with a variety of different groups, including adults.

Items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7 are scored from 0-3, (0= strongly disagree, 1= disagree, 2= agree, and 4= strongly agree), and items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 are reversed scored (0= strongly agree, 1= agree, 2= disagree, and 3= strongly agree). Rosenberg (1965) reported an internal consistency of .77, minimum coefficient of reproducibility was .90. Test-retest reliability over a two-week period ranged between .85 and .88.

This measure was selected for its applicability across age and racial groups. Additionally, it was selected to evaluate individual self-esteem of the participants. Other available instruments assessed collective racial self-esteem which captures the participants’ evaluation of their self-esteem as influenced by membership within their specific racial group, which was not appropriate for the purposes of the study.

**Procedure**
Centers serving students of color (specifically African Americans, if available) were contacted via email and asked to advertise the proposed study through email listserv’s, flyers, personal communications, etc. Additionally, participants were solicited through private Facebook groups comprised of African American women and men, via message posts. Interested students were directed to access the survey using the provided electronic link.

The first screen of the electronic survey required participants to read statements regarding informed consent, their right to discontinue the study at any time, and information detailing some specifics of the project. Participants agreed to continue the study and to complete the demographic questionnaire which contained information regarding their age, gender, ethnicity/race, parent’s ethnicity/race, education, social media use, and skin-tone (see Appendix C). Participants were not requested to provide any identifying information (name, email addresses, etc.).

To minimize a potential treatment effect, participants were asked to complete several questionnaires in sequential progression: FPI, RSE, MIBI, and SCSS (see Appendix D-H). Following the completion of measurements, participants were encouraged to contact the principle investigator via email regarding any questions. Due to issues of attrition, the number of responses for each measure varied: participants skin tone (n = 133), Facial Profile Instrument (n = 162), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (n = 154), MIBI public regard (n = 133), MIBI private regard (n = 133), MIBI centrality (n = 133), Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (n = 133).
CHAPTER IV:  

RESULTS  

IBM SPSS, version 25 was used to conduct the statistical analyses, chi-square tests, and Pearson’s correlations. Prior to the data analyses, participants’ data that failed to meet ethnicity requirements or include responses from the Facial Profile Instrument were removed. Preliminary analyses regarding the assumptions of normality (e.g. distribution of scores) were conducted on the data, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic showed that the data was distributed within the normal limits. The descriptive statistics and results of the inter-correlations of the study measures is presented in Table 2.  

Research Question One  

To determine if there was a difference between HBCU and PWI students’ skin tone preference of friends and skin tone satisfaction, as measured by the FPI and SCSS, a chi-square test for independence was employed. The first chi-square test indicated no significant relationship between higher learning institution and skin tone preference, \( \chi^2(6, n = 156) = 7.89, p = .25 \). A correlational analysis was also conducted to determine the relationship between the type of learning institution and skin tone preference, which was also not significant \( r(133) = .09, p = .31 \). The second chi-square test did not indicate an association between higher learning institution and skin tone satisfaction, \( \chi^2(4, n = 133) = 2.05, p = .73 \). The correlational analysis examining the relationship between type of learning institution and skin tone satisfaction was not significant \( r(133) = .09, p = .32 \). For both analyses, more than 20% of the cells did not meet the expected count, thus the assumption was violated and the null hypothesis was accepted.  

Research Question Two
To determine if there was a significant difference between skin satisfaction and Black racial identity at HBCU’s and PWI’s, as measured by the SCSS and MIBI, a chi-square tests for independence was employed. The first chi-square test, examining the relationship between the type of institution, skin tone satisfaction and public regard domain of racial identity, was not significant $\chi^2 (6, n = 129) = 6.52, p = .37$. The assumption was violated and the null hypothesis was accepted because more than 20% of the cells did not meet the expected count criteria. A correlational analysis comparing these interrelationships was not significant for institution and public regard $r (133) = -.05, p = .60$, institution type and skin tone satisfaction $r (133) = .09, p = .32$, or skin tone satisfaction and public regard $r (129) = -.10, p = .27$.

