Who Gave You Permission to Rearrange Me? Certainly Not Me: Examining the Racialized Nature of Beauty vis-a-vis Colorism, Skin Bleaching, and Life Chance

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
Who Gave You Permission to Rearrange Me? Certainly Not Me: Examining the Racialized Nature of Beauty vis-a-vis Colorism, Skin Bleaching, Identity, and Life Chance

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Natasha Patrice Ellis
May 2023
DEDICATION

To my ancestors, your sacrifice, grit, and resilience is my reason.
For my beloved grandmother, Daisy Mae Wadley, for the wisdom that governs my life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pursuing a PhD is something I’ve always wanted to do, but struggled with fear, and some imposter syndrome. There are people who have come into my life, and who have been in my life since birth, and people I have been inspired by, and people that saw something in me, before I could see it in myself that have encouraged me and pushed me to do the things I could only dream of doing. It’s true that sometimes people can see your crown before you do. I remember working at a university and being asked to help design a curriculum for the honors college. I had gained a lot of experience with this ask, but one day, the Dean had asked if we could have a meeting. I obliged and met with her and she said to me “have you ever thought about pursuing a PhD? I really think you should.” I responded to her, “I have thought about it, but have been too afraid to apply. It’s definitely something I’ve always wanted to do.” She simply said to me, “well, think about it. Really think about it.” Shortly after I left that role, I took a few weeks off to really think through what I wanted my life to look like. Fast forward, I did some research and sent emails to two department heads at two different universities I was interested in. The department head, who was the Director of Graduate Studies at the time at UT, was kind, professional, and responded to me promptly. From then, I asked if I could come to UT and speak to her about the program. She agreed and in the summer of 2018, I drove to UT and met with the Director of Graduate Studies. She said to me, “we want people like you in the program. Why don’t you submit an application?” My eyes widened, and I was a little surprised, because the imposter syndrome had taken a little toll on me mentally, but I was determined to try and face it head on. I smiled and told her I would submit an application. I submitted the application two months before the due date. Shortly thereafter, I was invited to attend the showcase in February and during interview process of the showcase, my nerves really got the best of me. I was so incredibly nervous. When I left, I called my mom and told her I messed up the interview. I shared with her, that I didn’t walk out feeling confident about things. She simply said to me “well the only thing they can tell you is no, and you’ll just go somewhere else. All they can say is no.”

A few weeks after the interview, I was sitting at a red light when I received an email from the Director of Graduate Studies with a document attached to the email. When I opened the document and realized I had been accepted, I broke down in tears at the red light and the people in car next to mine, was looking and wondering what had happened to me. I pulled over, re-read the letter, called my mom and basked in receiving this decision. That was almost four years ago. It is now the Spring of 2023 and I have completed and submitted this dissertation. The time has flown by. To think and reflect back over the journey, and over the process, the daily commute from Chattanooga to UT, the courses, and the opportunities, I feel incredibly grateful and indebted to the people who believed in me, when I struggled to believe I could do, this.

To my mother, thank you for creating an environment of structure, order, and academic excellence in the home. We lived in one of the roughest areas in town, but that didn’t matter. What mattered is who you told me I could become. Thank you for setting the academic expectations, not allowing me to make C’s in high school, and putting me in a position to be the best I can be. Thank you for everything. Thank you for all you have ever been to me. From teaching me to have decorum, giving me responsibility by giving me a key to our house when I was seven years old, and detailing my responsibilities on the wall when I came home from school, packing my lunch every day, driving me to the bus stop and waiting in the car with me until the bus arrived every morning, to having all of my dresses custom made and delivered on
time for each event, to bringing multiple dresses for me to choose from on picture day when I was in elementary school, from delivering balloons to the school every year for my birthday, to having my school uniforms monogramed with my initials, to hosting the girliest and liveliest sleepovers for my birthday, to purchasing me the biggest dollhouse a girl could ever dream of having, to catering to my Barbie obsession and making sure Barbie had an entire wardrobe, a jeep, and a limousine, to standing on the front row during my baptism, to having tea time with me when I was a child, taking me to plays, to letting me drive your T-Top Camara when I was in high school, and making sure I had money to stop and pick up goodies at the donut shop on the way to school. Thank you mother for giving me a charmed life. We have our differences, but thank you mother, for everything. I love you with every fiber of my being.

To my mentor, Dr. Glenn S. Johnson for his support over the past fourteen years. For all of the direction, the absolute best recommendation letters, insight, advice, and the continued to push to thrive, while providing me with the tools and resources required for academic prosperity. Thank you for teaching me and working with me in the very beginning. Thank you for working with me and my schedule, while I traveled for 8 weeks at a time recruiting for Spelman, flying back and forth from the West Coast to attend my classes, to get the work done, and submitted on time. Thank you for teaching me that “education is a journey, and not a destination.” Thank you, Dr. Johnson, for your unwavering support.

To my advisor, Dr. Stephanie Bohon for responding to that initial email when I was a prospective student trying to determine if the program was a good fit for me. Thank you for encouraging me to submit an application to the program in the very beginning, and for your unparalleled support over the duration of this journey. Thank you for your kindness, your consideration, and your continued support. Thank you for believing in me, my desires and giving me the opportunity to do this work.

Additionally, I would like to thank my dissertation committee for believing in my work and challenging me to be an ever-learning scholar. Thank you for the feedback, the willingness to teach me to think beyond the confines of my research and immerse myself in the scholarship and the literature. For encouraging me to be a better writer, a better thinker, and a better scholar.

To my partner, thank you for bringing me books, and reading the literature around my research with me. Thank you for your willingness to learn, and grow, thank you for making sure I celebrate each milestone of this program and for being my best friend. You are deeply appreciated for all of your encouragement throughout the duration of this program. I love you.

Lastly, to the remainder of my family, your support has been my rock and inspiration over these past four years, and over the course of my life. Thank you for being down, for this cause. I love you with all I am.
ABSTRACT

Who Gave You Permission to Rearrange Me? Certainly Not Me: Examining the Racialized Nature of Beauty vis a vis Colorism, Skin Bleaching, and Life

Critical Race and legal scholars approach colorism as a mainstay of white supremacy. Scholars evaluate geographical consolidations of whiteness by examining white supremacy’s role in the formation of colorism and the relationship between how race leverages and regulates beauty. Colorism, also known as light supremacy, shadeism, pigmentocracy, shade stratification, and skin tone bias operate as racialized systems that stratify on the basis of complexion. Skin tone bias is a gendered, intra-racial prejudicial system implemented during slavery that prioritized whiteness. This dissertation examines how historically induced entities of racism and colonization racialize beauty and reinforce whiteness as a form of capital. This study argues that the racialized nature of beauty situates whiteness as capital within the framework of colorism. This project investigates how complexion has been cemented as a driving force of social interaction, and leverages the hierarchies that racialize beauty, restrict access to economic capital and reproduce racism via colorism.
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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

“You gon be alright cause your skin is light” echoed my grandmother during one of our life talks when I was a child. My grandmother, whose complexion was paper sack brown and was born in 1938, shared with me that lighter skin meant opportunity. She had lived through segregation, Jim Crow, the assassination of Fred Hampton, President Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King and possessed a wealth of knowledge about race and the power placed on light skin. She only had a tenth-grade education, but served as my initial teacher when it came to acknowledging the threat of blackness, the pedestalization of light skin, and life chance. I had always thought about what she said and wanted to know more, but I never really asked a lot of questions. I did sometimes, but most times I’d just listen. I was like a sponge when she’d speak. And I didn’t want to risk missing any part of what she had to say, so many times I stayed quiet. The result of those life talks helped to serve as the motivation to pursue a PhD in Sociology, with a focus on race, ethnicity, the racialized nature of beauty via colorism, and its connection to life chance and identity formation. Additionally, the motivation also derives from an enriching and life changing experience living abroad in India. Although this experience transpired toward the end of my undergraduate career, the duality and the parallelism shaped my intellectual curiosity and has continued to deepen my commitment to Sociology, ultimately serving as one of the catalysts for becoming a Sociologist.

After graduating from Agnes Scott College as a first-generation college student, my immediate and initial desire was to enter the workforce. Upon graduation, I served as an admissions counselor for Spelman College for almost six years. I had fulfilling experiences that served as a continual and steady reminder of why Sociology appealed to me initially. After much introspection, I decided to shift my perspective and earn a Master of Arts from the WEB DuBois Department of Sociology at Clark Atlanta University, and later enroll in a PhD program in Sociology with a Critical Race and Ethic Studies as well as an Environmental Sociology concentration at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The discipline, both complex and broad appealed to me in many ways, particularly its relevancy to society at large, race relations, and my own personal experiences. During my undergraduate career, I developed an affinity for the discipline after taking Introduction to Sociology. In one of the classes, we watched a documentary detailing how hiring managers decline job applications based on ethnic sounding names. After watching this documentary, I knew this was it. I knew this was my major.

Shortly after declaring Sociology as my major, I signed up to take Global Awareness: India, a course that centralized India, and allowed students be introduced to the culture. At the end of the course, students were required to travel to India, visit thirteen different cities, with a span of four to six weeks. Before traveling to India, I had never flown before; neither had I left the country. In my neighborhood and the perception of those growing up around me, studying abroad was not normal. And the fact that I wanted to study abroad, meant that I was crazy. My family begged and pleaded with me not to go, but I knew I needed the experience and went anyway. I had my own personal reasons for wanting to study abroad but one of those reasons I kept to myself because I knew many of those around me would negatively critique and criticize my decision. And that reason tethered around what my grandmother shared with me as a child about light skin. I wanted to see if her perspective was conceptualized the same in other parts of the world and if there was a valorization of light skin in India. Fast forward, I get on a plane for
the first time, to travel to India. This was my very first time flying. It was a very long flight, but I was excited about what would come of the trip. While walking through streets of India, one day I saw a billboard advertising the skin bleaching cream, Fair and Lovely. The billboard displayed the face of a woman, with a line drawn down the middle of her face. On one side, her skin was of a darker complexion. On the other side, her skin was white. Seeing this advertisement, heightened my interest and answered my initial inquiry of understanding what my grandmother said, and learning of its existence abroad. Living in India, I learned that a lower caste system meant hard labor, zero opportunities and more time outside, which resulted in an increase in melanin. Similarly, being part of a higher caste system meant more opportunity and lighter skin, with more time spent indoors. I saw the variation of complexion with my own eyes as I traveled from city to city. I remember observing skin tone and thinking that the dialogue shared with me as a child, here I was, seeing that same concept in another part of the world. I had finally figured out what my grandmother meant. She was right. This isn’t to say that I haven’t experience racism, because I most certainly have, and at times, I still do. But, it wasn’t until I stepped foot on Indian soil that I realized these ideals were not only part of the community and the very fabric of life in which I identified, but this phenomenon was a gendered, global reality that negatively impacts identity formation and emphasizes how beauty is racialized.

Living in the age of information and surrounded by the infiltration of social media, colorism and its connection to capital and racialized beauty is a global concept I’d like to expand and challenge with my research interests. Being able to educate the next generation of scholars allows for continued service and contribution to the discipline, an expansion of the colorism scholarship and its impact on ethnic legitimacy. On New Year’s Eve night in 2013, and three weeks before my grandmother’s passing, she and I had another life talk. She was alert, she was her normal self, and laying in her bed, and I was sitting in her green recliner. She said to me “if something ever happens to me, I want you to remember what I’ve taught you, and I want you to do your life around that.” I got up, went over to her, leaned down, and laid my head in the middle of her chest, and she placed her hand on the side of my face. I told her I loved her. She told me she loved me, too. Although I didn’t ask her a lot of questions, I hope she knows, I listened.

Lastly, the title of the dissertation derives from one my favorite songs, *Certainly*, by one of my favorite neo soul artists, Erykah Badu. One of her albums, *Erykah Badu: Live*, is a collection of neo soul classics, and because this album is live, she introduces several of the songs, detailing her fears, and reflecting on the course of her life, and the cycle of life itself. The song titled *Certainly*, begins with “who gave you permission to rearrange me? certainly not me.” The song is a love song but comes after another part in the album where she states: “when coming over to America, we had to change a lot of things, but we ain’t give nobody permission to rearrange us.” When I think about the origins and infancy of colorism and what it does to the psyche, both historically and currently, the beginning of *Certainly* was quite fitting, and this is where the title for the dissertation comes from. Additionally, the title also weaves in language and terminology from the interviewees surrounding their experiences with colorism and racialized beauty.

**Background**

Rooted in the institution of slavery (Hall 2018), colorism functions to further the production of racial proximity to whiteness. Colorism, also known as light supremacy, shadeism, pigmentocracy, shade stratification, and skin tone bias operate as racialized systems that stratify on the basis of complexion. Colorism is a transnational, gendered, intra-racial prejudicial system implemented during slavery that prioritized whiteness. Additionally, colorism is an
implementation of identity erasure and suppression, division, and a phenotypical qualifier, the origins of skin tone bias are in concert with structures of racism executed by white supremacy (Hall 2018). This dissertation will center how a global order of African enslavement in the United States reinforces hierarchies that racialize beauty. Thomas (2020) illustrates this as the achievement of obtaining a white, racialized identity and appearance, by way of skin bleaching, cosmetic surgery, and internalized racism (Thomas 2020). Colorism is a byproduct of colonialism and racism, delves into the complexities that exacerbate color classism within the Black community and transnationally, highlighting how the colonization of identity has transcended transnationally and how the global enterprise of colorism profits and leverages racism. This outline of this dissertation begins with providing background regarding the infancy and origins of colorism, and moves into how authors are in conversation about the practice of colorism. Further, the dissertation will move into the themes and key findings, detailing the stories and experiences of those affected by colorism and conceptualizations of skin bleaching in both Africa and the United States. After the findings are revealed, the dissertation will move into the discussion section to analyze the findings and concludes with detailing future research plans and next steps. Additionally, there are tables and images that provide additional context into the structure and function of colorism, with a special emphasis on language. These figures can be found in the appendices section of the dissertation. In regard to the definition of terms, the terms below allow the reader to understand the varying conceptualizations of colorism before delving into the dissertation. It is important to note that there are several different terms for colorism that are used interchangeably but point back to colorism. The terms are used interchangeably in the literature as outcomes to obtain whiteness are different across geographies. These terms provide a basis for understanding colorism in literature and provide a perspective of how they might be understood transnationally. The nuances within the terms display how sociologists and scholars approach different geographical consolidations of colorism. Within the definitions, all of them are impactful and useful, particularly depending on the region being studied, and as indicated in the dissertation, colorism is called different things and experienced differently, and it’s imperative to have a knowledge base regarding the varying conceptualizations. To help anchor the next section of the dissertation, the literature review, the definition of terms is listed below.

As indicated previously, colorism is also known as light supremacy, shadeism, pigmentocracy, shade stratification, and skin tone bias. These terms also demonstrate how race was and is socially constructed and speak to the differentiation of racial codes and categories. More information regarding the social construct of race can be found in Chapter Two, the Review of Literature. For purposes of consistency, this dissertation will focus on the term colorism. The definitions are as follows:

**Definition of Terms**

a. **Light supremacy:** Hall (2017) indicates “the term light supremacy is a racial descriptor constructed for purposes of designating proximity to Caucasian populations.”

b. **Shadeism:** Bidushy (2021) defines shadeism as “prejudice based on skin shade” (Bidushy 2021).

c. **Pigmentocracy:** Lynn (2008) states the term pigmentocracy is “adopted by social scientists to describe societies in which wealth and social status are determined by skin color.”
d. Shade Stratification: Monk (2021) posits shade stratification is “a central aspect of colorism writ large (furthermore, the darkness of skin tends to track alongside Afrocentric appearance as a whole; Monk 2021).

e. Skin tone bias: Hunter (2016) notates “skin tone bias, or colorism, is a system of discrimination based on privileging individuals with light skin tone and devaluing individuals with dark skin tone (Hunter 2016).

**Statement of the Problem**

There are many areas in the colorism scholarship that require development as evidenced throughout the literature review. The focus of my research situates the following areas: the racialized nature of beauty and whiteness as capital, as well as the difference in experiences with colorism, between Black, Senegalese, Indian, Mexican, and Asian women, and Black men. This dissertation will also emphasize how beauty is racialized and that the digital platforms utilized to reinforce whiteness as capital. Key recurrent themes in the literature emphasize whiteness as capital, material advantages/life outcomes of light skin and particularly the signification of the body, with an emphasis on featurism and the intersection of skin tone and gender (Reese 2021). Using the lens of Critical Race Theory, Systemic Racism Theory, and Intersectionality, I will use these theories to support my arguments. I will apply Critical Race Theory to the theme of whiteness as capital and expanding on the intersectional elements that reinforce the valorization of racist ideology. Additionally, I will apply the lens of Intersectionality to illuminate the racialized nature of beauty. Although I will discuss colorism among Indian, Mexican, Senegalese, and Asian Women, this dissertation will centralize Black Women’s experiences with colorism in Senegal, West Africa and the United States.

**Research Questions**

Evidence suggests that colorism is a gendered experience (Hunter 2011) and while men in some racial groups are affected by colorism, women are mostly affected by this phenomenon (Hunter 2011; Collins 2000; Holland 2022). The research around colorism investigates how the historical, racialization of beauty currently manifests and impacts social mobility and life chance. The desire to achieve social and racial capital via the pursuit of dangerous and many times, lethal processes showcases the grip of white supremacy and the challenges of dissolving the practice. The research questions for this study are designed to investigate the lived experience of those impacted by colorism and to survey the manifestations of racialized beauty. These questions center the argument of race scholars and illuminate both the historical and current manifestation of skin tone bias. To add depth and new conceptualizations to the scholarship, I will rely on the three research questions. The questions listed below are connected in the way that they demonstrate the overall goal and inquiries of the study. Additionally, these questions leverage the themes and key findings and demonstrate how beauty is regulated and experienced cross culturally and across geographies. The questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. **RQ1:** How does the historical manifestations of colorism impact our current understanding of skin tone bias?
2. **RQ2:** How is beauty racialized and how does skin bleaching impact identity, the economic and social consequences of this racialization?
3. **RQ3:** How does colorism impact upbringing and social mobility transnationally and across geographies?
To answer the first question, how does the historical manifestations of colorism impact our current understanding of shade stratification? - I will investigate the complex history of colorism and racialized politics, focusing on colonization and particularly, plantation politics. To that end, I will rely on the historical facts to support the current debates and conceptualizations of what colorism has come to be as a result of the historical nuances of colonization and slavery.

To answer the second question – how does colorism impact upbringing and social mobility? - I will focus on the color language used in the family, and particularly education, as well as the idea of race capital equating to more accessibility and social mobility. The study will also tie in mate selection among some of racial groups highlighted in the study. To answer the third question – how is beauty racialized and how are the economic and social consequences of this racialization experienced? – I will focus on social media, rap lyrics, the skin bleaching market and apps used to change the shape and features of the face and body that work to approximate whiteness.

In terms of a brief overview regarding the methodology, I traveled to Senegal to gather data, and the remaining data was gathered in the United States. Using a qualitative methodological approach revealed the richness of the study, participant responses, and highlighted how colorism continues to saturate varying degrees of global society. More information regarding the methodology can be found in Chapter Four where I share the stories and quotes from participants regarding their experiences with colorism and racialized beauty, and how those experiences impact their day to day lives.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To convey broad analysis surrounding colorism, this literature centralizes six recurrent themes presented throughout the scholarship: (1) the history of colorism and the origins of white supremacy and colonization; (2) black feminist thought and intersectionality; (3) transnational circuits of colorism and skin bleaching with a focus on Black, Senegalese, Indian, Asian, and Mexican women; (4) life outcomes/advantages of light skin; (5) gaps within the literature and how these gaps provide evidence for further examination and analysis. Please note that the gaps are infused throughout the literature review; and (6) how this literature review helps to fill the gap(s) for future research and analysis. Emphasizing the genesis of racial stratification, the main argument focuses on how historically induced entities of racism continue posing a detriment to identity formation. Further, complexion has permeated and orchestrated the racial order.