The second chi-square analysis, comparing the relationship between the type of institution, skin tone satisfaction and private regard domain of racial identity, was significant $\chi^2 (8, n = 128) = 20.02, p = .01, \phi = .34$, but violated that assumption because more than 20% of the cells did not meet the expected count criteria. The likelihood ratio $p = .10$ was not significant and the null hypothesis was accepted. Correlational analysis did not find any significant interrelationship between the type of institution and private regard of identity $r (133) = .05, p = .60$, type of institution and skin tone satisfaction $r (133) = .09, p = .32$, and private regard of identity and skin tone $r (128) = -.10, p = .27$.

The final chi-square analysis, tested the relationship between the type of institution, skin tone satisfaction and the centrality domain of racial identity, was not significant $\chi^2 (8, n = 129) = 3.21, p = .92$. The assumption was violated and the null hypothesis was accepted because more than 20% of the cells did not meet the expected count criteria. Correlational analysis revealed no significant interrelationship between the type of institution and the centrality dimension of Black
identity \( r (133) = .10, p = .24 \), the type of institution and skin tone satisfaction \( r (133) = .09, p = .32 \), and skin tone satisfaction and centrality of racial identity \( r (129) = -.10, p = .28 \).

**Research Question Three**

A Pearson \( r \) Correlation was used to determine if there was a relationship between participants reported skin tone, experience of self-esteem, and/or skin tone satisfaction. There was no significant correlation between reported skin tone and self-esteem, \( r (131) = -.08, p = .31 \). An additional correlational analysis examining the relationship between skin tone satisfaction and self-esteem was significant \( r (133) = -.40, p < .01 \). The additional analysis was completed to determine the relationship between participant’s experience of their skin tone and the influence on their self-esteem.
Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations of Study Measures*  

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<th>2</th>
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<th>5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Public Regard</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.77</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<td>1.04</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.83**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.10</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>4. Centrality</td>
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<td>.87</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>.83**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.07</td>
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<td>6. Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (SCSS)</td>
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<td>.63</td>
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<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>7. Participant Skin Tone</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.28**</td>
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<td>8. Facial Profile Instrument (FPI)</td>
<td>3.52</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.17</td>
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*p < .05. **p < .01

*Note.* The number of valid participant responses for each measure varied: MIBI public regard (n = 133), MIBI private regard (n = 133), MIBI centrality (n = 133), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (n = 154), Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (n = 133), participants skin tone (n = 133), and Facial Profile Instrument (n = 162). Pairwise deletion was used in the analysis to correct for differences in responses.
CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

The general purpose of the study was to determine whether colorism impacts friendship selection, while simultaneously attempting to determine what other factors might have contributed to the initiation of friendships among African American women. Considering the extensive body of scientific literature attempting to determine if there is an impact of colorism on Black women, few studies have delved into how colorism may play a role in relationship formation specifically within this demographic. Additionally, research literature pertaining to friendship initiation and maintenance between African American women has also been limited, and has typically focused on relationships across genders and ethnicity/race. To expand the body of literature, this study utilized social media profile pictures as a tool to determine the aesthetic dynamics that influence how Black women choose to befriend one another.

Research Question One

Results of the data analysis failed to find any significant differences in skin tone preference or skin tone satisfaction across historically Black learning institutions and predominately White learning institutions. Although there was no statistically significant difference, participants from both institutions did show preference for women with “dark” skin tones. Picture selections were tracked, and the top four most selected photos included three depictions of dark skin women, the fourth woman was of “medium” skin tone. The most selected picture featured a dark skin woman who chosen by 105 of the participants. Participants skin tones ranged from very light to very dark skin tones. The majority of participants that disclosed their skin tone (n = 140) endorsed dark (32.82 %) and medium (32.14%) hues, followed by light
(17.14%), very dark (11.42%), and very light skin tones (6.42%). In terms of skin tone satisfaction, participants across institutions generally exhibited positive regard for their respective skin tones. This finding contradicts popular lore and widespread notions that lighter skin tones are preferable or desired by darker women.