Jablonski (2012) explains the biology of skin color and argues how it is the basis for racialization and governance. The author explains how color, historically and currently, is conceptualized by white supremacy and details the “politics of pigmentation” by focusing on the interplay of race and the origins of racial classification. The advent of racial stratification and the fallacies associated, demonstrate the salience and legacy of color classism. Because skin color has been cemented as a driving force of social interaction, the origins of white supremacy and the establishment of racial hierarchies portray the intent of racial dominance and the dissolution of ethnic legitimacy. In conjunction with these theories, my research will contribute an innovative approach to understanding and conceptualizing the dangers of both skin bleaching, racialized beauty, and colorism by bringing in the nuances of racialized beauty, the detriment to identity, and the sociological outcomes of racialized hierarchies.

Charles Cooley’s looking glass self, Erving Goffman’s stigma and Critical Race Theory as theoretical frameworks, gives rise to the sociological nature of skin tone bias. Although this dissertation will center Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, these additional frameworks dissect the collective consciousness and portray the sociological function of colorism. Cooley’s looking glass self rationalizes the ideas that social cues shape the consciousness of the self (Cooley 2007). Cooley indicates that “in imagination we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends and so on, and we are variously affected by it” (Cooley 2007). Goffman’s rationalization of stigma indicates “the self is inseparable from the ideas of others and that the self is the product and consequence of social communication. The self, then is acted out publicly as is explained by Goffman as dramaturgical” (Goffman 2007). More recent work on stigma provides displays how these conceptualizations operate currently. Walton (2019) argues the replication of white supremacy is “grounded in historical, political, and economic reality” (Walton 2019). Critical Race Theory sheds light onto the embedded, historical consequences of racialized oppression. The race-centric critiques of Critical Race Theory focus on emancipatory change for oppressed groups (Walton 2019). Systemic Racism Theory highlights the conceptualization of racial differences, and Critical Skin Theory (Hall 2019) gives rise to the conceptualization of how colorism is internalized and experienced.

The History of Racialized Beauty, Colorism, and the Origins of White Supremacy

Hall and Alhassan (2017) capture how the origins of colonization and white supremacy are responsible for the birth of racialized separatism. It is important to note that before slavery,
scholars contend that there was no existence of a racial order and no sense of racial consciousness until European explorers made contact with the New World and then colonized Africa and the New World. Per the literature, Africa was colonized by the British, Portuguese, and the French in what scholars observe as “state sanctioned violence” (Hall (2018) argues that the abduction and forced migration of Africans to the New World Americas served as the foundation for “rationalized Negroid racial inferiority” (Hall 2018). Further, evidence suggests that there is an absence of scholarship on whether or not, skin tone was examined before colonization, and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. However, this dissertation will center the Transatlantic Slave Trade in this section, and discuss how white supremacy orchestrates racialization and connects power to gradations of complexion. Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Transatlantic Slave Trade served as the origin of the Black and white binary (Edmondson 2016) and would fortify and solidify racialized inferiority. Talcott Parsons states “the primary historic origin of the modern color problem lies in the relation of Europeans to African slavery, as that became established along the whole Atlantic coast of the Americas from the southern North American Colonies to southern Brazil, very much including the Caribbean area” (Edmondson 2016). As a result, the author indicates that enslavement entrenched and developed a “white-world search for global influence and power” (Edmondson 2016) and contributed to cultural and socio-economic domination. Hall and Alhassan (2017) indicate fear, loss of property, loss of life, and power served as the genesis of white supremacy and the premise for which whiteness equating superiority and purity, is predicated upon. The authors state “the prevailing anxiety of upper-class European immigrants was loss of power. In an effort to confront the inevitable, they organized to impose a divide and conquer strategy to regain and/or maintain power. Hall and Alhassan go on to state: they had been convinced to accept a new race-based self as white. In the aftermath was the origin of white supremacy. Ultimately, white as a constructed identity culminated in the concept of racism acted out as a social institution. From the concept of whiteness, racism in America became a standard which orchestrated the interactions between whites and non-whites. The ethos, which sustained its existence was the doctrine of white supremacy that had evolved to permeate every element of the forthcoming democracy. It is in this origin of white supremacy that the origin of light supremacy inherited its modern-day genesis” (Hall and Alhassan 2017). To clarify, the authors demonstrate that the construct of race and its nuanced approach laid the foundation for how this nation would execute racial paradigms at the expense of human life. The authors posit that this type of division would help to sustain racial regimes that would influence how racial division is governed and reproduced. As evidenced by the literature, the institution of racism and color classism governs the landscape of race relations.

Nakano (2009) explores how white supremacy institutionalizes power by destabilizing the cultural hegemony of those who identify as “other” (Nakano 2009). Through the establishment of a white supremacist framework, the author approaches how economies of color reinforce the constitution of racism. Nakano (2009) demonstrates how whiteness and lightness are two completely different concepts, as is racism and colorism, but impact the process of racial cognition (Nakano 2009). In examining the racial history of America, superiority via the construct of race, shaped and served as the foundation of racialized capitalism, light supremacy, and dehumanization by way of slavery. Hall and Alhassan (2017) state “that by virtue of having light skin, they have been presumed endowed via the height of human evolution with the necessary apparatus to reign” (Hall and Alhassan 2017). The origin of white supremacy problematized dark skin and scholars argue that dark skin represented “inferiority, savagery,
irrationality, and ugliness” (Hunter 2007). The authors indicate “the subjugation of such non-white populations by Eurocentric forces has predisposed all non-white immigrants to the internalization of light skin as the universal hierarchal ideal. Dark skinned populations under the circumstances of colorism and regardless of race, previous nationality or citizenship are then deemed inferior carried out during the social interactions involving light skin and dark skin individuals” (Hall and Alhassan 2017).

The construct of race situates whiteness as superior, blackness as inferior, and provides leverage for understanding the nucleus of racial formation in America. Bell (1993) emphasizes the permanence of racism positing that it is integral to the formation of race. The author explains the conditioned denial of racial consciousness and the subordination of African Americans as well as the historical exoneration of those who normalized and implemented racism. Bell (1993) asserts that the structural tenets of racism force a level of refuge in self-destruction, oppression and the artificiality of racial progress via the regeneration of racism. Further, the author argues that “full equality” for African Americans is unattainable and states that racial patterns “have adapted to maintain white dominance” (Bell 1993). Bell recognizes the refusal of exclusionary practices, emphasizing the potency and pervasiveness racial alienation. A proponent of this theory, Mills (1997) demonstrates how the development of a racial contract justified the violence and degradation European domination brought into existence (Mills 1997). Similar to Hall and Alhassan, the designation of whites and non-whites, persons and sub-persons, Mills (1997) maintains that the construct of race is a political system tied to the origins of white supremacy. Mills’ approach challenges the moral and political ideologies central to canonizing racial domination and reveals the historical deficiencies of race as a construct, and contract. Mills (1997) engages white moral theory and dismantles the power structure central to racial formation, domination, and governance.

Omi and Winant (2015) articulate the ubiquity and centrality of race, racial inequality, and racial meanings. The authors discuss the sociology of race and how power is structured as it pertains to both the racial and color line. Omi and Winant’s arguments are structured around oppression and resistance as it relates to the construct of race. The scholars argue that structural forms of racial inequality demonstrate the regime of white supremacy, the resistance, and the practice of exploitation and control. Omi and Winant (2015) explore the foundation of white domination and the implementation of colorism by highlighting “practices of distinguishing among human beings according to their corporeal characteristics became linked to systems of control, exploitation, and resistance” (Omi and Winant 2015). The authors provide analysis surrounding racial fluidity, racial identity, and racial theory, indicating how the oppressed and marginalized perceive the dehumanization experienced both historically and currently. Omi and Winant (2015) in conjunction with Hall and Alhassan, (2017) ideas converge emphasizing the function of identity utilizing the centrality of race and white supremacy to contextualize racial formation in the United States. The scholars focus on how oppression reveals the politics of both the racial order and color lines and displays the inconsistency surrounding racial meanings.

DuBois (1999) conveys how white supremacy regulates the color line and identity. The author details the function of the color line and its intended purpose to exacerbate an ingrained disregard for African Americans. Dubois’ aim seeks to penetrate the culprit of racial separatism, skin color division, stratification and how blackness, in a white society can operate by adhering to a dual identity. DuBois (1999) discusses the problem with conforming and adopting a specific identity model and the dichotomy associated. On one hand, behind the veil, Black people can operate in truth. On the other hand, Black people are forced to suppress, to ignore and turn a
blind eye to who they are behind the veil, in an effort to navigate a racialized system and operate outside of the veil. Dubois (1999) states “in those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself, -darkly through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission he began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in this world, he must be himself, and not another. For the first time he sought to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, that dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem. He felt the weight of his ignorance-the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colorline” (Dubois 1999). Dubois extrapolates the duality and dissolution of identity, calcified resentment and hatred toward Blacks, and the racial continuum touted by white dominance. In alignment with Dubois’s conceptualization of Blackness operating two-fold, France Fanon’s (1967) illustration of Manichean worldview and structure (Jayawardene 2016) reinforces Dubois’ double consciousness. Fanon’s (1667) negotiation of identity and the Manichean lens he discusses separates the world using a duality similar to Dubois approach: the colonized and the colonizer (Jayawardene 2016) and the idea of alienation (Jayawardene 2016). Both Dubois and Fanon delve into ramifications and the impact of a dual identity (Moore 2005). Moore (2005) sums up DuBois’ and Fanon’s perspectives by stating “a double consciousness can delude a person to believe they can mentally fixate themselves into someone else’s reality” (Moore 2005).

In conjunction with Dubois, Hunter (2005) dismantles the historical politics of colorism. The author’s approach examines the skin tone hierarchy implemented during slavery and highlights how worth and value was and still is, tied to complexion. Hunter’s (2005) argument orients toward how racial designation was structured on the plantation indicating that lighter skin Blacks worked in the house and Blacks with darker skin, worked outside in the fields. This strategy produced animosity among the enslaved and reinforced the privilege associated with lighter skin. Hunter (2005) posits that historical definitions of beauty valued lightness and whiteness and displays how the aesthetic of whiteness leverages access to capital and mobility. The author investigates featurism and the advent of cosmetic surgery to reinforce the historical implementation of identity formation and de-racialization. Although Hunter’s and Dubois’s ideologies converge on the implications of racial proximity to lightness, the divergence in Hunter’s approach highlights the disadvantages of light skin. The author dissects the conceptualization of light skin being perceived as “not ethnic enough” and per Hunter’s (2005) data analysis, light skin is not a depiction of being “truly African American” and is an implication of racist underpinnings (Hunter 2005).

Hunter (2005) surveys color politics and the correlation to social mobility, particularly on the plantation. The author utilizes Omi and Winant’s framework for examining the fluidity of race relations in the United States with significant emphasis on the color hierarchy, particularly the one drop rule. Hunter (2005) explores power asymmetry and the manipulation of racial categories to maintain whiteness. Sociological perspectives examining the historical nuances of colorism converge to showcase that white supremacy serves as the core of skin tone stratification (Hunter 2005). All contend that colorism reproduces racism to govern privilege, perpetuate ethnic deficiency, and racist ideology. Hunter (2005) also argues that the sexual violence endured by Black women at the hands of white slave owners contributed to the color caste system and reinforced the meaning of privilege. The result of this violence birthed the creation of racial ambiguity and a racially mixed cohort which further crystallized a phenotypic hierarchy (Hunter 2005). To reinforce this historical discourse, Bodenhorn (2006) discusses how the advantages and preference for light skin gained its prominence during slavery. Bodenhorn (2006)
emphasizes the preference for light skin and explores the replication of colorism and its continued manifestation throughout history. Racial subordination serves as the foundation of colorism, identity formation, and the reinforcement of approximating blackness as a problem and a predicament (Jemima 2013). Unraveling Black inferiority, Keeanga (2016) emphasizes how African Americans have been conditioned to rationalize oppression as self-induced. The author discusses the problem of Black inferiority and how this framework sustains white supremacy via the construct of the American Dream. Keeanga (2016) illuminates the contradiction between enslavement and freedom highlighting the parallelisms and perpetuation of racist narratives that reinforce oppression and inequality. The scholar narrates how inequality is rationalized via material causes that have normalized Black inferiority as part and parcel of American society (Keeanga 2016).

The authors diverge in their perspectives when examining the cost associated with light skin privilege and the paradox of white invisibility (Hunter 2005). Hunter (2005) infuses the intersection of feminist theory to provide context surrounding the matrix of oppression and the historical discourse surrounding light-skin privilege. Utilizing an intersectional approach, the author investigates the parallelism of feminist theory, systems of oppression, and its direct connection to colorism. The historical context of colorism articulates the role of white supremacy, the matrix of oppression, and their contributions to the erosion of identity and racial inclusivity. As a result of white supremacist ideals, and the racial organization associated, Bonilla (2018) situates degrees of domination that sustain the pathology of white supremacy. The author’s analysis on racial domination asserts that racial regimes are cyclical in nature and continues to inform racialist activity (Bonilla 2018). Further, Robinson (1983) acknowledges “whiteness studies evolved into an academic pursuit, the fragility of white supremacy; racial capitalism survival depended not only on the violent subjugation of African and Indigenous people; the myth of white solidarity arouse and came to dominate American sensibility” (Robinson 1983). The convergence in the authors perspectives display that the fundamentals of racial stratification are grounded in exploitation and cultural domination. Similar to Black Feminist Thought, historical discourse examines the racial contours of colorism, the perspectives of Black Women, and delves into the orchestration of color politics. In concert with Hunter’s analysis, sociologists who study Black Feminist Thought affirm that systems of oppression are both gendered and intersectional, and historical evidence provides the foundation for which these systems are based upon. In closing, and in connection with Black Feminist Thought, my research will provide the Senegalese women’s perspectives regarding conceptualizations of beauty and status and how these elements coincide to approximate whiteness.

Beauty and Status: Black Feminist Thought

The contribution of Black Feminist Thought focuses on the gendered responses of power, privilege, and how these tenets help to approximate whiteness. This theoretical contribution prioritizes the gendered experiences of Black women, and weaves in colonization, which showcases a clear connection to Senegal and French colonization, and its connection to colorism. While Black Feminist Thought does not focus on rural Senegal as other scholarship which is highlighted in the dissertation, it provides a paramount conceptualization of how whiteness begets both power and privilege, and its connection to colonization, which are core elements of the function of colorism. Black Feminist Thought showcases the gendered component of the duality of colorism, and how Black women in particularly navigate the landscape of this racialized hierarchy. Black Feminist Thought, the feminization of colorism, and gendered racism are intersectional elements that emphasize the tenets of power, privilege, and degradation as a
result of systemic oppression and white supremacy. Black Feminist Thought articulates the duality of victimization and highlights the landscape of conforming and the attitudes associated. Collins (2017) illustrates the importance of both intellectual and lived experience-based inclusivity surrounding Black Women. This institutional level of analysis displays how the matrix of oppression is articulated to understand the crux of Black Women’s engagement. Collins’ argument focuses on the inclusion and reliance of the everyday happenings of Black Women outside of institutions of higher learning as well as how whiteness can only function by degrading blackness (Collins 1999). The author discusses the challenges with including only theory-based practices and minimizing the experiences of the racial group who serve as the centrality of this paradigm. Further, she dissects the complexities utilized to reinforce the matrix of oppression. Collins (2017) argues how solely focusing on scholarship and theory-based practices, removes depth, and substance. She utilizes a multi-faceted approach revealing both sociological and emotional conditioning as well as the intersectional tenets of the matrix. Collins emphasizes the everyday contours of the Black Woman’s experience and includes the thought levels of those not affiliated with institutions of higher learning. By so doing, the content’s density is enabled to convey the diversified perspectives of Black Women. She explores how marginalized and oppressed groups are conditioned to strategize and formulate ideas conducive for elites and dominant groups. The author emphasizes how restructuring and eliminating the nucleus of one’s experience, changes the dynamics and forecasts a strain that contorts the truth.

Collins (1986) surveys the sociological influence of Black feminist thought with significant emphasis on marginality and “outsider within” perspectives. The author examines Black women’s self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression and the importance of African American women’s culture (Collins 1986). The sociological significance of the outsider within perspective highlights the duality of a two-prong reality. Collins investigates the meaning of self-definition and self-valuation utilizing an element of Georg Simmel’s theoretical framework, the stranger, to capture the complexities of Black identity. The sociological explanations demonstrated in Collins’ analysis display how racialized, controlling images define Black women as a “negative other, the virtual antithesis of positive white male images” (Collins 1986). Further, the author examines internalized oppression and control and notate the effects on self-esteem. Hill (2002) emphasizes how white supremacist ideology amplified the correlation between whiteness and femininity, contorting and reducing Black women’s self-esteem. Davis (1981) states “during slavery Black women were required to be as masculine as men in the performance of work and were as harshly punished as men. The majority who survived acquired qualities considered taboo by the nineteenth century ideology of womanhood” (Davis 1981).

A byproduct of racism, colorism eliminates the crux of identity. Similar to Collins’ argument and further examining gendered racism and the current manifestations of racial bias, Roth (2016) articulates how these structures of oppression are positioned to approximate whiteness. The author delves into the identity matrix and identity formation of women of color, emphasizing the challenges of choosing between an innate identity and one formulated by the dominant group. This systemic maze of racism and classism regulates identity and poses a detriment in acknowledging one’s own cultural hegemony. Roth (2016) articulates the erasure of contributions from feminists of color surrounding mobilization and organization.

Roth (2016) emphasizes how considering the diversified perspectives of feminist groups allow for more density and diversified levels of thought and conceptualization. Examining the vast differences between the Black, Chicana, and White feminist movements, the author explores
the racial and class differences and how these variations influence the scope of experience. The author conveys that in an effort to focus on the crux of individualized racial bias, Black, White, and Chicana feminist organizations sought to separate by race and class to create a shared ethos and the movements specific to that particular racial group. Roth discusses how the initial feminists/feminist movements were White and singular and delves into the idea that Black Women were not joining these groups due to a lack of representation and a conscious reckoning regarding the issues affecting their collective.

Roth (2016) articulates the influence of mass media honing in on the involvement of White women while ignoring the struggles of women of color. The author delves into the fight for visibility among Black Women and asserts that White women and their modes of governing served as the catalyst for women’s issues and concerns, where the encounters of Black Women are not mutually exclusive. Roth showcases how these organizations collaborated, and conveyed both micro and macro level narratives, where each organization instinctively served to cater to the needs of their own oppression.

James and Sharpley-Whiting (2000) delve into the narratives and social critiques of Black Women. Building upon Collins’ ideology, James and Sharpley-Whiting (2000) emphasize perspectives ranging from the unprotected margins of the workplace to the racial trauma embedded in the social order. The scholars discuss how the white racial social order has been systematically orchestrated and organized to silence, exclude, and erase all parts of Black Women’s contributions and functions to maintain a hierarchy advantageous to white supremacy. Both James and Sharpley-Whiting infuse Roth’s approach by exploring levels of systemic exclusion and reinforces how racial binaries are not mutually exclusive.

Roth (2016) illustrates that women of color feminist groups, highlighted many of the same issues as their White counterparts, but those same issues contained levels of density and complexity not apparent in White feminist groups, for instance, racial oppression, racism, gender oppression and economic disadvantages. Roth provides a thorough understanding regarding racial multiplicity, gendered racism, the direct correlation to the matrix of oppression. She highlights differences among feminist groups and provides transparency regarding how those differences are experienced within the confines gendered racism. Both Roth’s and Collins work on feminism tackles the racialization and the racist ideology employed by systems of oppression in an effort to execute intersectional levels of gendered racism. Matthews and Johnson reinforces both Roth’s and Collins analysis by further examining the erasure of Black Women’s experiences with systemic oppression and how these systems work to reduce the validity of their contributions.

While Taylor (2016) is not a Black Feminist, her work surrounding racial capitalism articulate how systems of oppression work in tandem to minimize and dismiss the collective consciousness while illuminating the influence of colorism. The author reinforces the hegemony of Black identity and provides leverage in understanding the erasure of identity and how racialized capitalism reinforces this erasure. The authors emphasize the challenges of identity formation and displays the prioritization of oppression. The author highlights the duality of the racial order and discusses the importance of dismantling white supremacy. Taylor (2016), Matthews and Johnson (2014) in conjunction with both Roth and Collins demonstrate how the feminization of color fuses gendered racism, and how elements central to both feminist and revolutionary movements must be conceptualized, included, and not minimized.

The scholars’ perspectives converge in focusing on lived experience. All emphasize the importance of humanizing Black Women’s experiences and contributions and captures the racial
polarization of the collective. Collins and Roth seek to examine the entirety and the differences among feminist groups indicating that each movement requires different levels of thought and analysis. The scholars diverge in their perspectives whereas Roth emphasizes the normalcy of white feminists’ contributions serving as the catalyst for the feminist movement, Collins (2017) focused on the importance of including and humanizing Black Women’s contributions, employing an intersectional approach. The authors explore the nature of how groups’ organization was categorized and developed both racially and economically. Black feminist thought illuminates the matrix of oppression and identifies the pervasiveness of discrimination among Black women. It is important to note that colorism is enacted in a variety of ways in the Black community, particularly through language and skin bleaching, and impacts one’s sense of self. This is further discussed in the stories from interview participants. Participant narratives will confirm these scholarly perspectives and showcase some differences not mentioned in the scholarship, for example the rationale regarding why men reinforce and participate in the practice of colorism, and how remnants of French colonization continue to permeate conceptualizations of beauty and its reinforcement of racialized hierarchies. However, Black feminist thought crystallizes the experiences of Black women and exemplifies how circuits of oppression and rejection of ethnic legitimacy manifests in marketing, advertising and transnationally.

**Racialized Beauty via Language in Marketing and Advertising**

Employing the Critical Race tenant, the social construction of race (Hartlep 2009), displays the consequence of race as a social construct. The use of apps, particularly FaceTune, and Snap Chat have features that decreases the size of the nose, changes to one’s complexion, and even enlargement of the lips. The apps are primarily used on social media, and typically used before pictures are posted on social media platforms. We see the notion of racialized beauty with these apps and further evidence is needed to understand why these apps, provide these types of functions that situate whiteness as capital, with some reliance on the aesthetics of Black women. Considering the app allows people to lighten their skin, it goes hand in hand with practice of skin bleaching, without the chemicals, but with the same objective. The bleaching industry is one of the primary consequences of racialized beauty and whiteness as capital. Evidence suggests that the skin-bleaching industry is a multi-billion dollar enterprise (Thomas 2020). Further, Tate (2015) posits that global white supremacy provides the foundation for reinforcing skin bleaching. The author pulls in colorism and racialized aesthetics to highlight the dynamics of beauty and racialization (Tate 2015). Further, Fanon’s (1967) analysis of the self, psyche, and the colonial condition provides the framework of how racialized beauty leverages these elements to reinforce whiteness and beauty as a form a capital. Fanon’s (1967) depiction of alienation and colonized subjects (Jayawardene 2016) provides the lens to explore colorism using the Manichean school of thought (Jayawardene 2016). Just how colorism draws distinctions between complexion and pedestalizes light skin, Fanon discusses how “the Manichean structure divides the world into two distinct parts: the colonizer and the colonized based on good (lightness) and evil (darkness)” (Jayawardene 2016). It is important to note that the marketing for skin bleaching in other countries is quite blatant. However, here in the United States, the marketing for skin bleaching products isn’t as blatant or maximized, but it is still seen in the ingredients list on beauty products in the United States. Below are beauty and marketing advertisements derived via the Tennessee Electronic Library, an entity of Chattanooga Public Library Archives and the Smithsonian. These images display the language used to racialized beauty and denigrate blackness. The time period selected for the images from the Tennessee Electronic Library range
from 1919-1938. Some of these images were located in the Chattanooga Times Free Press Newspapers during 1919-1938. Special emphasis should be noted on the language used to market and advertise skin bleaching creams in an effort to racialized beauty.

Images in the appendices illuminate how beauty continues to be racialized to maintain white superiority. The language used on the images highlight the reinforcement of what’s considered beautiful and the pedestalization associated with light skin. As time has progressed and we’ve moved into a different space and time, in other countries, the language used to market skin lighteners and bleaching creams hasn’t changed much (Holland 2022). Transnationally, skin bleaching is commonplace and advertisements are visible and the language used on the billboards to advertise skin bleaching use language that uphold racist and white supremacist ideals. In a further discussion, a comparison is drawn between the languages used to racialize beauty in the United States and abroad showcases the stark differences in the marketing strategies of beauty and skin lightening products. This is also a phenomenon that isn’t illuminated in the literature and a phenomenon I plan to dissect further with my research. The transnational circuits of colorism and skin bleaching are prevalent in many domestic and global spaces and provides a lens for examining how racist ideas of beauty continue to drive the conceptualization of what’s deemed beautiful and what skin tone is a commodity. More recently, this was a social media before and after, of a consumer using Whitenicious lightening cream: Whitenicious, is a brand that promotes skin lightening and bleaching. This is a relatively recent product, but as Holland (2022) suggest, white the marketing transnationally looks different from the skin bleaching market in the United States, we still see language that leverages whiteness as capital. In some places, the marketing and the language used on these products is quite blatant, but in other areas, in the United States specifically, not as much. As pictured above, the physical outcomes of product usage show stark differences in complexion.

**Transnational Circuits of Beauty, Colorism and Skin Bleaching**

“All white Americans realize that their skin comprises an inestimable asset .... Its value persists not because a white appearance automatically brings success and status. What it does ensure is that you will not be regarded as black, a security which is worth so much that no one who has it has ever given it away” (Hacker 1993)

This section coincides with the interviews conducted in Senegal in particular as it reinforces the fact that colorism is not an isolated, domestic issue. It is transnational, hence the importance of providing a transnational perspective to the dissertation. Participant responses in Senegal revealed how beauty is conceptualized and how it is almost always associated with light skin, and the desire to be and look white. It reinforces that while colorism and skin bleaching are experienced differently, the outcomes experienced transnationally approximate whiteness, regardless of the cost associated. Participants discussed how the bleaching advertisements are everywhere in Senegal and showcases a direct connection, via language in particular, to the advertisements I pulled from the archives, which I go into great detail in the Discussion section of the dissertation. Colorism, and particularly skin bleaching, as indicated previously, are global phenomenon’s that impact to Whiteness as the core of racial identity burgeoned transnationally. The legacies of slavery and colonialism continue to fragment global constructs of identity. The result of these practices has fueled the idea that whiteness is property. Harris (1993) explores the undercurrents of fractured identity, power differentials, and the cyclical nature of whiteness serving as a frontier for identity and capital. Harris (1993) argues that whiteness maintains its value by racializing privilege. The author contends that whiteness thrives via the access created through racialized degradation. The entrenchment of whiteness reveals the orchestrated
deficiencies of identity on both moral and political ideologies. Harris contextualizes the politics of racial identity emphasizing the social construct of white domination on Black subordination (Harris 1993). The framework of whiteness portrays the refusal of acknowledging group identity, reifies and perpetuates subordination (Harris 1993). Central to Harris’ analysis, Gilroy (2020) examines the relationship between identity and difference, sameness and otherness, as “intrinsically political” (Gilroy 2020). The author notates that identity is a form of power and authority when realized politically. The interplay of sameness and otherness formulates the threshold for identity manipulation (Gilroy 2020). Gilroy’s perspective considers how conditions of identity are produced and sustained. The author points out the political consequences of identity and reveals the patterns associated. Gilroy (2020) analyzes the racial hierarchy and acknowledges racialized color lines as “operations of power” (Gilroy 2020). Please note that all charts for the study can be found in the appendices.

Dixon and Telles (2017) demonstrate how transnational circuits of colorism have commodified and catapulted a global idealization of whiteness. The authors utilize an interdisciplinary approach to examine color consciousness and white supremacy. While slavery is the nucleus of the racial order, Dixon and Telles emphasize the convergence of colorism highlighting the demand for lighter skin transnationally (Dixon and Telles 2017). The scholars explain how the United States, Latin America, the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia champion the regime of white supremacy and the underpinnings of color differences. Dixon and Telles (2017) argue that while human difference is conceptualized differently across societies, a consistent skin color paradox is maintained. The authors specify how the material evidence of the bleaching industry (Dixon and Telles 2017) reinforces the global preference for light skin and proximity to whiteness.

Evidence suggests that the skin-bleaching industry is a multi-billion dollar enterprise. Scholars conclude that bleaching is denigrating and the commodity of lightness centralizes the legacies of white supremacy. Hall (2013) argues “a bleaching syndrome is the conscious and systematic process of self-denigration and aspiring to assimilation on the basis of alien ideals, resulting from colonial domination” (Hall 2013). Scholars question if the desire for bleaching is grounded in pathology or mass media, but gives rise to the conceptualization that skin tone equates capital (Dixon and Telles 2017). Mire (2001) argues that the politics of whiteness is situated around profit. The author emphasizes how skin bleaching infuses and prioritizes beauty standards associated with white supremacist culture. Mire (2001) surveys “colonial representations” of race and beauty and emphasizes the detriment of acquiring a white, racialized body. Mire focuses on the poison of the skin bleaching industry, the chemical agents, and highlights the exploitation associated with racialized capitalism, white supremacist ideology and commodity racism. The author examines the social, political and historic discourse of skin bleaching and emphasizes the material privilege of whiteness via the toxic practice of skin-bleaching. Sociological evidence specifies the gentrification of identity mobilizes whiteness in a way that reifies race-based exclusions and differences (Mire 2001).

Scholarly advances portray that the idealization of light skin via skin lightening, skin bleaching, and the manipulation of identity supports racist ideology. Research specifies the lack of understanding and internalized victimization that seeks to corroborate deviation from one’s cultural identity to one proximal to whiteness. Sociological examinations of race, skin bleaching and capital displays the legacy of colonialism and the global repercussions of identity erasure. Hall et. al (2013) focuses on the modernity of identity erasure and its significance on an international scale. The authors chronicle the obsession with the phenotypical “gold standard” or
“cosmetic westernism” as both social, emotional, and economic capital. Hall et. al (2013) note the global asymmetry of colorism and reveals how many ethnic communities have internalized racism in an attempt to acquire racial proximity to whiteness. The authors assert how light supremacy within Black, Mexican, Asian, and Indian cultures has fractured the entirety of identity formation. The transnational climate surrounding the issues of colorism exacerbates a sense of disdain and an internal struggle assimilate. Skin tone stratification, regardless of how it’s experienced globally, produces the same result in reinforcing whiteness and truncates ethnic legitimacy. Hall et. al (2012) states “thousands of years ago tan-free skin become a common marker of status in agrarian societies across diverse regions of the world. When indigenous populations were conquered by people of the West, who just happened to have lighter skin, the importance of having light skin color took on even greater significance and then, other cosmetic features associated with White Europeans came to be admired, internalized and imitated” (Hall et. al 2013). With the consumption of bleaching and skin lighteners, Nakano (2008) explains how pharmaceutical corporations stimulate the desire for whiteness via media, internet, and print, reinforcing the idea that light skin is capital. Nakano (2008) investigates the marketing and practice of skin bleaching utilizing a multinational approach and reveals the racist tropes and ideologies that position the achievement of whiteness as fundamental.

Scholars conclude that normalizing bleaching champion’s self-hatred. Charles (2003) examines black identity in Jamaica and the use of bleaching creams, asserting that self-hate is a scar of slavery. The author emphasizes how the enslavement of Africans through conditioning and socialization aided in the development of negative perceptions of themselves (Charles 2003). Charles argues that skin bleaching provides evidence of this hatred and hypothesizes that this practice is a result of self-degradation and low self-esteem (Charles 2003). Charles (2003) analyzes how self-hatred is taught and negatively impacts the fundamentals and formulation of identity. Scholarly advances on the topic of colorism and identity distinguish differences in experiences for racial groups. In further surveying colorist experiences among racial groups, Candelario (2007) examines the negotiation of identity and the commitment among Dominican women, to reject their African ancestry (Candelario 2007; Banks 2007). In so doing, these women manipulate their racial designation in an effort to assimilate within the confines of whiteness. Candelario (2007) articulates the fluidity of identity and acknowledges that while the Dominican Republic has attempted to maintain a level of cultural hegemony, there remains a reproduction of racial paradigms that infuses the ideology of whiteness and the threat of blackness. Despite these dynamics, Candelario (2007) centralizes the malleability of identity illustrating the connection between race and nationalism, emphasizing how narratives touted by beauty salons and museums propel anti-blackness. Hordge (2015) explores racial stratification in Brazil and discusses how the process of racialization is central in the development of racial hierarchies and experiences. In convergence with Hordge (2015) in examining the consequences of a “phenotypic continuum,” and ethnoracial inequalities, Monk (2014) implies that complexion is “consequential” regarding life outcomes for both Brazilians and African Americans. The transnational ethos of race approximates whiteness and perpetuates racial inequality (Hordge 2015). According to the author’s assertion, racial appearance is subjugated by racial categories and each dimension of race garners different and preferential treatment (Hordge 2015). Seeking to tackle post-colonial racial configurations, Jemima (2013) conveys the racialization process in Ghana and the meaning of blackness via the structure of white supremacy. The author situates the politics of racial colonialism in African societies emphasizing how the Transatlantic Slave Trade problematized the meaning of blackness. Jemima (2013) contends that “race crafting”
cemented the predicament of blackness and is contingent upon continuing racialization in the framework of whiteness. The scholar argues that post-colonial scholarship dismisses the persistence of racially structured practices and posits that the construct of race informs identity transnationally, particularly in Black communities (Jemima 2013).

Pigmentocracy in the Latin America and the Caribbean also provide evidence of transnational racialization. Richard (2008) suggests that it is light-skin, or those who have racial proximity to whiteness, can achieve social mobility. The author notates pigmentocracies in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Asia (Malays, Indonesians, Filipinos, and Thais) all operate under the model of white supremacy (Richard 2008). Further, Twine (1998) examines the consequences of a racial democracy naturalized by white supremacist ideology. She surveys responses to racial disparities and emphasizes the lack of support for anti-racists movements in Brazil. Twine (1998) utilizes an ethnography to capture the methods and practices that function to maintain white supremacy. The scholars converge in their perspectives highlighting the structures put in place to bolster the desire for light skin transnationally. In accordance with the construct of race, Berger (1966) contends that degrees of reality are experienced differently, and colorism examines the consequences of these racialized nuances. Further, my research will help to expand the scholarship and literature surrounding colorism as it highlights and fills the gaps that continue to showcase the dangers of skin bleaching and the detriment of colorism, particularly in global markets, with emphasis on Senegal.

Skin Bleaching Market

The Skin Bleaching Market, or race capital (Hunter 2011) is heralded as a multi-billion dollar, transnational enterprise that creates beauty and bleaching products geared toward producing and reproducing whiteness. Evidence suggests that skin bleaching market targets women in an effort to reinforce racialized standards of beauty. As stated previously, the privileging of light skin in Senegal is pushed through the marketing and advertising of skin bleaching products. Authors note that “the use of skin lightening creams in Africans has been known since the 1960s. When the desired pigmentation had been reached, the number of applications was modulated to stabilize the clear pigmentation. The majority of women applied creams to the whole body” (Yves and Giudice 2002). During my observations in Senegal, bleaching and skin lightening advertisements were at the busiest intersections and some of the most prominent bleaching creams were typically sold at beauty supply stores. The language used on skin bleaching products in Senegal are as follows: Pure White, Khess Petch: Completely White, etc. Sociologists and race scholars assert that the skin bleaching industry reinforces elements of colonization and remnants of slavery that have never been eradicated. Scholars highlight the cyclical nature of inferiority and emphasizes how the manifestations of racialized practices continue to show up post colonization and post slavery. Thomas (2020) explores how skin lighteners uphold pre and post-colonial racialized politics. The author “theorizes skin as a site for antiracist struggle and lighteners as a technology of visibility that both challenges and entrenches racial and gender hierarchies” (Thomas 2020). Comparing Senegal to the United States in terms of colorism, there are stark differences (i.e. the marketing of beauty products, the terminology used to describe lighter skin women, etc which is detailed further in the dissertation), but the outcome is the same for both racial groups. Although the journey to achieve and acquire beauty look different, both groups illuminate the forces proven to uphold racialized beauty. A chart can be found below that detail the differences and similarities in terms of how colorism is experienced in both Senegal and United States. The language used in the United States column was actual language from the interviews in the United
States. This type of language used in the United States is further dissected in Chapter five of the dissertation.

**Skin Bleaching Market Cont.**

Thomas (2020) investigates skin lightening up against the historical conceptualizations of beauty, indicating that “it is a history of struggle” (Thomas 2020). The author observes how the body is used as a tool to reproduce divisive practices and standards of beauty. Yves and Giudice (2002) evaluate the adverse effects of bleaching by examining the main chemicals used in bleaching creams: hydroquinone, mercurials, and corticosteroids. The authors note the governmental interventions to prohibit skin bleaching, but highlight how it’s not enough, as people make and develop their own bleaching creams. Further, Holland (2022) discusses how bleaching advertisements is less nuanced in the United States, (although this is changing Palumbo 2022) yet pedestalized in Africa, Asia, and India. The author observes beauty and emphasizes the under the radar advertisement of skin whitening products in the United States, verses blatant marketing strategies employed to other countries to achieve whiteness. The graphs for Holland (2022) can be found in the appendices for skin whitening: the global market.

**Beauty, Black Women, and Colorism**

One of the most profound narrations of Black women’s desire for whiteness and the rejection of blackness is outlined in Toni Morrison’s, *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison (2007) depicts a young, African American girl’s idealization and obsession with whiteness. The author captures the undercurrent of colorism, exposing Pecola’s hatred toward her blackness. Morrison’s work demonstrates the cruelty of sexual violence, self-hatred, and racism, via colorism. Race scholars affirm that rape and the sexual exploitation of Black women centralized oppression and advanced a gendered system that benefited a white racial framework. This sort of “social death” (Cunningham 2020) emphasizes Wilderson’s (2019) conceptualization that slavery is a permanent fixture and Black people are integral to the fabric of this nation, yet excluded from the dimensions of belonging. The initial charge into furthering the production of whiteness outside of separating slaves by skin tone (house slaves vs. field slaves) was the result of miscegenation (Hall 2013). Miscegenation was a result of the lack of agency Black women had over their bodies during slavery. The sexual politics of slavery governed control of reproductive capacity (Collins 2007) and created gendered levels of oppression. Collins (2004) explores the trauma of sexual politics emphasizing how institutionalized rape was rationalized, and legal (Grosholz 2007). In conjunction with Collins, Feinstein (2019) presents how rape was commonplace during slavery and “perpetuated privilege and oppression” (Feinstein, 2019) and intensified the skin color paradox. The author discusses the power dynamics and the value placed on the sexuality of Black women indicating that “the pricing of enslaved women based on skin tones indicated the sexual value of enslaved Black women. On the auction block, lighter-skinned enslaved women were sold for an average of five percent more than darker-skinned women” (Feinstein 2019). West (2001) points out that the degradation of black bodies was central to the framework of white supremacy. The author maintains that this level of degradation perpetuates the taboo of Black sexuality and states “yet this white dehumanizing endeavor has left its toll in the psychic scars and personal wounds now inscribed in the souls of black folk. These scars and wounds are clearly etched on the canvas of black sexuality” (West 2001).

Feinstein (2019) underscores the salience of the “intergenerational transmission of white masculinity” asserting how the sexual violence of Black women and girls is central to the “dominant white racial frame and the white-gendered world view” (Feinstein 2019). The dismissal of this violence and the intergenerational lack of agency demonstrates, how white
superiority, privilege, and domination is sustained and maintained. Further, Feinstein (2019) analyzes how sexual violence gave rise to the model of hypersexuality associated with Black Women, which reduced their existence to terms such as “concubine, prostitute, jezebel, wench, and mistress” (Feinstein 2019).