Participants were asked to indicate which factors influenced their decision for their picture selection and were given several choices. Skin tone only attributed to 9% of the total responses, whereas facial expression, which was the most endorsed characteristic, made up 32% of the choices. Hairstyle (24%), attractiveness (16%), clothing (9%), and other (6%) made up the remainder of the participants’ endorsements. This data supported the notion that skin tone was not a main determinant factor in friendship selection within this sample and that their choices regarding who they would befriend may be better explained by a combination of several other factors. The work of both Collins (2010) and Shambly (2012) discuss the importance of perception on friendship selection among Black women. Specifically, they postulated that Black women would reject women that portrayed certain archetypes such as the “mammy,” “jezebel/hoochie,” “welfare queen,” or any other images that reinforced racist, sexist, and other negative images. The fact that the profile pictures were chosen for their neutrality may have aided in reducing bias due to the aforementioned controlling images.

**Research Question Two**

There were no significant differences in skin tone satisfaction and Black identity attitudes across institutions. Both groups shared strong positive attitudes views regarding both the centrality and private regard of their racial identities. Additionally, both groups indicated that they believed external racial groups viewed Black individuals negatively. The lack of findings in this domain contradicts previous research (Harvey et al., 2005; Wilder, 2015; and Gasman &
Abiola, 2016) which hypothesized that racial context was a significant factor in African Americans experience of racial stigma. The results also challenged the notion of a Black hierarchy based upon skin tone within HBCU institutions, where those of darker skin tones would indicate lowers levels of self-esteem and skin tone satisfaction. The findings also corroborate Lee and Ahn’s (2013) research which linked those with strong racial/ethnic identities to heightened perceptions of discrimination.

**Research Question Three**

There was no correlation between reported skin tone and self-esteem, but there was a significant relationship between participants’ skin tone satisfaction and self-esteem. Those with higher levels of self-esteem indicated higher levels of skin tone satisfaction. Overall, skin tone was not predictive of how participants experienced their self-esteem. Regarding previous research literature (Thompson & Keith, 2004; Wilder & Cain, 2011), participants with darker skin tones did not indicate lower levels of self-esteem when compared to their lighter skin counter parts. This finding challenged the notion that darker skin women would prefer lighter skin and exemplify increased psychological distress as a result.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

The results of the study should be interpreted with some caution. First, the study relied on self-report measures, which may have influenced participants to report in a more positive or favorable manner although the data was entirely anonymous. Another consideration is that scales of the MIBI may be influenced by current social and political climates. Specifically, participants may feel more empowered and motivated to view their race as more favorably because they may perceive that society holds a negative view of their identity. For example, there have been several prominent movements such as Black Lives Matter, “Oscars so White,” and others that
have advocated against violence and discrimination towards African Americans. Future studies may benefit from assessing the influence of contemporary movements and events on internal racial attitudes.

A concern regarding sample composition is the distribution of participants from PWI’s and HBCU’s. Participants from PWI’s were overrepresented in the study and made up approximately 71.8% of the total sample. The unequal sample sizes may have impacted the generalizability of the research findings. Efforts were made to reduce sampling bias by intentionally disseminating the survey directly to predominately Black institutions, affiliated groups, and academic listservs. The final issue pertains to the sample composition, addresses the small number of male participants. Although the study’s intent was to capture the experience of African American women, male participants were included to explore any potential gender differences in photo selection. Gender differences could not be adequately assessed given that African American males made up approximately 11.7% of the sample. To address these limitations, future studies should increase the avenues in which research surveys are distributed, seek organizations/entities that specifically serve Black men, and potentially offer incentives for increased participation. Another consideration includes shortening the length of the survey. Many participants did not complete the 56-item MIBI. This is significant considering that only 20 questions from the assessment were used to assess public regard, private regard, and centrality in the final data analysis.

Finally, it is essential to acknowledge the potential limitations of using the Facial Profile Instrument. The FPI utilized profile pictures of African American women of various hues and was developed by the investigators of the study. At the time of the study, there were no standardized measures that could assess the influence of colorism on friendship selection. One
significant weakness of the measure was that the categorization of skin hues was subjective, thus leaving the measure vulnerable to differing standards of comparison. Statistical analysis of validity and reliability of the FPI were not strong, indicating that the measure should be improved for future administrations. Another issue regarding the FPI is that the color of the images could be distorted on participant’s computer screens depending on their settings, potentially influencing their perception of skin tone. Finally, an additional limitation to consider is the wide range of ages represented in the study. Many of the pictures used to generate the FPI instrument included younger women, which may have influenced older participants’ perceptions of the pictures. Specifically, there may be other generational factors that determine friendship selection. It will be beneficial for future studies to pilot test a measure assessing the categorization of skin tones to develop a more valid and reliable measure and restrict the age range or provide more diversified photos.