Hall et. al (2013) specifies how rape during slavery further developed the color binary. The scholars note “a white master having sex with his own female slaves was yet another matter, one that required a certain degree of vigilance and delicate attention. Although the topic was one that many White men would rather have avoided altogether, it was evident from the growing number of mulatto offspring that the practice was common enough, to have become problematic” (Hall et. al 2013). Reinforcing complexion bias, the offspring of these relationships formed their own groups, and organizations which served to bolster racial governance. Emphasizing the visceral consequences for African Americans, colorism operates as a sieve and a lucid form of identity suppression. Our current understanding is informed by the primitive and historical racist tropes and demonstrates the absence of equalization in terms of the color caste system. According to the literature, this negotiation of race shapes and formulates a physical identity where one straddles the color binary. The praxis of colorism was intentionally designed to eliminate cultural autonomy and maintain the myth of white purity (Hunter 2005). Skin prejudice reinforces the adoption of a European shade and features for the “fear of being perceived as someone with unacceptably dark skin persists” (Hall et. al 2013).

As exemplified in the scholarship, the African diaspora has been conditioned to deny and reject the biology responsible for variances in complexion to benefit the white racial order. The racial construct of phenotypical capital provides the foundation for examining Black women’s experience with colorism. Hunter (2005) argues that “racism spawned colorism and one key phenomena to understanding skin color stratification among African Americans is the history of sexual violence against African women by white men during slavery. The social order established by powerful white men was founded on two inseparable ingredients: the dehumanization of Africans on the basis of race, and the control women’s sexuality and reproduction” (Hunter 2005). The author notates how rape served as the genesis of the skin color hierarchy and examines how miscegenation yielded the first cohort of light-skin Black people, as Black women were the centerpiece for blackness (Hunter 2005).

The racialization during slavery helped to ground genetic proximity to whiteness. In examining the legacies of colonialism (Hunter 2005) specifies how Black women’s initial and historical experiences serve as the catalyst for beauty equating capital. Per the scholarship, during slavery, Black women were taught to hate themselves, their complexion, and were ridiculed for the natural form of their bodies, (i.e. Sarah Baartman) but the current ethos displays the capitalization of the Black woman’s body via the media and the advent of non-Black women adopting black women’s bodies, features, lips, and tanning to look like light-skin Black women. This phenomenon is called blackfishing. Strmic-Pawl et. al (2021) note that “there is a deficit of academic scholarship on Blackfishing” (Strmic-Pawl et. al 2021). Examples of black fishing or reverse colorism include the Kardashian effect (non-black women tanning to look like light skin Black women and the idea of “acting Black”), the Rachel Dolezal effect (white women portraying themselves as Black women to gain economic benefits), and particularly the BBL (Brazilian Butt Lift; all races of women undergoing surgery to emulate the form and natural shape of a Black woman’s body, ex. Sarah Baartman) movement. Because the threat of blackness pre-dates the current landscape of racial ambiguity, Harris (2018) emphasizes the idea of passing and its correlation to the hypodescent rule (one drop rule: if one parent is Black, the
offspring is Black) and examines how racialized identity, via passing, supports the rejection of Black identity. The author explores the sociological tenets of passing and argues that family income, gender, neighborhood, and religion influence the desire for passing (Harris 2018).

Intra-group racism via the family structure and language are other ways Black women experience colorism. Bonilla et al. (2010) surveys data over the past decade highlighting the reproduction of racism within the family. The sociologists critique family structure, racial socialization and the discourse surrounding family-relevant research on colorism (Bonilla et al. 2010). In addition to the family structure serving as reinforcement of the racial hierarchy, Black women’s experiences with colorism manifest outside of familial lines. Strmic-Pawl et al. (2021) note that the valorization of lightness is “imposed on people of color, by people of color” to reify the racial order that “rewards lightness and penalizes darkness” (Strmic- Pawl et al 2021). Practices of skin tone bias are portrayed in the media, workplace, educational institutions, and in mate selection where light skin is prized.

Matthews and Johnson (2014) explore how complexion partiality impacts the lives and self-esteem of Black women indicating “African American women are influenced by the messages they receive from society. The low self-esteem that is experienced by women of darker complexions is only what her society mirrors; that she is not worthy of feeling appeal in herself. These negative judgements are twofold- brought about by the upholding of white beauty standards and the continuation of colorism” (Matthews and Johnson 2014). The authors argue how the existing framework of identity affects the life outcomes and social capital for Black women. The scholars vocalize how white beauty standards compromise identity formation for Black women by contorting the psyche and self-esteem of Black women (Matthews and Johnson 2014). An integral element conveyed by the authors is the role of the Black male’s contributions to colorism. Matthews and Johnson (2014) note the implications for imitating whiteness and how hip-hop culture articulates partiality to light supremacy. In examining the imitation of whiteness and its influence on self-esteem, Thompson and Keith (2001) display how skin tone shapes self-actualization. For Black women, the authors emphasize the self-efficacy associated with complexion and the “gendered expectations of feminism” (Thompson and Keith 2001). However, authors highlight the gap in literature indicating “there is very little empirical research on the relationship between gender, skin color, and self-concept development” (Thompson and Keith 2001). The scholars unearth social class affiliations and its influence on skin tone highlighting the worsening of the color hierarchy. Thompson and Keith (2001) note colorism’s effect on Black women is much different for Black men. Collins (2000) state “black men’s blackness penalizes them. But because they are not women, valuations of their self-worth do not depend as heavily on their physical attractiveness” (Collins 2000).

The ramifications of skin tone bias are experienced differently and while the authors discuss methods for escaping colorism, that escape is almost always associated with achieving lighter skin (Thompson and Keith 2001). Scholarly advances support Collins’ argument emphasizing the gap in the literature regarding Black men’s experiences with colorism. Johnson and Matthews (2014) emphasize that while colorism has great influence on beauty capital for Black women, there is an absence of scholarly contributions on the disadvantages Black men encounter with colorism. Monk (2014) argues that this is due to the importance of aesthetics and racialized ideas of beauty. He argues that the lack of illustration for how skin color operates in everyday life, demonstrates the gap in determining how color bias affects Black men (Monk 2014). According to the literature, racial classification systems mask intra-racial disparities, emphasizing the “linked fate” that works to reinforce color inequality (Monk 2014). In
conjunction with Monk’s (2014) analysis, the gap reveals that “despite the significant amount of research on skin color stratification, little attention has been paid to how skin color operates uniquely in the lives of women” (Hunter 2005). The author’s analysis survey’s the racial order and illuminates current advances that seek to elevate color bias transnationally (Monk 2014). Evidence suggests intra-racial systems of inequality continue to mobilize skin privilege as a defining feature of mobility, particularly for women. Scholars indicate “while having light skin is beneficial for African-American women, many researchers suggest that lighter tones on African American males are a disadvantage within the Black community” (Johnson and Matthews 2014).

Lastly, research suggests color classism is deeply embedded within the fabric of the Black community and the absence of scholarship displays the necessity for further analysis. The role of this classism works to equalize racist ideology and is chored in maintaining intra-racial tension. Hochschild and Weaver (2017) state “in resolving racial hierarchies, policies designed to alleviate this phenomenon have not been helpful and worsen the salience of the skin color paradox in Black communities” (Hochschild and Weaver 2017). Another gap mentioned in the literature indicates “few studies have accessed whether there has been a progression, decline, or no change in the color attitudes and beliefs of young Black Americans, as compared to the ideological beliefs of previous generations” (Wilder 2010). As mentioned previously, colorism is not specific to the African diaspora, although its infancy is embedded in the institution of slavery. In parts of Africa, Senegal specifically, India, Mexico, China, Japan, and Korea, whiteness is the standard and is evidenced by the multi-billion dollar skin lightening industry, the valorization of light skin and the deconstruction and rejection of ethnic identity and legitimacy.

Senegalese Women, Beauty, and Colorism

Scholars posit that beauty aesthetics in Africa are tied into the cultivation of self. According to the International Journal of Women’s Dermatology, In Senegal, 60% of women bleach their skin (Holland 2022) and the study concludes that although the language used for marketing bleaching creams in the United States has changed, the global market of skin whitening still utilizes terms that prioritize whiteness. Holland (2022) states “after rebranding in the west, many beauty companies are still offering to whiten skin elsewhere” (Holland 2022). Per the research, “50-67% of women in Dakar, and Senegal, used skin bleaching products” (Asumah et al 2022). Now, broadly in Africa, bleaching is heavily practiced, particularly in sub-Saharan African populations (Giudice & Yves 2002). While there are stark differences in African and Western standards of beauty, Ibanga (2017) and Greer (1999) emphasize that regardless of racial and cultural binaries, beauty is important to many (Ibanga 2017 and Greer 1999). It is important to note that the function of white supremacy in the both the United States and Senegal produce differing racial codes, but the outcomes are the same: achievement and reinforcement of racialized beauty.

Next is a discussion of how racial codes are reproduced across different cultures and display the internalization of whiteness for Indian, Mexican and Asian women.

Indian, Mexican, Asian Women, Beauty and Colorism

To further unearth the implementation of colorism, scholars analyze the normalization and desire for whiteness among Indian women. Hall et. al (2013) note “over 30 percent of half a billion females in India admit to using skin-lightening products on a daily basis. As of 2010, the skin-lightening market in India alone was estimated to be well over $432 million, with 80 percent of that market controlled by Hindustan Unilever, the India-based division of the massive European Corporation, Unilever which make Fair & Lovely “fairness cream.” Al-Ahram (the Arab’s world’s most influential news medium) blames the desire to be lighter on a color hierarchy imprinted in our psyches through centuries of White colonial supremacy” (Hall et. al
Similar to the experiences of both Black and Indian women, the threat of dark skin is further problematized among Mexican women. The historical remnants of slavery posited the same meaning of Blackness in Mexican culture. Hunter (2002) states “similar to the African American experience in slavery, indigenous people of what is now Mexico were colonized by Europeans and subjected to racialized hierarchies. In colonial Mexico, the Spaniards developed a color caste system, which privileged light skin and European features, to help maintain their own racial power” (Hunter 2002). The author analyzes the differences in racialization among Mexican women, highlighting the parallels that work to reinforce European standards of beauty. Scholarship establishes that the process of racializing indigenous people, not only reinforced white supremacy, but also reinforced the racist belief systems of the Spanish (Hunter 2005).

Notating the difference in racialization among two groups, Hunter (2005) illuminates how the racialization of Africans derived from their enslavement and the racialization for Mexican women and men derived not only from European colonization but also Spanish colonization (Hunter 2005). The author emphasizes how white supremacy conceptualized both Africans and Mexicans as the same stating that “whites labeled both Mexican and African Americans as heathens, barbaric, and generally as other” (Hunter 2005). Sociological explanations portray the premium associated with light skin and the measures taken, particularly by women, to achieve racial proximity to whiteness. Evidence suggests that in order to attain economic mobility, one must err on the side of racialized advantage by attempting to achieve light skin as the threat of dark skin, per the scholarship, dissolves social capital. Hunter (2005) examines how skin color operates in the lives of Mexican women and outside of nativity and language, the discourse surrounding skin tone among Mexican women, is similar to that of African American women.

Nakano (2008) explores how Asian women are affected by the valorization of whiteness. The author posits that Asian women, similar to that of Black, Indian, and Mexican women, “associate light skin with modernity and social mobility” (Nakano 2008). The literature suggests that Asian skin is not the same as white, European skin, however both reinforce the framework of whiteness (Nakano 2008) and emphasizes that “Asian societies has long idolized ivory-like skin that is like a boiled egg” (Nakano 2008). The author notes that skin lightening products in Asia are not relegated to facial skin lightening, but bleaching and lightening of the knees, elbows, and underarms (Nakano 2008). An interesting element among historic Asian societies, the author highlights how the use of white-lead powder or “white face” makeup was worn by upper class women (Nakano 2008).

This notion is a far cry from the bleaching cream itself, and much different from how other racial groups have been conditioned to achieve proximity to whiteness, however it still reinforces European standards of beauty as markers of status (Nakano 2008). Scholars emphasize the idealization and valuation of light skin revealing how skin tone is a determinant of life chance and mobility. The convergence in the scholars’ analysis showcases how skin tone predicts educational attainment, income and spousal status among Mexican women and the results are in concert with the experiences of Black women and other ethnic groups.

**Material Advantages and Social Mobility/Life Outcomes/Advantages of Light Skin**

“If my skin was darker, I wouldn’t be at my job” -United States Interviewee
The life outcomes and advantages of light skin are best depicted by Carter G. Woodson’s *The Miseducation of the Negro*. Woodson (1993) argues the liability of race, and how racial inferiority is taught, impacting levels of attainment, indicating “when you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions” (Woodson 1993). The author discusses how the imitation of whiteness stimulates the educational processes of the oppressor (Woodson 1993) which in turn, affects social mobility and positions light skin as an advantage. Woodson (1993) demonstrates how the educational framework fuels inferiority and handicaps the ability to conceptualize the falsehood of white, racial superiority. Woodson’s perspective analyzes conditioning and reveals the intent to diminish African philosophy (Woodson 1993) and yield whiteness as paramount. In convergence with Woodson, the scope of scholarship surrounding colorism explore the advantages associated with light skin and achieving whiteness. Race scholars approach life outcomes of light skin by examining the sociological elements that fuel a racial divide. Examples include social mobility, educational access, employment opportunities, and mate selection. Existing literature emphasizes the importance of light skin and whiteness, who made it important, and displays the multitude of reasons why, in a white world, skin color is fundamental. Nakano (2008) situates the significance of skin tone by examining the fluidity of opportunity associated with whiteness. The author discusses how the white supremacist approach is institutional, and the social and political dimensions of power are created at the expense of those who do not identify as white (Nakano 2008). Nakano’s (2009) analysis of examining color as “series of economies” display the impact of skin tone on social mobility. The author’s term of “symbolic capital” surveys how color, in conjunction with featurism, operates in the pursuit of mobility (Nakano 2009).

Race scholars point out the differences in outcomes by skin color, indicating a similar ethos to the institution of slavery. Sociological perspectives examine the racial configurations of slavery, particularly the initial divide of house slaves vs. field slaves. This implementation sustained and authors state that “dark skin, which is associated with Africans or indigenous people, is “assigned a lower status” in society (Hunter 2002). Achieving proximity to whiteness reveals the process of racialization and how cultural survival continues to manifest and inform the color line. The life outcomes of skin tone bias are situated around the element of capital. Throughout the scholarship, three recurrent themes display how life outcomes are conveyed sociologically: educational attainment, mate selection, and income. Hunter (2002) indicates that beauty operates as a form of social capital and the significance of capital showcases the valorization of light skin and the degradation of dark skin. The author illuminates a gap in the literature, indicating the absence of surveying or attacking the racialized nature of beauty (Hunter 2002).

Measuring color, mate selection, the criminal justice system, and educational attainment, scholars utilize national surveys to examine the correlation between educational attainment, income, incarceration, and skin color. Hochschild (2006) considers the Multicity Study of Urban Inequality, Georgia Department of Corrections and the National Survey on Black Americans to illustrate how predictors of life chance uphold racist ideology. In terms of mate selection, Hamilton et. al (2009) suggests that the premium placed on light skin (Hamilton et. al 2009) penalizes women for having dark skin when examining the correlation between skin tone and marriage. The authors dissect the role of socialization in spearheading the advantages associated with light skin and emphasizes the shortage of marriageable Black men. According to the Sentencing Project, “Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly 5 times the rate of white Americans” (https://www.sentencingproject.org). Other facets include criminal history,
felony convictions, drug and alcohol abuse. Hamilton et. al (2009) observe policies that increase marriage yet worsen colorism. The scholars argue that greater mobility is associated with light skin and the small percentage of marriageable Black men reinforce racist ideology by placing the same premium on light skin, while penalizing dark skin. Hunter (2007) states “dark-skinned people lack the social and economic capital that light skin provides, and are therefore disadvantaged in education, employment, and housing. Additionally, dark skin is generally not regarded as beautiful, so dark-skinned women often lose out in the dating and marriage markets” (Hunter 2007). When looking at the intersection of skin color and the law, Jones (2000) contends that colorism is rampant in the criminal justice system and correlates to length of sentencing (Hochschild 2006). In order for racial classifications to dissipate, the legal system needs to design policies that dismantle racism and provide equal and fair opportunities, regardless of complexion (Jones 2000). Even when controlling for income, Hochschild (2006) states “dark skinned blacks earned less than seven-tenths as much as light-skin blacks” (Hochschild 2006).

Further, Monk (2015) surveys the correlation between skin tone and health. His analysis demonstrates that skin tone significantly increases levels of discrimination as it relates to health outcomes. The author posits that skin tone is a form of both capital and social status and displays how health disparities exacerbate inequality. In further surveying lightness as capital, Hunter (2002) illustrates how beauty as capital privileges light skin. The author situates skin color hierarchies as stratifying elements that seek to reproduce dimensions of colonialism and racism (Hunter 2002). Evidenced by the literature, these racialized paradigms predict educational attainment, income, and spousal status (Hunter 2002).

Scholars converge in their perspectives regarding skin tone and life chance. The scholarship conveys the embedded function of white supremacist ideals and the modes of governing for opportunity, social mobility, access, and acceptance. Scholars conclude that the framework of white supremacy problematizes blackness in a way that stifles economic mobilization and prosperity. Investigating the correlation between education and access, scholars posit that complexion influences the type of education and educational access one can obtain. For instance, among the Latinx population, Bustamante et. al (2021) emphasizes how complexion impacts life chance and life experiences. The authors’ survey data (located in the appendices) reveal the impact of these experiences.

While the dissertation surveys and explores other ethnicities and their experiences with colorism, it centers Black women’s experiences with colorism. Although Black men were part of the interview sample, the focus of the dissertation centers Black women. In surveying life chance, evidence suggests skin tone impacts varying levels of life chance for Black women and men. For example, Hayes (2016) states the following:

“Lighter skinned black people worked in higher socioeconomic division than those with darker skin (Higher rankings in jobs).”
- Even after slavery ended, lighter blacks had advantages for jobs and schools.
- Light skinned black people have a higher income, complete more years of schooling, and live in better neighborhoods.
- Skin color associated with qualities of life.
- During the civil rights movement, being light skin could be used as a form of safety against racial violence.” (Hayes 2016)

Critical Race and legal scholars approach colorism as a mainstay of white supremacy. Scholars evaluate geographical consolidations of whiteness by examining white supremacy’s role in the formation of color stratification. As stated previously, colorism like whiteness as
capital, are rooted in the institution of slavery and so is the stifling of opportunity and educational access (Moore 2005). Current manifestations of racialized beauty operate in conjunction with colorism and impact the outcomes of economic capital and beauty. Because beauty is racialized, examining the intersection of colorism provides a framework for surveying the advantages associated with light skin privilege. Colorism via social mobility leverages the hierarchies that racialize beauty, restrict access to economic capital and reproduce racism via colorism. As stated by some of the interview participants, beauty standards approximate whiteness and reinforce access, racial governance and dominance central to canonizing the framework of white supremacy and impacts the outcomes of social mobility.

The graph (located in the appendices) showcases income differences by skin tone. The following section will discuss the theoretical frameworks that ground this research. As mentioned throughout the dissertation, there are several theoretical perspectives that bring nuance to the colorism argument. And while this dissertation mentions a host of sociological theories that highlight the complexities of colorism, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are used as the grounding frameworks for this dissertation. These theories have been selected to ground the dissertation as they utilize a sociological lens to illuminate the currents of colorism, pulling in various sociological tenets that explore the function of colorism, laws that reinforce colorism, racialized beauty, and skin bleaching.

**Racialized Beauty, Colorism and the Grounding Theoretical Frameworks**

Race scholars argue that Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are critical theories that display the functions of colorism and racialized beauty. Brief introductions of other theories are mentioned, but the study is grounded by Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality. Examining colorism through the advent of racial formation in the United States and intersectionality provides the premise for understanding colorism’s lineage and race as a social construct. Intersectional scholarship provides both critical and analytical methods for examining the contours of colorism. Intersectional analysis examines the matrix of oppression, systemic levels of exclusion, and illuminates the forces that function simultaneously to reinforce racial bias. Both racial formation and intersectionality reveal how calculated levels of oppression shape experiences with colorism. Identity is regulated and African Americans and other ethnic racial groups are discouraged from conceptualizing an innate identity. Instead, one is conditioned to conform to an identity model that still doesn’t guarantee proximity to whiteness, safety, mobility, agency and acceptance. This erasure reconstitutes a framework not innate to the chemistry of the African diaspora and others, but one enforced by white supremacist ideology.

Existing scholarship indicates that lighter skin is a form of social capital, and scholars explain how lighter skin serves as the cornerstone for mate selection, social mobility, income, educational access, employment, and a predictor of life chance. Transnational circuits of colorism display that this phenomenon is not specific to the African diaspora and Black culture. Colorism transcends, transnationally affecting many Asian, Mexican, and Indian cultures, women particularly. With the emergence of skin bleaching and lightening creams, evidence suggests women are conditioned to adopt an identity governed by structural and internalized racism. This racialized practice is designed to muddy the psyche, force a rejection of cultural hegemony, and amplify the “struggle for existence” (Bell 1993). Colorism is designed to alienate and eradicate all facets of identity and muddles the conceptualization of color prejudice and power asymmetry.

The importance of Critical Race Theory and its connection to the laws that profit off of the degradation and use of skin bleaching products is paramount in understanding the
intersection of colorism and the law. Critical Race Theory demonstrates that the laws that allow the sale of skin bleaching products reinforce the commodification of complexion and illuminate how these laws in other global markets, i.e. Senegal, India, and Asia allow for racialized capitalism. French colonialism on Senegal and slavery in the United States uplift the importance of Critical Race Theory for this study as it illuminates the gendered responses of colorism, highlights laws both currently and historically that leverage racialized capitalism, and displays how historical implementations of laws surrounding complexion, still show up in the 21st century, but in deeply interesting ways. This is partially demonstrated by the language used to market skin bleaching products in Senegal and in other countries. In comparison, in the United States, while the sale of skin bleaching products falls far behind Senegal and other global markets, there are other ways that racialized beauty and capitalism continue to influence the conceptualization of beauty while uplifting the tenets of Critical Race Theory and its connection to the laws surrounding the commodification of complexion. Hartlep (2009) observes Critical Race Theory as the embedded, historical consequences of racialized oppression. The race-centric critiques of Critical Race Theory focus on emancipatory change for oppressed groups (Walton 2019). Critical Race scholars indicate the tenants of Critical Race Theory are: (1) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (2) the idea of an interest convergence; (3) the social construction of race; (4) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (5) the notion that whites have actually been recipients of civil rights legislation (Hartlep 2009). Critical Race Theory analyzes the replication of racism, and highlights the sociological elements that leverage whiteness to reproduce colorism. While all facets of Hartle’s analysis are important, this dissertation will rely on the following statements to guide the research: (1) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (3) the social construction of race; (4) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling (Hartlep 2009).

Critical race theory and its connection to colorism emphasizes the trends in literature on racial socialization. Bonilla et. al. (2010) discusses the absence of colorism in family research, but suggests a shift in the color line influenced colorism’s prominence within familial literature. In examining colorism through the lens of whiteness, the scholars indicate that racial stratification affected the “social construction of families’ lives” (Bonilla et. al. 2010). Hall et. al (2013) indicates keeping familial lines “light” is a skin prejudice that helps to reinforce the bias, the reality of the color line, and the structure of the racial hierarchy employed by racist ideology. Further, the authors emphasize that skin prejudice isn’t only apparent in the familial structure, but its visibility is apparent in intra and inter group communities, politics and entertainment. The authors discuss how Black women are portrayed throughout entertainment as well as politics and how these representations are not accurate reflections of the people as a whole. Hall et. al (2013) discuss how narratives pertaining to skin color have not changed and the trauma dominates the landscape of racialization.

Collins and Bilage (2020) states “intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age among others as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences” (Collings and Bilage 2020). Intersectionality demonstrates how racialized elements function concurrently to reinforce both colorist and racist assertions and oppression. Applying an intersectional lens to colorism and racialized beauty illuminates how whiteness as capital is prioritized. Intersectionality’s critical approach to colorism amplifies how
power relations are not mutually exclusive, but function concurrently (Crenshaw 1991; Collins and Bilage 2020). Crenshaw (1991) explores dimensions of identity as intersectional and discusses how intra-group differences create tension among groups (Crenshaw 1991), which serves as the primary reinforcement of colorism, racialized beauty, and racist ideology. Collins and Bilage’s (2020) four tenets of power: structural, cultural, disciplinary and interpersonal demonstrate how colorism is able to transcend beyond complexion and beauty. These tenets highlight the nuances of complexion and racialized beauty and showcases the negotiation to leverage social mobility; and displays how achieving whiteness is front and center of the idea of achievement. This effects the production of colorism as it demonstrates the intersectional function of colorism and displays how colorism goes beyond complexion and identity and is all encompassing and also showcases how racialized beauty is reinforced via different elements of human interaction. Systemic Racism Theory emphasizes the conceptualization and internalization of racism. Race scholars highlight how the consequences of racism embed in the psyche and allow for the ramifications of these consequences to be manifested. Feagin (2006) examines how racialized stereotypes pervade all levels of society and are continuously reproduced. The author also delves into how political and social worlds are influenced by the institution of racism and how this oppression is embedded in racialized hierarchies (Feagin 2006).

The next sections of the dissertation will focus on the methodology used to facilitate the data, and the analysis generated from this methodology. I chose to do qualitative research as it can be difficult to quantify experiences with colorism. Because some elements of colorism cannot be quantified, I relied on the lived experience of participants to bring nuance to this work. As you will see in the methodology section, participants ranged in age and experience with colorism and many of them had been affected by and participated in colorism. The qualitative data I was able to gather, both in Senegal and the United States, allowed me to peer into the lives of participants and learn about their conceptualizations and experiences with skin tone bias. This methodology, and the experience of being able to travel to Senegal and facilitate interviews also allowed me to compare and contrast different interpretations of achieving whiteness meant to different groups of people. I learned that while their journeys to achieving social and racial capital and legitimacy are very different, the outcome is mostly the same. In closing, these theories showcase how proponents of racism reinforce colorism and demonstrate how laws leverage racism for profit. They also helped to produce the argument surrounding racialized beauty, its connection to colorism, life chance and how white supremacy is a mainstay of racialized beauty.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Sociologists delineate that a qualitative method of sociological research allows the “social scientist to directly interact with those whom he or she is studying. The social scientist attempts to see the world from their perspective and to interpret their practices in a meaningful way” (Sallaz 2018). However, authors posit that the disadvantage of interviews lies in the power dynamics between the researcher and the participant (Hai-Jew 2015) and other disadvantages of interviews such as bias, power and resistance (Nunkoosing 2005) serving as impediments to authenticity. This project relied on a qualitative approach and I chose to facilitate interviews as they allowed for the engagement with lived experience surrounding colorism and racialized beauty. I also incorporated billboard advertisements to highlight the differences in marketing strategies utilized in Senegal and the United States. I have provided a chart that displays the differences in skin bleaching and colorism marketing. This method allowed participants to share their stories, which brought nuance to new and existing colorism scholarship. For the sample, I facilitated (35) interviews with Black, Senegalese, Asian, and Indian women and Black, Senegalese, and Mexican men to understand how colorism appears during childhood via socialization, i.e. how a person is raised and conditioned during their upbringing. Part of the interview sample included member(s) of Black sororities and fraternities. This method allowed me to unpack colorism’s connection to classism during the interview process, the color language used in Black communities and in hip hop culture to draw racialized and colorist distinctions. For organization purposes, I will focus on Senegal first, and the United States second. NVivo was also used to code and interpret the data. The themes revealed in NVivo mirrored the themes highlighted at the beginning of this section. I used NVivo to garner and code recurring themes in the study, but found there were a lot of similarities to the same themes I pulled out during the interview process. The interviews also dissected examples of color language utilized to further proximity to whiteness, which is detailed later in the data and analysis chapter. The recruitment flyer could not be posted social media to generate interview participants and could not be displayed in public settings, as this was to prevent any negativity and bias within the data. The organizations and universities I contacted and shared the recruitment flyer with were: University of Tennessee, Knoxville sociology courses, Basic Needs Initiative representative at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, the Senegal Research Initiative, Mantan Indian Student Association at University of Tennessee, Knoxville, as well as my own colleagues, professional and conference networks. These organizations used snowballing and helped to recruit participants for the research and to provide depth to the sample in terms of locale, educational interests, and experience.

As the literature suggests, interviews engage the participants lived experience. Because the lived experience of colorism and racialized beauty has limitations in areas of measurement, one on one interviews provided the nuance required for understanding the challenges of colorism. I conducted (35) interviews (in person and via Zoom) with Black, Indian, Mexican and Asian women, and Black and Mexican men, from ages 18 to 45 between June and August 2022 to gauge their lived experiences with colorism. Seven (7) of the interviews were Senegalese participants. It is important to note that the complexion/race of the Indian, and Mexican participants were all a light brown complexion (see Ellis Monk’s skin tone scale in the appendices for reference). And although they were considered and identified themselves as light brown, they all indicated that by their countries and some of their families’ pedestalization and
upholding of white standards of beauty, they were all considered too dark, and not light enough. By adding the international element to my research and traveling to Senegal, I was hoping that these interviews would shed light on the differences in experiences with skin bleaching and colorism, and the impact these practices have on life chance, or social mobility. The duration of the interviews varied dependent upon participant response time, but each participant was given an hour and thirty minutes for the interview. While other racial and ethnic groups are highlighted in the dissertation, I have chosen to focus on Black women and men, as the practice of colorism is rooted in colonization and slavery. Further, I chose Indian women as research displays similarities in experiences with African Americans (Banks 2015) regarding colorism. I selected (35) participants as it positions well with the timeframe of completing the dissertation. The interviews were conducted in two places: Popeguine-Ndayane, Senegal and Chattanooga, Tennessee. In Senegal, the interviews were facilitated in person at the Senegal Research Institute. I chose Chattanooga, Tennessee for several reasons: (1) the city has an incredibly rich history concerning experiences of African Americans and the challenges endured to attain social mobility; (2) I am originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee and have an established network where interviewees were easily accessible; (3) and historically, bleaching advertisements saturated the Chattanooga Times Free Press Newspaper in the 1950s and targeted Black women to push proximity to whiteness.

To examine colorism in Africa, I traveled to Popeguine-Ndayane, a city in Senegal, West Africa to facilitate interviews. Popeguine-Ndayane “is a small village on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean in Senegal, located 70km south of Dakar, on the Petite Cote, in the department of M’Bour in the region of Thies Region” https://travel.sygic.com/en/poi/popenguine-ndayane-city:1397492. I was selected by the Senegal Research Institute as a research fellow to examine colorism and skin bleaching in Senegal and the institute selected the interviewees via snowballing. The Senegal Research Institute was “a three week cultural immersion program that invited early scholars, cultural practitioners, visual artists, and students from the undergraduate to doctoral level. This institute is crafted for those who would like to enhance their life experiences in West Africa, while using a decolonial, transnational approach to engage a myriad of fields, including: African/a and gender studies, religious studies, visual art (documentary, photography), therapy, anthropology, and environmental studies” (Senegal Research Immersion Initiative). I had previously traveled to India and learned that colorism was rampant throughout the country, so traveling to Africa made sense considering the data surrounding skin bleaching and the use of skin lighteners in Africa. Evidence suggests that the skin bleaching industry in Senegal is a common practice (Mahe 2003), and visiting Senegal to conduct interviews provided nuance to the transnational portion of the dissertation. Additionally, conducting interviews in Senegal was critical because it is the home of Goree Island, one of the locations of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and French colonization. The Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville approved the study and I was able to facilitate the interviews in Senegal.

The original plan was to facilitate (20) interviews in Senegal. However, due to structural and organizational challenges of the program, I was only able to facilitate (10) interviews which consisted of seven Senegalese interviews and three American interviews. Because the primary languages in Senegal are Wolof and French, a translator was present during the interviews. Because these interviews were taking place internationally, the screening and informed consent documents were delivered via email to the organizer of the program to distribute to participants between April and May 2022, before my arrival to Senegal. The remaining (25) interviews were
facilitated in Chattanooga, Tennessee via Zoom. Stateside, the interviews were facilitated on a
daily to weekly basis. Participants were recruited through university listservs, sociology course
announcements, snowballing, my professional and conference networks. I created
the advertisement/flyer, distributed to my professional networks and allowed for at least a day to two
weeks to begin scheduling interviews, based on participants’ availability. Some participants were
available the same day the recruitment flyer was distributed and we proceeded accordingly. Once
a participant confirmed their interest, they were provided dates of availability via email, or text,
the screening questionnaire, and an informed consent document, which had to be electronically
signed and emailed back to me before the interview. The screening questionnaire was created
using Qualtrics. Once interest was confirmed and the screening and consent form were submitted
to me, I proceeded with scheduling the interview. Participants received an email communication
with zoom information for the interviews in Chattanooga, Tennessee, duration, and a confirmed
date for the interview. For the screening, the Qualtrics survey was used to quantify the
demographic data of the participants, and to help with compiling the results. Interviews were
alphabetized to maintain confidentiality and anonymity among the participants. For instance,
interview and screening A, B, etc. Components of the screening are as follows: 1.) ethnicity; 2) 
city; 3) age; 4) marital status; 5) gender; 6) occupation; 7) highest level of education.

For the interview sample, I used the Monk Color Scale. This scale was appropriate and
important as it ensured that wide variety of skin tones were represented in the sample. This scale
also ensured complexion inclusivity and because of the scholarly contribution of Dr. Ellis Monk,
this color spectrum helped to add nuance to my data. Skin Tone Research via Google AI states
that the Monk Skin Tone Scale was “developed by Harvard professor, Dr. Ellis Monk, the MST
Scale provides a broader spectrum of skin tones that can be leveraged to evaluate datasets and
ML models for better representation” Skin Tone Research @ Google AI. Among 35 people
(n=35), 7 of which are of Senegalese (4 Senegalese men; 3 Senegalese women aged 18-45 years;
mean 2.17), 23 females and 12 males aged 18-45 years participated in the research study. (1)
African American male participant had used skin bleaching agents throughout his life; (1)
Senegalese female participant admitting to using bleaching cream, but has since stopped due to
the cancerous agents in the bleaching cream she was using. Remaining participants admitted to
never using skin bleaching creams. The Qualtrics screening highlighted the racial demographics
of the interview sample, as well as the additional qualifiers utilized to gauge overall
demographics. This study revealed profound nuances that will help to maximize and strengthen
the scholarship surrounding issues of colorism and racialized beauty. The discussion of the
differences in education, the economic factors, and the ways in which many participants believed
they had to present themselves in society and how many defined themselves relative to
experiences with colorism showcased the importance of this research. As indicated previously,
the study sought to learn of the experiences of people who had encountered or experienced
colorism and the insight many of the participants provided displayed the embedded
conceptualization of what race is thought to be and how it continues to function. Additionally, as
part of the study, I visited the Archives Section of the Chattanooga Public Centennial Library to
pull photos to examine the language used to market beauty products in Chattanooga from the
1920s-1950s. The finding from this photo-elicitation revealed that the same language used
historically, was the same language used present day in other countries, particularly in Senegal.
The findings also revealed that some of the ingredients listed in the creams are still some of the
same agents utilized in bleaching products sold in various global markets. This demonstrates an
interesting duality in terms of how colorism was reinforced for profit here in the United States at
one point in time and displays how colorism is reinforced transnationally, today, through language. This archival analysis also revealed a sense of stagnation in Senegal and in other countries that still currently utilize racist and colorist language for generate profit and leverage racism. In terms of my own positionality shaping the experiences with my participants, I went into my interviews open, willing to listen, and engage my participants and their experiences.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Count</th>
<th>Total %</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45 years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
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<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
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<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
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<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer Not to Say</td>
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<td>5.7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Image for Country of Origin
Figure 2: Image for Country of Origin in Africa
As shown on pages 29-31, the sample of (35) participants, seven (7) of which were Senegalese (5 Senegalese men and 2 Senegalese women) represented the following racial groups: 1) African American; 2) Asian; 3) Indian; 4) Hispanic/Latinx. The sample of participants selected represented the age range of 18-45 years of age, a wide array of occupations, locations, and conceptualizations regarding experiences with colorism both here in the United States and abroad, particularly in Senegal. Participants were from various parts of Senegal as listed above, and the United States and represented different generations and different experiences with the lived experience of skin bleaching and colorism. Once the screening was complete, the consent form was signed and a date was selected to interview, the participant was placed on the schedule. Some interviews happened on the same day the screening and consent were submitted. On the day of the interview, I sent reminders to the participant(s). I provided the following statement before starting the interview:

“Sociologists posit that colorism, life chance and the racialized nature of beauty are intertwined. My research seeks to understand the role of colorism, how beauty is racialized and how these processes impact life chance. To evaluate the correlation between these sociological processes, I asked the following interview questions. If at any point you are uncomfortable or if there are questions you do not want to answer, please let me know. I will press record for the audio to be saved to the cloud on Zoom and we will proceed with the interview.” After I provided this statement, the interview began.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. How do you define race?
3. When did you realize your race?
4. In what ways has race impacted your lived experience?
5. How do you define colorism?
6. In what ways have you experienced colorism? Or skin tone discrimination?
7. What factors influenced your professional attainment and merit?
8. How does colorism affect life chances?
9. What do you think about the light skin vs. dark skin debate that has happened and is happening in the Black community?
10. How has some of the color language you’ve heard racializes beauty in hip hop?
11. What similarities exist in your community that relate to racializing beauty?
12. What are your thoughts about skin bleaching?
13. Have you ever considered bleaching your skin?
14. Do you think beauty can be defined?
15. What is the blueprint for beauty?
16. In thinking about movie roles and portrayals, in what ways does skin tone matter?
17. What can we do to solve colorism?

During the interview, weather in person or via zoom, my field notes examined body language, tonality, types of emotional responses, etc. Questions were revised after each interview, dependent upon how the questions are answered. During the interviews, participants went into great detail regarding their experiences with colorism and many people circled back to their childhoods to emphasize the consciousness and highlighted how some of the language used in their childhoods centered colorism. For instance, one participant mentioned going to a summer camp as a child and given an umbrella every day. The participant’s grandmother said “use this umbrella at camp every day. It will stop you from getting so dark.” Participants discussed being treated differently due to their skin tone, being marketable or not being marketable in terms of
dating, educational access and opportunities, and even benefitting as well as not benefitting from having a lighter complexion. As indicated previously, there were several structural and organizational challenges I faced while attempted to conduct my research. There were issues that came about during the research process in Senegal, that should have and could have been avoided had proper planning been prioritized by the program, but nonetheless I focused on the goal of the research and the study was approved by the IRB before I arrived to Senegal. The next section will analyze the interview data to illuminate common themes, threads, and compare Senegalese women’s experiences with colorism in Senegal, to Black women’s experiences with colorism in the United States. Be advised that some of the stories and quotes evoke emotional responses and reflect how and why the participants felt the way they did about their experiences with colorism. The analysis will detail the differences among racial groups in achieving both racial and social capital and particularly how the skin bleaching phenomenon is experienced both domestically and internationally. I will rely on the stories, the data, and the lived experience to display the cyclical nature of colorism, and how history has repeated and manifested in a lot of ways. While vastly different, the research highlighted the similarities and the differences among the racial groups interviewed. Harking back to my own positionality, it was important for me to create an emotional safe space for participants to share their experiences and detail the impact colorism had on their lives. I allowed the participants to guide the conversations, which allowed for more depth in their responses. In closing, my positionality comforted my participants in helping them to understand that someone cared enough to help shift the narrative, whether that was through conversation, or contributing to the colorism literature and scholarship.
CHAPTER FOUR:
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Before traveling to Senegal, I visited the Chattanooga Centennial Public Library’s Archives. The purpose of visiting the archives was to examine the language in terms of how beauty products, particularly skin bleaching agents, were marketed and compare that up against the language used in Senegal to market skin bleaching products. These beauty advertisements bring nuance to the discourse, particularly its connection to racialized beauty, racialized capitalism, and the reinforcement of colorism. The companies that produced the products during the time period of advertisements I pulled from the library, were able to profit from racism and the laws that allowed the production of skin bleaching agents. I pulled advertisements from the 1920s and beyond, and the findings revealed a very interesting similarity to what I was about to witness in gathering data for the transnational portion of my research. As indicated previously, these advertisement constitutes a discourse in the fact that although the language is different now, in the United States, it is still currently as blatant and racist in Senegal, as it once was here in the United States. The advertisements also allow for the discourse of comparison and traveling to Senegal allowed me to draw comparisons between the regions I was studying. In drawing a comparison to these historical advertisements and present day racialized beauty, one of the most profound narrations of Black women’s desire for whiteness and the rejection of blackness is outlined in Toni Morrison’s, The Bluest Eye. Morrison (2007) depicts a young, African American girl’s idealization and obsession with whiteness. The author captures the undercurrent of colorism, similar to the goal of the advertisements, exposing Pecola’s hatred toward her blackness. Morrison’s work demonstrates the cruelty of self-hatred, and racism, via colorism. Secondly, the Netflix film, Passing, engages the duality of colorism. The film examines the lives of two Black Women, one who affirms her identity and one who rejects her identity in an effort to pass as a white woman. The film Passing is important in understanding the framework of colorism, as it provides fertile ground for public and cultural context, while examining the internalized response of colorism, for social and economic capital and attainment. The film highlights the agency associated with being able to pass, and the repercussions for doing so. Therefore, the delve into the archives helped to set the stage for examining how skin bleaching advertisements in Senegal reproduce colorism. Please note this chapter will be split into two sections: Senegalese findings will be presented first and the United States findings will be presented second.