**Clinical Implications**

Understanding the current influence of colorism in the lives of African American women and the barriers that it may create for them, is of continued importance. Clinicians now have these findings to guide their interventions rather than merely relying on popular lore. As research continues to grow, reassessing the challenges that colorism creates for African American women may help inform multicultural practice. Considering the pervasiveness of colorism in American society, clinicians would have the ability to utilize more culturally responsive interventions (support groups, workshops, psychoeducation, etc.) to help attend to psychological discomfort within this population.
REFERENCES


*Body Image, 13*, 38-45.


*Communication Studies, 62*, 531-546.


*Sociology Compass, 1*, 237-254.


Appendix A

Recruitment Flier

Request for African American Research Participants

For a study examining the criteria that African Americans use to select and solidify friendships on social media

If you are:
- at least 18 years of age or older;
- and identify as African American,
  you are invited to participate in the research study.

This research study is conducted by a doctoral candidate in a counseling psychology Ph.D program. If you have any questions please contact Ghynecee Temple at ghynecee.temple@wsu.edu.

Please select the URL link below to access the informed consent statement and measures for the study: https://wsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eaL86PhNAyzVvCN
Subject Line: Research Participants

Greetings,

My name is Ghynecee Temple and I am a doctoral candidate at Washington State University’s APA-accredited Ph.D. program in Counseling Psychology. I am contacting you to request assistance with disseminating my research project to your constituents. Specifically, I am seeking participants who identify as African American and that are at least 18+ years of age. It would be greatly appreciated if you could disseminate the email below to your contacts. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Ghynecee Temple

Greetings,

My name is Ghynecee Temple and I am a doctoral candidate at Washington State University’s APA-accredited Ph.D. program in Counseling Psychology. I am contacting you to request your participation in my dissertation research. Specifically, I am seeking participants who identify as African American and are at least 18+ years of age.

The present study is examining the criteria that African Americans use to select and solidify friendships on social media platforms. Study Participants will be asked to complete several survey items including a demographic questionnaire and four self-report measures. The completed survey will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. Participation is completely voluntary and no identifying information will be requested.

If you have questions about this project, please contact me at ghynecee.temple@wsu.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Marianne Barabasz at mbarabasz@wsu.edu.

Please select the URL link below to access the informed consent statement and measures for the study: https://wsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eaL86PhNAyzVyCN
Thank you for your time and consideration!

Ghynecee Temple
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Researchers: Marianne Barabasz, Ed.D, Professor, Counseling Psychology, Washington State University
Ghynecee Temple, B.A. Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Psychology, Washington State University
Department of Educational Leadership, Sport Studies, and Educational/Counseling Psychology, Washington State University

You are being asked to take part in a research study carried out by Ghynecee Temple, a doctoral student and her advisor, Marianne Barabasz, Ed.D. This form explains the research study and your part in it if you decide to join the study. Please read the form carefully, taking as much time as you need. You can ask the researcher to explain anything you don’t understand (ghynecee.temple@wsu.edu). You can decide not to join the study. If you join the study, you can change your mind later or quit at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of services or benefits if you decide to not take part in the study or quit later. This study has been determined to be Exempt Research by the WSU Human Research Protections Program (HRPP).

What is this study about?

This research study is being done to investigate the criteria that African Americans use to select and solidify friendships on social media platforms. If you identify as African American and are at least 18 years of age or older, then you are eligible to participate in the study.

What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?
If you take part in the study, you will be asked to complete an online survey containing a demographic questionnaire and four self-report measurements. Completion of the survey will take approximately 20-25 minutes.

Are there any benefits to me if I am in this study?
The potential benefits to you for taking part in this study are: the opportunity to reflect upon factors that influence your friendship selection. If you take part in this study, you will contribute to the growing body of research literature pertaining to African Americans and how this population initiates friendship.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?
The potential risks from taking part in this study include some psychological discomfort while completing measures pertaining to self-evaluation. If you experience psychological distress, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Will my information be kept private?
The data for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by federal and state law. No published results will identify you, and your name will not be associated with the findings. Research data is only accessible by the research team and will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer. The results of the study may be published or presented in professional meetings, but the identities of each research participant will remain confidential. The data for this study will be kept for seven years.

Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?
There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study. You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for taking part in this study.
Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact the researchers: Ghynecee Temple or Marianne Barabasz (please see top of form for contact information). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the Washington State University Institutional Review Board at (509) 335-3668, or e-mail irb@wsu.edu, or regular mail at: Neil 427, PO Box 643143, Pullman, WA 99164-3143.

What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:

• You understand the information given to you in this form

• You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns

• The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns

• You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.
Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

What is your age? ________

Please indicate your gender

☒ Male
☒ Female
☒ Other (please specify) ______________________

Please indicate your race

☒ African American
☒ Bi-racial
☒ Other (please specify) ______________________

Parent's race

   Mother _____________________
   Father _____________________

Name of college or university if applicable (please write N/A if not applicable)

________________________________________________________________________

If applicable, is your college or university a Historically Black College or University (HBCU)?

☒ Yes
☒ No
Please indicate your current year in school

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduated
- Seeking professional/graduate degree
- None of the above

What social media sites do you use? (select all that apply)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Other (please specify) __________________________
- None

How many days of the week do you login to these sites?

- Never
- 1-4 days per week
- 4 or more days per week

Q34 How many hours per day do you use these sites on average?

- Never
- 0-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6 or more hours

Q10 How important are these social media sites to you?

- Not important
- Somewhat important
- Very important

Q11 Do you use social media to initiate and/or maintain friendships?

- Yes
- No
How important are social relationships with other African Americans?

- Not important
- Somewhat important
- Very important

Do you use social media to initiate and/or maintain friendships with African Americans?

- Yes
- No

What percentage of your social media friends do you consider "good" or "actual" friends?

____________________
Appendix D

Facebook Profile Instrument

Please review the pictures on the next page and select the top 5 women that you would be most likely to befriend.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Of the 60 pictures displayed above, please select the FIVE that you would most likely befriend. In the spaces below please write the numbers shown under the photographs.

Woman ______________
Woman ______________
Woman ______________
Woman ______________
Woman ______________

For the FIRST woman Number ______ you selected, please choose which factors influenced your decision (select all that apply).

- Hairstyle
- Clothing
- Facial Expression
- Attractiveness
- Skin tone
- Other (please specify)

For the SECOND woman Number __________ you selected, please choose which factors influenced your decision (select all that apply).

- Hairstyle
- Clothing
- Facial expression
- Attractiveness
- Skin tone
- Other (please specify)

For the THIRD woman Number __________ you selected, please choose which factors influenced your decision (select all that apply).

- Hairstyle
- Clothing
- Facial expression
- Attractiveness
- Skin tone
- Other (please specify)
For the FOURTH woman Number _________ you selected, please choose which factors influenced your decision (select all that apply).

- Hairstyle
- Clothing
- Facial expression
- Attractiveness
- Skin tone
- Other (please specify)

Q25 For the FIFTH woman Number _______ you selected, please choose which factors influenced your decision (select all that apply).

- Hairstyle
- Clothing
- Facial expression
- Attractiveness
- Skin tone
- Other (please specify)
Appendix E

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>At times I think I am no good at all.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel that I have a number of good qualities.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am able to do things as well as most other people.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel I do not have much to be proud of.</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>I certainly feel useless at times</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I wish I could have more respect for myself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.</td>
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<td>I take a positive attitude toward myself.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix F

### Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall, being Black has very little to do with how I feel about myself.</td>
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<td>It is important for Black people to surround their children with Black art, music and literature.</td>
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<td>Black people should not marry interracially.</td>
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<td>I feel good about Black people.</td>
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<td>Overall, Blacks are considered good by others.</td>
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<td>In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image.</td>
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<td>I am happy that I am Black.</td>
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<td>I feel that Blacks have made major accomplishments and advancements.</td>
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<td>My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people.</td>
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<td>Blacks who espouse separatism are as racist</td>
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<td>Agree 1</td>
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<td>Strongly disagree 9</td>
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</table>