This was by far the most challenging, yet the most enriching portion of this research process. For a portion of the transnational piece of my research, I traveled to a land I had only seen and heard about on TV. Africa was always a place I had wanted to see with my own eyes at some point in my life and interestingly enough it came to pass for me. I landed in Senegal a day after I was supposed to arrive. My flight was cancelled until 1PM the next day. The pilot didn’t arrive for the initial flight. No one knew where he was. The other three pilots that were there continued to call and try to reach him to no avail. The pilots that were there kept coming out of the plane saying we would leave at 5 o’clock, then 6 o’clock, then 7 o’clock, then 8 o’clock then 10:30pm, until finally he mentioned that the fourth pilot didn’t arrive, that the flight had been cancelled and we could not leave until the next day. I was livid, but tried to keep a positive state of mind considering the circumstances, to which I couldn’t do anything about. I slept on the ground near a side window in the JFK airport in New York. I was in and out of sleep, angry, and...
sore from sleeping on the hard ground. But I kept thinking, “I’m going to Africa.” I could have left and got a hotel, but the lines for a hotel were incredibly long and most of the hotels that were available were at least an hour away from JFK, and I wasn’t willing to take the risk considering the traffic in New York, so I just stayed in the airport. At around 7am, I got up off of the ground and went to have breakfast in the airport. Around 11am, the airport staff arrived and mentioned that the flight to Dakar would be leaving at 1PM. People were excited and ready to leave. I know I was. There were several people who slept in the airport as well, so it wasn’t just me there sleeping due to the cancellation of the flight. After boarding the plane, and after a long, (9) hour flight, the plane descended in Dakar, Senegal. I looked out the window, but it was so dark, I couldn’t see anything. I landed in Dakar after 8pm, which was 1am stateside. I called and texted the director of the program and let her know I had arrived. She mentioned she was outside of the airport waiting for me. I was nervous. I was excited. And I didn’t really know what to expect. All I knew is I was in a place I had always wanted to be, and a place I had always dreamed of going.

When I entered the airport, I looked around and noticed a distinct smell. It wasn’t unpleasant, just a distinct smell. I started walking, following the crowd, and I looked around and noticed soldiers carrying AR-15 guns. Soldiers were all over the airport with these guns. All uniformed, their attire signaled that they were authority figures. The airport was extremely hot. I arrived to a booth where a man behind a glass counter checked my passport, asked me where I was going and why was I there. After I responded telling him I was there to conduct research, he slid a finger print machine under the glass and told me to place my index finger on the machine. I did so, and gave me back my passport and signaled that I was good to go. I then proceeded to baggage claim to get my luggage. It took almost two hours to get my luggage. After I retrieved my luggage, I walked to the exit point of the airport. As I walked to the exit, the double doors opened and there were what seemed like thousands of people bargaining, selling things, taxis, etc. It was busy. I spotted the Director of the program, and she and I got into a taxi and we left to go to the institute where I’d be staying along with some others in the cohort for the program. During the drive to the institute, I noticed that we stopped to let a herd of large white animals go by. I have no idea what type of animals they were, because it was very dark, but I looked closely and noticed they were white. There were no signs, no street labels, no street names, and no street lights, or red lights. Directions were written on random bricks and stone walls during the drive to the institute. During the drive, the road become really rocky, and it almost felt like we were driving through large piles of sand, (to which I later noticed we were driving through sand) but I could see that we were arriving in some form of a village. One of the structures in the village had a bright light at the top and we stopped directly in front of it. It was the institute. Once we arrived to the institute, and I got out of the back of the taxi, these black gates that looked like a wall with a window at the very top of the gates, opened and I proceeded to go through. Once inside the gate, there was a man, with skin the color of charcoal and skin that was flawless, smiling with a cigarette hanging from his lip; we will call him Zamba. He met me at the stairs and welcomed me to Senegal. He grabbed my suitcases and took them upstairs to the room where I’d be staying. I entered the room and looked around. It was a really nice space. There was a mosquito net over the canopy bed and the bedding was blue with white circular designs/patterns. I noticed that the blanket on top of the sheets was paper thin, and I later realized it was because of the heat. Nothing could really cool down the room completely because there was no air conditioning in the room. There was a standing, rotating fan, but it was still hot. But that didn’t really matter. I had my own bathroom and the doors in the room led to a beautiful patio with all sorts of flowers and greenery I’d never seen. After the program director came to the room, and shared with me a
few things about my stay, she left and I shut the bedroom door. I stood back, smiled, and looked out on the patio and said to myself “I am in Africa.” As I journeyed through Senegal, I noticed a lot of things: bleaching advertisements, the hustle and bustle city, the hijabs, the grilling of fish with the head and eyes intact late at night, exercise sessions happening very late at night on the side of road, fresh tea leaves being sold, being told “welcome home my sister” as I entered the villages, the friendliness, the hospitality, and the getting stopped by the police, none of whom carry guns in Senegal. One thing that stood out the most: I noticed that people were very thin and fit, and took exercise and physical activity very seriously. Senegal was quite the experience and one I’ll never forget and one I’ll always hold close.

There was something very spiritual, and very surreal about being on African soil. I felt connected. I felt this sense of freedom I can’t really explain. I felt lighter. And interestingly, for a while, I felt at home. It was an extreme culture shock, but I worked to adapt quickly. Particularly when visiting Goree Island, one of the locations of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and walking inside, and touching the walls of the slave dungeons and standing in the Door of No Return facing the Atlantic ocean. Zamba took us to Goree Island and he shared with us that there are many of our ancestors’ bodies at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean and that we have to always remember their sacrifice. It was a surreal experience. The beauty of Africa is difficult to put into words. The air was fresh, and the dirt on the ground was a reddish brown color that saturated and covered your feet regardless of what type of shoes you had on. The heat was a type of heat I had never experienced and my complexion changed at least three shades. The teas were fresh. The food was fresh. Like fresh coming from the ocean every day. The moringa seed I had was fresh. My body wasn’t used to this and I got extremely sick, but I worked to power through as long as I could. As I progressed through my stay, a week after my arrival, I began conducting interviews in Senegal. All of the interviews I conducted were held at the institute. Many of the respondents were excited about the research and revealed to me many times to continue this work because it brings nuance to the generational issues of colorism. Even though there were challenges outside of my control, I am grateful to have had this experience. Below are the stories and responses from both Senegalese men and women and how they view the practice of colorism and bleaching, and particularly their thoughts about respecting darker complexions.

To map the outline of this chapter, I will discuss the two recurrent themes, key findings and detail the stories and quotes from the interviewees, Black men and Latinx men’s, as well as Indian women’s experiences with colorism. I will also discuss my arrival to Africa and its contributions to my research. This section of the dissertation will be structured around two recurrent themes that include subsets of each theme. I will also highlight the language used in different racial groups that reinforce colorist distinctions. In analyzing the interview data, several themes were highlighted, but the analysis will be situated around two primary themes: Black Women’s experiences with colorism in Senegal and Black Women’s experiences with colorism in the United States. However, the two main themes that came about during the interview process (Black Women’s experiences with colorism in Senegal and Black Women’s experiences with colorism in the United States) are comprised of different elements which will be emphasized through participant responses. The additional themes from the interviews are as follows: 1) power and legitimacy (both Senegal and United States); 2) colorism through language (United States); 3) the skin bleaching market (Senegal, Asia, India, and United States). During daily observations in Senegal, there was a billboard advertising bleaching cream that read “Clear White.” The billboard included a woman, to display the result of using the bleaching cream to achieve a lighter complexion. Locally known as “xessel” (Yves and Guidice 2002),
bleaching is an incredibly common practice in Senegal and one of the primary reasons for selecting this area to facilitate this research. The data gathered during my travels to Senegal reinforces the standpoint of the literature in acknowledging white supremacy’s role in identity degradation and complexion rejection. It is important to note “the Senegalese people are composed of several populations with different skin pigmentation according to ethnic origin” (Yves and Guidice 2002). The interview data articulates the cyclical nature of colorism and the attempts to dissolve the phenomenon. Data will be stored and archived in both the university system Qualtrics and on the Zoom cloud until the dissertation has been defended, completed and accepted in TRACE.

The Interview data in Senegal highlighted the effects of white supremacy and the internalization as well as the rejection of European beauty standards. Interview responses revealed that while some people shun skin bleaching, it is heavily acknowledged that bleaching is practiced in Africa, more so by women. In Africa, the bleaching industry is a multi-million dollar enterprise with bleaching advertisements in various locations and intersections. Data gathered in Senegal showcased rejection for the use of bleaching, however, one participant acknowledged that at one point, she used to bleach her skin, but after learning that the chemicals in the cream are cancer-causing agents, she stopped bleaching her skin. In her interview she mentioned being told to “go away with your dark skin” and that “bleaching is used because they think lighter skin is beautiful.” Another participant mentioned that while she does not bleach her skin, her sister does. The subset of theme (1), power and legitimacy was most present among interview participants in both Senegal and the United States. The interviewees’ responses harkened back to Fanon’s depiction of blackness existing in three realms: the self, the culture, and the ancestors (Fanon 2012). Power is a derivative of legitimacy and scholars note that “race capital can be purchased through skin bleaching creams or cosmetic surgery” (Hunter 2020).

**Chapter Four THEME (1): Senegalese Women’s Experiences with Colorism in Senegal: Beauty and Bleaching & the Skin Bleaching Market:**

“Women think that if I am not light, I am not beautiful” – Senegalese Interviewee

The interview data gathered in Senegal displayed the methods utilized by Senegalese women to achieve both power and legitimacy (there was a mentioning of some Senegalese men in Africa using skin bleaching agents, but evidence suggests this practice is way more prevalent among Senegalese women). One of the primary mechanisms for achieving power and legitimacy was via skin bleaching. In Senegal, light skin meant beautiful, increased marriageability, social status and economic capital. While Senegalese men were interviewed, this section will focus primarily on the female participants. All of the Senegalese men interviewed denounced skin bleaching, the bleaching market and stated that they have never used skin bleaching agents, but knew men in other parts of Africa who bleach their skin. Senegalese interviewees stated that women bleach their skin for several reasons: 1) to be seen as beautiful; 2) to gain status; 3) to look white; and 4) to look light skin. To further explore the conceptualization of skin bleaching, the interviews I conducted in Senegal shed light onto how skin bleaching is both practiced and perceived. Among the Senegalese interviews, you will find that most men demonstrate a disdain for skin bleaching, but acknowledged its practice and prevalence in the country. The next section will delve into the stories and responses particularly from Senegalese men and women who participated in an interview. The first quote I’d like to highlight is the first Senegalese interview I
conducted. This interviewee, a Senegalese male, was twenty-one years of age. As he entered the room for the interview, I noticed that he was extremely tall. He had to be about 6’6, or 6’7 and his skin, the color of dark chocolate looked like silk. There wasn’t a flaw anywhere on his skin. He had a very thin frame, but looked incredibly healthy. He was very calm, and seemed excited and interested in the research and interview. Upon entering the room, he removed his shoes and sat in the wooden chair facing me. I introduced myself and shared with him that I was student from America conducting research on colorism and skin bleaching. After getting past his initial inquiries and nervousness, we began the interview. After going through each question, one of his most profound responses are as follows:

“Lots of people in Africa change their color. Women look bad when they do it. Men do it for women. Women think that if I am not light, I am not beautiful. Lots of women are stupid. Keep your beauty natural. It will not be easy to get rid of colorism because people don’t listen. This colorism mentality is from slavery.”—Senegal Interviewee

This interviewee’s responses highlights what I have waffled with in doing this research. His response, particularly comment “It will not be easy to get rid of colorism” is something that I ponder on frequently in doing this work. At the same time, his response displayed to me that in order for the narrative of colorism and skin bleaching to shift, or to be completely eradicated, contribution to the scholarship and the continuation of education and conversation will be critical in dismantling the practice. While interviewing in Africa, I got the sense that colorism and the practice of skin bleaching was frowned upon by many people. In Africa, it seemed that dark skin was celebrated and in talking with the interviewees, the only reason there was a partiality to light skin in Africa and skin bleaching advertisements was due to the remnants of slavery and white supremacy. I started to feel like dark skin was celebrated there, even though there were skin bleaching billboards, and light skin was celebrated here in the United States. And this next interview confirmed what I was actually thinking about the distinctions between the United States and Senegal.

This next interviewee, a Senegalese male, was a school teacher. He was also tall and thin, not as tall as the first man, but he was tall. He entered the room without his shoes as well. He was also friends with Zamba, the man who greeted me when I first arrived to the institute. His complexion was more of a light brown. Here in the United States, someone in the Black community would say that he’s considered “paper sack brown.” He was very kind, educated, spoke several different languages, including English and he didn’t sit in the wooden chair towards me. He sat on the bed, clasped his hands and said, “I’m ready.” At first, I wondered if him sitting on the bed was considered strange to do, but he stayed there, and I didn’t say anything and proceeded to introduce myself and get going with the interview. During the interview, he said a lot of things, but this is what stuck out the most:

“Race is not good because dark is natural. A lot of people want to look white. In Africa, a woman who is very dark is told she is beautiful. When we see her, we say, “don’t change your color.” The focus should be on what’s natural. You need to respect your color. People want to remove community from Black people and make money off Black people. Bleaching is not natural.”—Senegalese Interviewee
I was quite pleased when this interviewee mentioned that dark is natural and that a level of respect that should come with what your genetics and DNA has given you. I also found it interesting his conceptualization of removing community from Black people and making money off Black people. I immediately started to think about the appropriation of a Black woman’s aesthetic and the racialized beauty and racialized capitalism. It also made me think of the beauty advertisements I saw while driving through Senegal and particularly the language used on these advertisements to push proximity to whiteness. I also began to think about the differences in the marketing strategies of beauty and bleaching products as well. I demonstrate through a chart later in the dissertation how colorism is experienced in both Senegal and the United States. I also began to think about the article I referenced earlier in the dissertation that highlighted how the idea of race came about.

Afternoon (on the same day as the two previous interviews) in Senegal rolled around and in came another young man. He was also very kind, a little confused as to what was going on, and once I shared with him who I was and the research I was doing, you could see the relief in his facial expressions. He was shorter, much shorter than the two men I had interviewed before. He came in smiling, barefoot, and sat in the wooden chair. He really didn’t like the idea and practice of bleaching and made sure before the interview ended that he was adamant about the production of bleach being “cut.” He stated the following:

“I was 12 years old when I saw white people for the first time. Bleaching will break your skin and you reduce yourself. Women do this to be seen. The production of bleach needs to be cut.”

—Senegalese Interviewee

His comment about bleaching breaking your skin and you reducing yourself really made me think of this idea of confidence and the impact on identity. The fact that he associated bleaching with a reduction in self revealed to me how easily these people have been persuaded to do and partake in dangerous situations in an effort to be seen or to appear desirable. His commentary is also in concert with the conceptualizations of the other two men I interviewed earlier that day. Now, the next interviewee, an older man appeared after the next participant left. He appeared extremely tired and to have just gotten off work because he was covered in dirt and sand. He didn’t sit in the wooden chair. He sat on the floor and crossed his legs. He eventually stated that he had just left work. Similar to the other men above, he states:

“Bleaching is not good. Early or later, you will see that it is not good. I was 10 years old when I realized my race. My father taught me about the story of Black people. My mother discussed slavery. There is no race problem in Africa. Black is natural. I give thanks to God and don’t need to change anything about myself. Black skin is beautiful. In Senegal, men bleach, and in Mali men bleach, and when I see men who bleach, it’s very funny to me.”

—Senegalese Interviewee

This participant is one of the first to mention how he learned about Black people and slavery. Like the others, he was aware of the consequences associated with skin bleaching but was adamant about respecting what is natural. He also highlighted how some people think bleaching is really funny, and looks funny. His comment confirms the next participant’s thoughts and perceptions about bleaching. This next participant, who during the interview, couldn’t stop laughing thought the practice of skin bleaching was really funny. He was falling over laughing.
He was average height, very soft spoken, and spoke several different languages as well. But in English, he states:

“I seen some dudes do it in Nigeria. I just couldn’t stop laughing. It was just so funny. I will never use skin bleach.” –Senegalese Interviewee

Similar to another participant who found the practice of bleaching funny, the interviewees also acknowledge that while it’s mostly women who practice bleaching, men do it as well. He later stated that for men in Africa, they do it to make their lips appear more pink. The next interviewee, a young woman admitted to using skin bleach in the past, but later stopped once learning of the cancer causing agents in the bleaching cream. But acknowledged that women love to bleach in Senegal. She states:

“Women in Senegal love to bleach because they like light skin; sometimes if a woman is ugly, she can bleach and be considered beautiful. The bleaching product in Senegal is not good and some women create the bleaching product on their own. Like mix ten different bleaches. Men here do it to have pink lips. I told my sister to stop or she will burn herself. She says she likes it.” –Senegalese Interviewee

The last participant’s response was in concert with the other men who participated in an interview. His response centers respect, and appreciation for darker complexions. His acknowledgment of ancestry is extremely telling because it tethers on embracing and remembering how your bloodline and life line began. For example, he states:

“This is the blood you come from. Accept that we are Black and come from African ancestry. No bleaching cream. In Africa, when we see a woman who’s skin is Black, like dark Black, we always tell her, you are beautiful. Please don’t change your color.” –Senegalese Interviewee

All of the interview participants in Senegal acknowledged that skin bleaching is something that many people, particularly women, do in Africa. Participants pointed to slavery serving as the reason skin bleaching practiced. Many of the stories and comments that people shared, displayed the battle and the failure of preventing and stopping the production of bleach, but realized that people didn’t necessarily have to rely on a skin bleaching product from the store. They could make it themselves. Comparing Senegal to the United States in terms of colorism, there are stark differences, i.e. the strategies used to market skin bleaching and beauty products, the reasons why men in Senegal/Africa use skin bleach to the appreciation for dark skin in Senegal verses the reasons Black men in the United States use skin bleach and their partiality to light skin, not dark skin. These interviews demonstrate while the journey may look different for each of these groups that derive from the African diaspora, the outcome is the same. Although the process to achieve and acquire beauty looks different across the racial spectrum, both racial groups illuminate the forces proven to uphold racialized beauty. As stated previously, interviews in Africa revealed a real appreciation for darker complexions. On the flip side, participants acknowledged that skin bleaching is rampant and highlighted the desire to be light skin, or look as close to white as possible. The interviews highlighted that this practice is a remnant of slavery and will be difficult to shift the narrative of colorism and skin bleaching. The interviews in Africa demonstrated that for the most part,
darkness is not considered a mark. Women are told, “don’t change your color.” The stark difference here in the US is that it is very clear that dark skin is perceived as threatening and the responses below highlight the dichotomy of these two countries. The stories and quotes relate to one another and help to solidify the broader aims of the dissertation. In the stories and quotes from the Senegalese participants, we find an appreciation for Blackness, particularly from the perspectives of Black men. Many of them felt the same way about colorism and acknowledged its prevalence in their country and wanted it to end. This next section will go into great detail regarding Black Women’s experiences with colorism in the United States.
Chapter Four: THEME (2): Black Women’s Experiences with Colorism in the United States

I left Senegal nine days early. The structural and organizational aspects of the program were taxing, and it was in my best interest to leave and begin my research state side. I was so ready to leave, that I left the home where I was staying in Senegal, twelve hours early. My flight wasn’t until 1AM the next morning, but I had lost patience and wasn’t physically able to stay due to becoming ill. Upon returning from Senegal, I was slated to begin the interviewees in the United States. I had begin connecting with colleagues and people I knew were interested in the research. When I came back, I couldn’t start the interviewees right away due to issues out of my control. However, once those issues were on the mend, and in the process of being resolved, I set out to begin interviewing. It was June 2022, and I had just returned to the United States much thinner than when I originally left. But none of that mattered. I was very interested in hearing from the people here in the United States about their experiences with colorism and I was interested in hearing their thoughts regarding the practice of skin bleaching. The process of gathering the data on this side was different, as all of the interviews in the United States were facilitated via Zoom. I wasn’t physically strong as I was before traveling to Senegal, but I told myself that this work was important and that I needed to begin the data collection process on this side.