- as White people who also espouse separatism.
- Blacks would be better off if they adopted Afrocentric values.
- Black students are better off going to schools that are controlled and organized by Blacks.
- Being Black is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.
- Black people must organize themselves into a separate Black political force.
- In general, others respect Black people.
- Whenever possible, Blacks should buy from other Black businesses.
- Most people consider Blacks, on average, to be more ineffective than other racial groups.
- A sign of progress is that Blacks are in the mainstream of American more than ever before.
- I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>The same forces which have led to the oppression of Blacks have also led to the oppression of other groups.</td>
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<td>A thorough knowledge of Black history is very important for Blacks today.</td>
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<td>Blacks and Whites can never live in true harmony because of racial differences.</td>
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<td>Black values should not be inconsistent with human values.</td>
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<td>I often regret that I am Black.</td>
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<td>White people can never be trusted where Blacks are concerned.</td>
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<td>Blacks should have the choice to marry interracially.</td>
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<td>Blacks and Whites have more commonalities than differences.</td>
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<td>Black people should not consider race when buying art or selecting a book to read.</td>
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<td>Blacks would be better off if they were more concerned with the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree 1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Neutral 5</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Strongly disagree 9</td>
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</table>

- problems facing all people than just focusing on Black issues.

- Being an individual is more important than identifying oneself as Black.

- We are all children of a higher being, therefore, we should love people of all races.

- Blacks should judge Whites as individuals and not as members of the White race.

- I have a strong attachment to other Black people.

- The struggle for Black liberation in America should be closely related to the struggle of other oppressed groups.

- People regardless of their race have strengths and limitations.

- Blacks should learn about the oppression of other groups.

- Because America is predominantly white, it is important that Blacks go to White schools so that they can gain
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<th>8</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>

experience interacting with Whites.

Black people should treat other oppressed people as allies.

Blacks should strive to be full members of the American political system.

Blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals.

Blacks should strive to integrate all institutions which are segregated.

The racism Blacks have experienced is similar to that of other minority groups.

Blacks should feel free to interact socially with White people.

Blacks should view themselves as being Americans first and foremost.

There are other people who experience racial injustice and indignities similar to Black Americans.

The plight of Blacks in America will improve only when Blacks are in
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<th>Neutral</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>important positions within the system.</td>
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<td>Blacks will be more successful in achieving their goals if they form coalitions with other oppressed groups.</td>
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<td>Being Black is an important reflection of who I am.</td>
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<td>Blacks should try to become friends with people from other oppressed groups.</td>
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<td>The dominant society devalues anything not White male oriented.</td>
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<td>Being Black is not a major factor in my social relationships.</td>
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<td>Blacks are not respected by the broader society.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In general, other groups view Blacks in a positive manner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am proud to be Black.</td>
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<td>I feel that the Black community has made valuable contributions to this society.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Society views Black people as an asset.</td>
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</table>
Appendix G

Skin Tone Pallet

Please choose the skin tone that most closely aligns with your own facial tone. Shades reflect general skin tone categories and may not perfectly capture your tone.

How would you describe your skin tone?

Very light, creme colored skin

Light colored skin
Medium brown, golden brown colored skin
Dark colored skin
Very dark, deep brown colored skin
Appendix H

Skin tone Satisfaction Scale

Q31 How satisfied are you with the shade of your skin color?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you with the shade of your skin color?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very Dissatisfied</td>
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</table>

Compared to most African American people, I believe my skin color is ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compared to most African American people, I believe my skin color is ...</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Much, much lighter</td>
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If I could change my skin color, I would make it...........

<table>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>6</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Much, much lighter</td>
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</table>
Compared to the complexion (skin color) of members of my family I am satisfied with my skin color.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Compared to the complexion (skin color) of members of my family I am satisfied with my skin color.</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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I wish the shade of my skin was darker.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Not at all</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Very strongly</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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I wish the shade of my skin was lighter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I wish the shade of my skin was lighter.</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
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<th>3</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Very strongly</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>
Compared to the complexion (skin color) of other African Americans, I am satisfied with my skin color.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied 1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compared to the complexion (skin color) of other African Americans, I am satisfied with my skin color.</td>
<td>☒</td>
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