I was very shocked to say the least of what some of the participants mentioned. One of the things that I wished I had known before starting this work was how much these responses would be jarring and hurtful to me, as they were to the participants sharing this information with me. There were so many elements of experience with colorism that participants had shared with me and I was grateful that they felt comfortable doing so. It was important that I created an emotional safe space for the interviewee to detail and discuss how this issue had impact all parts of their lives. On the flip side, I was also shocked to learn that some people knew colorism was wrong, but acknowledged being able to benefit from it, and had done things to ensure that they would benefit from it as well. The investment in colorism from some of the participants was upsetting, but I allowed the interviewees to guide the interview.

It was great being able to return home. I was excited to share my experience visiting Africa with my family, the things I saw, the things I was able to do and see. Even with all of the structural and organizational challenges, I relied on the fact that I was able to see a land I had only dreamed about. I was able to be there, immerse myself as much as possible, and bask in the reality that I was able to set foot in a place I was only talking about in my research. It made this project much more meaningful and I was excited to glean as much information as my participants would allow. Many of them thanked me for doing this work because for the first time, for many of them, they felt like someone had actually cared about their issues and how their experiences with colorism shaped their entire lives. This first participant had a really complex perspective and experience with colorism. Her commentary really shed light onto the dual function of colorism and it was something that provided a dual benefit for her. She says:

“Being bi-racial, I can never identify as a white woman the way I can as a Black woman, but my whiteness protects me. Even though I identify myself as Black woman. I am fortunate to be white enough to benefit from both ends.”-United States Interviewee

I had never heard anyone discuss being able to straddle a line of identity. It was something I found very interested and it made think of the ways in which legitimacy, complexion, and belonging are core intersectional elements that work to reinforce and reproduce colorism. This
next section will delve more into what her statement means and what that looks like for other participants who did not identify as biracial.

i. Complexion and Belonging

“Legitimacy is a thing in whiteness” — United States Interviewee

Thomas (2020) acknowledges how power and legitimacy prioritizes whiteness in a way that “shapes social possibilities and internal belongings” (Thomas 2020, p. 17). The author observes how historical beauty ideals denigrated blackness and did not allow the virtues of beauty to be associated with blackness (Thomas 2020). Because beauty and blackness has a long, and complicated history, an entire enterprise of achieving power and legitimacy was born under the guise of Black women to have access to power, and feelings of legitimacy (Thomas 2020) while at the same time, valorizing whiteness (Thomas 2020). The interview data gathered among Black Women displays the methods utilized to achieve power and legitimacy. The stories told by the interviewees reveal profound levels of consciousness and methods employed to maintain legitimacy in a society that prioritizes lighter skin. Another component of power that participants revealed was the idea of exoticized Blackness. Per the participant(s) exoticized blackness warrant comments like “she’s pretty for dark skin girl” or “she’s black, but she has good hair.” Thomas (2020) illuminates the correlation between colorism and racism, positing that racialized pursuits of beauty help reinforce complexities of power and legitimacy (Thomas 2020). Participants focused on hair texture and racially ambiguous features serving as the leverage for exoticized blackness. The United States interviewees’ stories showcase the pain as well as the protection of colorism and light skin privilege. The interviewees’ stories and experiences can be found below. This first interviewee was really interested in the work and felt compelled to share her experiences with colorism. She discussed how growing up, colorism posed a problem for her, particularly with regard to her self-esteem, and how the problem of colorism still shows up in her life present day. She states:

“I had some self-esteem things as I was growing up, and there’s a part of me that felt not desired and not beautiful that kind of still shows up in my current life” — United States Interviewee

The stories shared by the interviewees were some of the most profound, psychologically and emotionally jarring recollections and experiences with elements of colorism and its connection to racialized beauty. Participants detailed their personal experiences and demonstrated how colorism affected them both then, and now. These stories are explore the lived experience with colorism and illuminates the connection in the literature used throughout this dissertation that dissects colorism, racialized beauty and its impact on their lives. The first interviewee can be described as a high achiever and scholar, who knows the experience of colorism as a dark skin Black woman all too well. She starts the interview with this sort lightheartedness, but at the same time, she was very serious, honest and transparent, and heavily impacted by her experiences with colorism. For instance, she states:

“Dark skin is a mark. I have to stay fit because I can’t have that many strikes against me. In terms of how I think about beauty; darkness is associated with masculinity. I can’t be dark and not fit. As a dark-skinned Black woman, growing up, I was super aware of my color, not because I saw anything wrong with it, but like from elementary to like high school, hell even my first year of college for whatever reason, people always felt the need to remind me about my complexion
as if I didn’t look in the mirror and see that I’m dark skin. Skin tone was always the butt of a joke when it came to dark skin. And what’s the craziest things about it is sometimes it will be like the darkest people, when it came to guys, it was always the darke‌st guys that had something to say about my complexion. Looking back on it, I think it had everything to do with their own self-esteem and feeling less than because of how dark they were. They were projecting their own feelings onto me. It’s internalized colorism.”-United States Interviewee

This interviewee’s response demonstrates some of the other participants’ perspectives in highlighting Black men’s partiality to lightness and also brings in an interesting notion of Black men’s self-esteem as it relates to colorism. Similar to the next participant, the interviewee emphasizes how she perceived her complexion as well as how her blackness is perceived in white spaces. She states:

“I have always sensed that I was this other, but could never articulate or contextualize that in a Black framework, or the impact of that, until Travon Martin died. His death was an awakening for me to realize what it meant to be Black. And fully becoming aware of what it meant to live as a Black person in America specifically. I think it has kind of warped a lot of my sense of myself. I am typically brown skin, but I’ve gotten a tan since being in Africa, and I probably look dark skin now, but as a brown skin Black woman, I’ve always had this warped sense of beauty and always this, I think this subconscious desire to be closer to whiteness in some ways until there was a long period of time where I would play up the aspects of my identity that were seen as exotic or kind of other, so I would always tell people I was Egyptian and made that the basis for which I would express myself and identity with this arabness that, presents as complicated because my grandmother is from Egypt and presents as Black. Race has impacted the way I see myself, my self-esteem, just in the sense that, I always grew up with this subconscious idea that Black wasn’t beautiful and you couldn’t be Black and beautiful at the same time. Or that you couldn’t be Black and smart at the same time. Because I grew up with such a proximity to whiteness, I’ve kind of internalized this idea that to be smart, or to be beautiful, or to have any kind of legitimacy and power in this world, that you had to be white and so I think I lost a lot of my agency because of this. And now, I’m being proud of who I am, but it took a while to get there, because I experienced a lot of macro and microaggressions growing up in white spaces and it took me a while to not take those things personally and that there was this systemic racism and sexism. Growing up, I sensed that my blackness was vulgar.”-United States Interviewee

This interviewee’s perspective also delves into the idea of beauty, racialized beauty, legitimacy and highlighting her understanding of whiteness as it relates to legitimacy. Sensing that her black skin is not only a threat, but her sensing that her blackness was vulgar was deeply hurtful to me and at times I paused the interview. Her response is similar to the first participant’s response and conceptualization that dark skin is a mark. She states:

“Colorism is rampant in the Black community and there are these internalized forms of racism that are definitely pushed by other Black people. I am Muslim so I grew up with the fact that I didn’t fit in this Christian hegemonic society. When people think of Black people, they think of Christianity. It became harder and harder to relate to Black people and I was doing a lot of internal work because my identities were so different from the stereotypical Black person. I internalized very early on that intelligence was close to whiteness. There was a sort of rationality
to whiteness that didn’t exist in Black communities. I grew up with this understanding that in order to have some type of legitimacy as a Black person, and legitimacy in general, you had to be smart and that’s what drove me to be an intellectual. Legitimacy is a thing in whiteness and you can tell these class distinctions just by how clinically smart someone is. As a Black person, I went to a highly established, very prestigious, very old, white boarding school and in order to have legitimacy in this very affluent white space, I had to be smart. And smarter than the average white person. My personality had to be my redeeming quality because it wasn’t my skin tone. It was never “oh I’m struck by your beauty kind of thing because I’m dark skin.”- United States Interviewee

This participant gets into how colorism works in the Black community, but at the same time highlights the oscillation between having beauty and being smart. Similar to the next participants understanding, her quote indicates that beauty depends on the circumstance. She goes on to state:

“Beauty is situational.” - United States Interviewee

When the question of bleaching came up in the interview, the participant’s response below errs on the side of doing whatever it is you have to do, to improve your life regardless of the cost. As the interview continued with the mentioning of the dangers of skin bleaching and what the practice really meant to her, and possibly others, she states:

“If bleaching improves your life, I can’t judge it.” - United States Interviewee

The response above gets into the goal and practice of bleaching. Other participants highlighted why bleaching is practiced and what the people who engage in bleaching hope to achieve or attain. In the response below, this participant highlights the complexity of being bi-racial and the identity negotiation she’s experienced in both Jamaica and Australia. She discussed the perception of her being bi-racial and what that meant in terms of colorism. She states:

“Being bi-racial, my blackness is exoticised. A pinch of Blackness, it’s not too threatening. There’s a watering down of blackness in Jamaica, and in Australia, there’s a pinch of otherness when it comes to being biracial.” - United States Interviewee

In further experiencing the perception of blackness abroad, similar to the response above, the next participant discusses the parallels of both being considered light skin and dark skin in both Malawi and Jordan. She discusses the language utilized to describe her complexion and the impact this had on her self-esteem. She says:

“It was interesting when I started traveling. I remember going to Malawi and I was lighter than many of the people there. So they didn’t consider me to be Black they thought of me as colored. So I was kind of this other thing that wasn’t really embraced by the people I was hoping to be embraced by. It was my first time in Africa and I went with the expectation that I was going to find my people there. And I didn’t experience that because I was lighter skin. When I went to Jordan, I was called Nutella and slave girl in Arabic and I just remember feeling at once sexualized and fetishized because I just light enough to be sexualized, but then also too dark and
too Black to be taken seriously. I was fuckable but I wasn’t seen as anything outside of that. And that really hit myself esteem hard because it made me wonder if I was even worthy of love or if anyone would love me in the way I try to love others.” – United States Interviewee

Two of the participants responses delved into perceptions of blackness abroad, but still highlighted the threat of dark skin here in the United States. Through her family, the participant below recalls a damaging experience she had as a child with her grandmother as it relates to the pedestalization of light skin. Another element that came up in the interview was the idea of protection, the notion that “I want to prevent you from having certain experiences and I can prevent that by ensuring that you don’t get too much sun.” She describes her experience as a child at summer camp by stating:

“When I was little, I remember my grandmother telling me to not get so much sun. I remember going to summer camp and she asked, how much time are they having you all spend outside? You’re getting really dark. Then she sent me to a summer camp with an umbrella for the sun. And I remember walking around with that umbrella for many summers and that taking a huge toll on my self-esteem as a young child. I must have been like 8. My grandmother, she’s a dark skin Black woman, and I just remember being confused as to why she didn’t want me to go in the sun to play. I felt like I was robbed of a childhood because of that because of the early things my grandmother was instilling into me.” – United States Interviewee

Similar to the participant’s response below, this next interviewee highlights what the grandmother was saying without verbalizing anything, but giving the participant above an umbrella to prevent her skin from getting darker by being in the sun. This next participant below owned the advantages she had by having a lighter complexion and acknowledged that she is aware of the privilege and uses it because she knows she can. She indicates:

“I would be lying if I said I didn’t benefit from having light skin. And some of us, really use it to our advantage.”-United States Interviewee

The response below gets into how dismantling colorism could look. And this participant demonstrates what one of other participants have stated in terms of expectations, and particularly solidarity. This next interviewee highlights the solidarity she was expecting in the Black community. Although she mentioned she was raised to believe that Black people should work together to achieve unity, her reality was very different. And she was impacted negatively by her experiences. She also gets into the idea of mate selection and being fetishized and sexualized, but not desired. For example, she states:

“In white spaces, I saw Black men as my counterparts. I expected a level of understanding. I didn’t expect to see racism, colorism especially in a predominantly white space. I expected solidarity and when I didn’t get that, it took me awhile to recover because I was raised to believe that Black people should be in loving community with each other and when that didn’t happen, I was devastated. I have felt colorism more in my propensity to love people and people loving me. Like this social idea that in order to be worthy of love, you had to have this proximity to whiteness. When I was in high school, the guys would always look at me, and stare at me with this fascination, but it never go beyond that. And because I was a dark skin Black girl, I never
really got the chance to be, loved, or able to engage in relationships with people because I was seen as undesirable. ”- United States Interviewee

As interviews progressed, we moved into the questions about popular culture. Interview participants talked a lot about popular culture, and especially the movie industry. There is language in the next section that was used in the casting call for women. The language utilized directly corresponds to this participant’s statement. She states:

“A lot of time, actors and actresses in popular culture are mixed, and they are the representations of blackness in Hollywood. And they depict characters that are dark skin Black women. I personally find it hard to never see myself in the media because media can be a way to kind of showcase beauty or ideas of beauty or get validation just in seeing someone who’s like yourself or being able to relate to someone on screen. Seeing lighter skin and mixed actresses and actors playing the roles of black people, which they are considered Black, but it’s different, it kind of enraged me and I’m more inclined to the side that they should respectfully decline the roles that are meant for darker skin people. A lot of the color language I was hearing or whether mixed people were really considered Black, or high yellow, if you could really claim blackness in the same way a darker skin person could. I’m inclined to say that they have a different experience of blackness in the same way I have a different experience of blackness. It matters what is being seen onscreen.”- United States Interviewee

The statement above highlights the emphasis placed on complexion in popular culture and the movie industry. The next participant began discussing the ways in which light skin is pedestalized in hip hop, but also gets into the idea of black fishing. Black fishing is a relatively new phenomenon in the literature, but it’s discussed in the Black community a lot, particularly among Black women for a long time. For instance, she states:

“The women these rappers choose to be in relationships with, there’s an adjacency to blackness; the women want access to Blackness, and they are still privileged. But they literally want to be a Black woman. Like they are obsessed with Black women. But, they want to look like a light skin Black woman though. It’s like Black women are elevated and degraded in the sense of a hypersexualization. So there’s this essence of almost being a siren and almost a cardinal being. Hip hop is misogynistic and colorist, and I moved away from listening to a lot of hip hop. With Black men, they reinforce partiality to lightness. It’s what they do in popular culture. Colorism goes beyond skin color, and includes features and hair.” - United States Interviewee

As evidenced above, these stories detail childhood, adulthood and everyday trauma and experiences of Black women and colorism, and ideas of what it means to be beautiful. The interview responses reveal how beauty is racialized and delves into the outcomes of how that trauma appears throughout one’s life course. These interviews showcased very powerful and profound experiences and recollections with colorism and demonstrate why this work must continue in order for perceptions and conceptualizations about beauty to shift in a way that’s conducive to all. The following section will center a subset of theme (2): Colorism through Language up against Black women’s stories and perspectives in the United States. The following interviewee, described herself as a dark skin Black woman, but knew all too well the realities of colorism. She really highlighted how intra-group workings of colorism and had a really
interesting take on the impact of colonialism and colorism. Some of her commentary tethers on the life chance aspect of colorism as well. She states:

“Color language exists, it is seen in many homes across the world, starts with colonialism, the darker the women, being called girl, and not by her name. It is fetishized and objectified and sexualized by being called gorilla, darkie by other people of color and the same complexion. The discrimination exists as almost a mental sickness. And the caste system is so inflicted mentally into people of color worldwide that I do not think that caste system will ever go away. Ever. And long as colonialism exists, the caste system won’t go away. History has shown that people of color want to have sex with white people just to breed their color out. And thinking that that child will have a better opportunity presenting white, vs presenting brown skin and down the color spectrum.” – United States Interviewee

**Colorism through Language**

Strmic-Pawl et al (2021) asserts that colorism is race-based and the intra-racial manifestations of whiteness is perpetuated by preferential treatment and higher social status (Strmic-Pawl et. al 2021). Additionally, the authors emphasize the color language used in Black communities and in hip hop to draw racialized and colorist distinctions. Examples include, “red bone, lightskins, darkskins, tar baby, yellow bone, caramel, chocolate, chocolate drop, oreo, paper sack brown, pretty skin, high yellow, light bright, dirty red, house nigga, field nigga, etc (Wilder 2010). Further, the scholars discuss the appropriation of skin tone and the transraciality associated with the skin lightening industry. Strmic-Pawl et. al (2021) also emphasize the dichotomy of the capitalization of Black skin and how the continued push for sustaining a legacy of white supremacy provides fertile ground for racial domination (Strmic-Pawl et. al 2021). Upon dissecting the following terms, and hearing these responses from the interviewees, these are the meanings associated with how people describe African American men and women in the United States. How I came to analyze this list and make these designation, these terms were not only mentioned in the literature, but reinforced by the interviewees in terms of how colorism is experienced in the Black community. In other words, how Black people, label other Black people. Interview respondents shared what most of these terms meant, from a lived experience. The interview respondents stated:

i. Red bone: a light skin Black woman
ii. Light skins: a light skin Black woman
iii. Dark skins: a dark skin Black woman
iv. Tar Baby: a dark skin Black woman
v. Yellow Bone: a light skin Black woman
vi. Caramel: a brown skin Black woman
vii. Chocolate: a dark skin Black woman
viii. Chocolate Drop: a dark skin Black woman
ix. Oreo: a mixed/biracial man or woman (*Black and white*)

x. Paper Sack Brown: a light brown Black woman or man
xi. Pretty Skin: a light skin Black woman
xii. High Yellow: a light skin Black woman
xiii. Light Bright: a light skin Black woman, closer to white in complexion
xiv. Dirty Red: a light skin Black woman
As evidenced by the literature and by the participants, it is difficult to unsettle these terms. Participants discussed how these terms trickle down in the family and how they become embedded and internalized, garnering a participation in colorism. These terms solidify the position that colorism is embedded and conceptualized in many parts of human interaction, but intra and inter-group, and we see that on both national and international platforms. Per the interviewees’ responses, colorism through language is highlighted in Black families and particularly in hip hop and popular culture. Ferdinand (2015) investigates stories of dark skin Black women where Lupita N’yongo states “I got teased and taunted about my night-shaded skin, and my one prayer to God, the miracle worker, was that I would wake up lighter skinned. These are the words of Lupita Nyong’o, the Oscar winning star of 12 Years a Slave” (Ferdinand 2015). Many interview participants discussed the prominence of color language throughout hip hop and popular culture. One female participant highlighted the casting call for the movie *Straight Outta Compton*. *Straight Outta Compton* “is a biopic and was released in August 2015. It tells the story of the “infamous West Coast rap group N.W.A.”* [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/straight-out-of-compton-casting-call_n_5597010](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/straight-out-of-compton-casting-call_n_5597010). N.W.A. stands for “Niggas wit Attitude.” The participant discussed how offensive the language was, and the fact that the women were categorized based on certain characteristics. She especially notes the language used to describe dark skin Black women in comparison to the description for light-skinned Black women. Below is the language used in the actual casting call for the movie *Straight Outta Compton*:

“A GIRLS: These are the hottest of the hottest. Models. MUST have real hair - no extensions, very classy looking, great bodies. You can be black, white, asian, hispanic, mid eastern, or mixed race too. Age 18-30. Please email a current color photo, your name, Union status, height/weight, age, city in which you live and phone number to: SandeAlessiCasting@gmail.com subject line should read: A GIRLS

B GIRLS: These are fine girls, long natural hair, really nice bodies. Small waists, nice hips. You should be light-skinned. Beyonce is a prototype here. Age 18-30. Please email a current color photo, your name, Union status, height/weight, age, city in which you live and phone number to: SandeAlessiCasting@gmail.com subject line should read: B GIRLS

C GIRLS: These are African American girls, medium to light skinned with a weave. Age 18-30. Please email a current color photo, your name, Union status, height/weight, age, city in which you live and phone number to: SandeAlessiCasting@gmail.com subject line should read: C GIRLS

D GIRLS: These are African American girls. Poor, not in good shape. Medium to dark skin tone. Character types. Age 18-30. Please email a current color photo, your name, Union status,
This casting call reveals colorism is used through language to reinforce racist ideology. And it also showcases the conceptualization of dark skin in media and advertisements. Further, the following section will explore the experiences of Black men and Mexican men with colorism. As indicated previously, no Indian men participated in the study. Although I reached out to the Indian Student Association at University of Tennessee, I was not able to garner interest from members of the organization. The next section focuses on the Black and Hispanic men’s experiences with colorism. These men had interesting conceptualizations of colorism and showcased how color prejudice has impacted their own lives. Much of their perspectives were in concert with the women. The only difference is that some of them were willing participants, who admitted to actually reinforcing colorism. The women, not so much. In putting the next section in dialogue with the women who interviewed previously, one participant blatantly states that he reinforced and practiced colorism in terms of labeling women. The men’s perspectives intersect with racial categories and conceptualizations of beauty indicated by the women who participated in the interviews. This section also reveals and confirms that the women interviewees believe men’s reinforcement of colorism shape and influence their views of themselves, but in particular with practices of colorism. The next section of the dissertation focuses on the experiences of Black, and Hispanic men with colorism and Indian and Asian women’s experiences with colorism. This will demonstrate how Black masculinity and non-Black women are affected by the same global relations of whiteness.
CHAPTER FIVE:
BLACK & HISPANIC MEN’S EXPERIENCES WITH COLORISM AND INDIAN & ASIAN WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES WITH COLORISM

With an interest in showing how gendered colorism is not just about Black Women, the dissertation attends to Black men and Indian Women to clarify the role of hierarchies with regard to Black Men, Indian and Asian women, hence the reason this section of my research needed a separate chapter. Per the directive and recommendation of one of my dissertation committee members, he highlighted how the nuances of these racial groups allowed me to fill a gap in the literature by having a separate chapter that focused on the perspective of the male, considering its absence in the literature and scholarship surrounding colorism. Additionally, because of Bollywood’s (similar to United States Hollywood) pedestalization of light skin, as well as Asia’s reinforcement of skin bleaching and colorism, a separate section showcases the geographical differences in experiences surrounding colorism and approximation of whiteness. Race scholars observe how Black men reinforce partiality to lightness, particularly in popular culture, through language, but there is a gap in the literature that focuses on Black men’s experiences with colorism. For this portion of the analysis, I interviewed (6) Black men, in the United States. In comparing their responses to the Black men I interviewed in Senegal, there are stark differences. In Senegal, among the Black men I interviewed, there was no partiality to lightness or whiteness. But, in the United States, the interviews revealed a completely different perspective. Focusing on the perspectives of the Black American male interviewees, (6) Black American men participated in the study. Of those (6) Black men, all of them live here in the United States and were interviewed via Zoom. Because scholars discuss Black men’s contributions to colorism in hip hop culture, it was vital to learn how they experienced colorism and how sometimes, unconsciously, they reinforce colorism. One participant stated:

“Unknowingly, I participated in colorism. Most Black rappers talk about a specific type of woman in their music. Like, thick red bone. That is a light skin Black woman. But hearing that and repeating that, it gets in your mind and that’s what you look for.”

This participant’s response confirms what several of the women stated previously. Here, this participant has admitted to participating and reinforcing colorism. This next interviewee discusses how he actually experienced colorism through his Black mother. And he acknowledged that the disdain for his complexion was instilled by the way his mother made him feel. He says:

“I’ve experienced colorism my entire life, particularly through my mom. She always criticized me about my complexion. I started using a bleaching cream when I was in high school, and maybe my first year of college for hyperpigmentation and it changed my complexion completely. I was much lighter than I am, and I am a dark skin man. I stopped using it, but that didn’t change the way I was made to feel about my skin tone.” –United States Interviewee

The interview responses highlight the differences in experiences with Black men and colorism. Now, I interviewed two men who identified as Mexican and their responses were different than the Black men and women I interviewed, however, there were some similarities.
One participant indicated that in his country, dark skin is celebrated, at least in his experience. Only when he arrived to the United States, did he began noticing the distinctions people problematized when it came to complexion. The other participant, mentioned how his grandmother used certain terms to discuss his darker skinned relatives. Both men responses showcased disdain for colorism and in the interview, neither could understand why complexion was a driving force of social interaction. One participant states:

“For the life of me, I can’t understand why darker skinned women are degraded in this way. I am not attracted to white women and it just bothers me that there is this line drawn. Darker skin women are beautiful and it’s sad that this is something that still continues to happen. Even my grandmother calls my cousins who are darker skin, names that are degrading. I just don’t understand.”-United States Interviewee

This participant’s response was interesting and was similar how Senegalese men feel about the colorism and the fact that several of the Senegalese men mentioned that when they see a woman of a darker complexion, they emphasize to her “don’t change your color.” So this shows how he sees it. The second Latinx participant held a similar worldview and viewpoint regarding dark skin being celebrated. He indicates:

“Black women are celebrated in my country. In my country, race is not important at all. But in the United States, I started to realize that it was important. In my country we have the third largest population of Black people, around 4 million. The racist aspect of American society is disappointing. I hate skin bleaching and I can’t believe that happens.”-United States Interviewee

Sociologists and race scholars acknowledge colorism’s impact transnationally, particularly in India (Hunter 2011). India’s global market for skin bleaching, another function of colorism, is a multi-billion dollar industry (Cole et. al 2013) where women are the primary practitioners. But not only is colorism and skin bleaching rampant in India, it is carried and reinforced by historical implementations of stratification. Jayawardene (2016) states “colorism in South Asia is not simply characterized by a yearning for lighter skin, but is far subtler and severe. Skin color is, thus, imbricated in ethnic difference and structured via caste classification. According to this logic, variation from light to dark hues are associated with both high and low caste grouping” (Jayawardene 2016). For this dissertation, I interviewed two Indian women. Both of who shared certain experiences that reinforces the function of colorism in their communities. The following section will highlight their experiences.

“In India, more fair skin means you’re more inclined to get married off easier. Skin bleaching is huge in India and it’s a very cruel standard.” –United States Interviewee

Jayawardene (2016) investigates how Indian and South Asian culture “are marked by signifiers of race, caste, ethnicity and colorism” (Jayawardene 2016). As stated previously, I interviewed two Indian women via Zoom, who were located in two completely different regions of the United States: Tennessee and DC. Both of their responses detailed how in their countries, and in their communities back home and here in the United States light skin, or white skin is prioritized. One Indian female participant stated:
The second participant response brought in popular culture, i.e. Bollywood films and how colorism basically runs the industry. She discusses her experience with colorism and the fear and the threat of darkness people instilled through language when she was a child. She goes on to state:

“I have always felt conflicted in my identity because both of my parents are from Africa, and it’s like should I be identifying myself as Indian or African. I have definitely experienced colorism and we see it a lot in Bollywood films. When I was young, I was playing outside and people told me I needed to stop because I was getting dark.

It is important to note how caste systems play a role in colorism. Racialized casteism (Jayawardene 2016) investigates how caste serves as a marker for colorism. The author describes racialized casteism as the intersection of caste and colorism in South Asian societies (Jayawardene 2016). Jayawardene (2016) also notes that Eurocentric thought materialized methods of caste stratification (Jayawardene 2016) and the historical positionality surrounding physical appearance reinforces Western ideas of beauty and value (Jayawardene 2016). The second participant’s response bleeds into the function of colorism as it relates to the caste systems in India. Jayawardene’s discusses the relationship between caste and colorism in India stating “caste-based attitudes toward the darker skinned overlap with perceptions of blackness as both a symbol of inferiority and an indicator of a particular racialized subjectivity. In general, blackness and Africanness are synonymous concepts for South Asians. South Asians read and understand Africanity through corporeal characteristics. Whiteness (or a visible European phenotype) is the marker of that which is Western” (Jayawardene 2016).

After completing interviews in both the United States and Senegal, I was able to pull out several differences. Senegal provided the transnational segment of the research and the interviews stateside highlighted how the United States reinforces colorism. There are several similarities between the two regions, but there are also stark differences. But what the chart reveals is something similar to a previous statement in the dissertation: although the journeys are different in both regions to reach proximity to whiteness, the end results are always the same. In this chapter, I was able to highlight the key findings, tell the stories of the interviewees, provide a reflection of my arrival to Africa and highlight the experiences of the racial groups I interviewed. Please note the emotional language utilized in the United States column below are comments derived directly from interview respondents that identified as dark skin women. After the table, the following section will move into the discussion component of the research. In connecting participant responses to the literature, their lived experience is in concert with the colorism literature and scholarship. At the same time, these interviews demonstrated the gaps in the literature and highlighted the need for the continual contribution to the literature. The next section of the dissertation displays a table that compares and contrast how colorism is experienced in both Senegal and the United States. Afterward, the next section moves into the discussion and demonstrates what the findings suggests about racialized beauty, colorism, and the practice of skin bleaching.
Table 2: Compare and Contrast Experiences with Colorism in Senegal and the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Colorism is experienced in Senegal</th>
<th>vs</th>
<th>How Colorism is experienced in the US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logical response to the reality of colorism; identity shifting</td>
<td>Logical response to the reality of colorism; identity shifting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be seen as beautiful</td>
<td>To be seen as beautiful: Hair Texturism; featurism;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital; to be idealized in the culture; idealized by men; to be marriageable, to be beautiful; beneficial life outcomes</td>
<td>Social Capital; beneficial life outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy use and promotion of bleaching cream -Advertisements/Billboards throughout; whitening language on the front of the product vs. No advertisements; back of products list some of the same chemical agents in the United States</td>
<td>Zero blatant promotion of bleaching cream; emotional violence; use of whitening language/ingredients on the back of bleaching creams</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skin or body modification through bleaching;</td>
<td>Body modification; Plastic Surgery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anti-poor; emotional violence:</td>
<td>Emotional violence; Speech/language: “you’re pretty for a dark skin girl”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin Bleaching Billboards &amp; Advertisements</td>
<td>No skin bleaching billboards or advertisements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud Promotion of bleaching creams and agents: Pure white/Clear White cream; Fair and Lovely/Glow and Lovely (mainly sold in India; body toning oils mainly used in Jamaica) -Internalized anti-blackness</td>
<td>Quiet promotion of bleaching creams in certain industries and in families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caro white; Lait Super Whhite; Pretty White! To be privileged or benefit romantically.</td>
<td>Facetune, Snap Chat, FaceApp, social media filters, pretty privilege</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Aspiration/Access</td>
<td>Class Aspiration/Access/Your name; origin of name</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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CHAPTER SIX:
DISCUSSION

Among (35) interviews, the findings suggest that beauty is racialized, light skin privilege is exploited, dark skin is a mark, and social and economic currency are tied into the mobility one is able to attain, when complexion is a descriptor and qualifier. Within the sample, there was a variation of skin tones. It is important to note that no Indian men participated in the study. The findings display the correlation between beauty and complexion, racial capital and life outcomes. The analysis also displays a stark contrast, one where I wasn’t expecting, in the marketing used to advertise skin bleaching agents both here in the United States and abroad. The findings demonstrate that while global marketing for skin bleaching agents abroad are blatant in both language and access, here in the United States, blatant advertisements for bleaching have not existed in quite some time. However, the language and ingredients on the back of beauty creams here in the United States shows that bleaching agents are still very present, accessible, but not as loud in marketing, or maximized as it is, in nations outside of the United States. This is a gap I plan to explore with my research.

The study revealed the dichotomy of language, between marketing, conceptualization of beauty and social capital. Per the literature, scholars argue that color language plays an important role in both intra and inter group racism. The findings of this research study support Critical Race scholars’ assertions that language encapsulates identity. Colorism through language was also a reoccurring theme throughout the interviews. Throughout the study, there was a reoccurrence of the theme power and legitimacy. Out of all of the themes mentioned in the study, power and legitimacy remained a constant among the participants. In terms of unexpected results, the dichotomy between Black men in Senegal and Black men in the United States and their experiences with colorism were vastly different and illuminates another gap I plan to dissect with my research. Additionally, another gap that came about where I wasn’t expecting is the conceptualization of race problems in Africa vs. race problems in the United States. One participant stated that “there is no race problem in Africa” but acknowledged the threat of skin bleaching. Interview participants here in the United States highlighted the race issues they experienced during childhood and as adults, emphasizing that they are still impacted by those experiences and living in the United States, race is a constant and participants revealed that they had to always be aware of their race and if they were not aware, the society of the United States would remind them. Further, how blackness was conceptualized during the interview phase of the research showcased the significance of further examination as participants experienced blackness differently, but yet the same, particularly when controlling for where they were from, and how they detailed their childhoods and upbringing. These gaps in the literature highlight the critical need for further investigation.

In terms of weaknesses regarding the research study, because of the structural and organizational challenges of the Senegal Immersion Initiative, I was not able to conduct all twenty of the interviews I was initially slated to facilitate. This caused a weakness in the depth of the findings as I wasn’t able to gather data from a complete sample in Senegal. Because skin bleaching in Senegal is normalized and heavily practiced, having more participants’ interview to share their experiences would have provided more nuance to the argument of this research study. However, evidence from the interviews suggests that skin bleaching is a predictor of internalized racism and colorism, and interviewees acknowledged that colorism will be difficult to eradicate,
but worth continuing the discussions and the advocacy via scholarship and scholarly contributions that provide methods for shifting the narrative. In connecting the themes back to the literature, the findings are in concert with the current scholarship surrounding colorism and through the interviews and additional research, other themes emerged that I will explore at a later juncture.

As indicated previously, in addition to gathering data via interviews, I went to the Chattanooga Centennial Public Library to examine beauty advertisements, particularly the language used to market skin bleaching products in the United States to compare the skin bleaching advertisements used in Senegal. The photos I pulled ranged from the 1920s-1950s and some years afterward (the images are listed in the appendices for reference). The language utilized in the advertisements racialized beauty in the same way that skin bleaching advertisements did in Senegal. The beauty advertisements listed in the appendices of the dissertation provide great detail surrounding the language used to market skin bleaching creams. Another interesting element of the beauty advertisements I pulled from the Chattanooga Centennial Public Library Archives is that it encompassed the same language participants used in the during the interviews. I was able to talk about some of images I found during my delve into the archives with some participants and the findings served as a backdrop for understanding the stagnation and reinforcement of colorism across geographies. I found it quite interesting the language from the 1920s-50s and beyond, was being used in the 21st century in Senegal, but no longer in the United States. And if it was, it wasn’t as blatant as it is in Senegal.

Interviewees were privy to the blatant language used in Senegal to racialize beauty and many of them discussed how there may not be this sort of blatant language on billboards here in the United States, but colorism and racialized beauty showed up on a multitude of current and national platforms, particularly in popular culture. In connecting the interviewees responses to the beauty advertisements pulled from the archives, the most profound element was the use of the language both then and now. Interviewees in Senegal really highlighted how colorism is a remnant of slavery and because colorism has been embedded historically, it is difficult to eradicate. Another interesting piece of the archives is the connection to colonization and the interviewees responses and conceptualization of “darkness being natural.” These advertisements show a completely different depiction of darkness historically and currently, but the beautiful thing is the interviewees in Senegal revealed a deep appreciation of blackness, but acknowledged that many people, women in particular were affected by the impact of colonization and slavery, to this day. The interviewees I spoke with in Senegal indicated that men did use skin bleach, only to obtain pink lips, but not at the same rate women practiced bleaching. Also, I noticed on the beauty advertisements from the archives, there were no men pictured on those advertisements. In the appendices section of the dissertation, I provide several images of the archival advertisements, and none of those advertisements include men. It is important to note that when sifting through the archives, there were no images of men advertising bleaching creams. It was almost always women. This revelation connects directly to the participant responses in Senegal and illuminates how they see that its more women that use skin bleach than men. This finding also connects to the literature in that colorism is a gendered experience and while the gendering of colorism looks different across geographies, the outcome is always the same.

Male participants in the United States were mostly against skin bleaching, as was most men in Senegal, but acknowledged the partiality for light skin and their participation in colorism. Men in Senegal on the other hand, most indicated that they will never use skin bleach, held reverence for women who had a darker complexion, and urged women with darker hues to not
change their color. However, Senegalese male participants knew of men who practiced skin bleaching. They didn’t understand why the men would do it, only acknowledging that most of the time, it was done for women, but couldn’t really understand why a man would want to use skin bleach. On the flip side, in the United States, men didn’t use skin bleach, but practiced colorism.

In comparing Senegal to the United States in terms of examining racialized beauty, the findings demonstrate both acceptance and rejection. Acceptance in the sense that many people, primarily women in Senegal have internalized the pedestalization of light skin and whiteness. Senegalese interview participants indicate that women practice bleaching to be seen, to be perceived as beautiful, and to be valued. Senegalese participants also mentioned this idea of ugliness up against what’s considered beautiful. In Senegal, participant(s) state that “if a woman is ugly, she can bleach and be seen as beautiful.” Even still, Senegalese participants displayed an appreciation for Blackness but acknowledged how colonization and slavery influenced how beauty is conceptualized, and highlighting that it is racialized. Placing Senegalese participant responses up against the responses from the United States reveals complex differences, yet similarities in obtaining proximity to whiteness.

In comparing the United States to Senegal, interview data among United States participants showcase how the body is used as tool for reinforcing colorism and racialized capitalism post slavery. US interviewees discussed the body modification procedures that people, primarily women go through that approximate whiteness. One of those modification procedures being a nose job. Most of the time, the nose jobs are done not to widen the nose, but to elongate and slim the nose. In my presentation, I demonstrated how an app racialized beauty by not only lighting my complexion, but the app made it appear that I had a nose job. This mirrored what participants mentioned in terms of how body modification reinforces proximity to whiteness and upholds standards that allow white supremacy to be reproduced through racialized capitalism.

These findings also connect directly to the literature review in that colorism is a gendered experience. There isn’t much in the literature surrounding men’s experiences with colorism, and the participants responses highlighted how colorism through skin bleaching is primarily practiced by women. The most interesting and surprising element of the study was learning the reasons why men in Africa use skin bleach. Participants revealed that men in Africa use skin bleach to have pink lips, and that they do it for women. This was deeply interesting, particularly when comparing the reasons why men may or may not use skin bleach in the United States and how men in the United States reinforce partiality to lightness, particularly through popular culture. In terms of limitations, due to structural and organizational challenges of the Senegal Immersion Initiative program where I was selected to facilitate the transnational portion of my research, I was not able to visit beauty salons to locate the skin bleaching creams, and I was not able to facilitate the twenty interviews I was initially supposed to conduct. I only ended up facilitating (10) interviews, which provided depth and lived experience to the research study, but served as a limitation to the additional information I would have been able to include, which would have strengthened the study. Additionally, the translators that were available were not fluent in English and at times, responses were difficult interpret, which posed another issue with being able to gather the totality of the interviewees’ responses. All of the findings in the study demonstrate that beauty is racialized and that in parts of Africa, particularly in Senegal, while women are encouraged to embrace their melanin, the remnants of colonization and slavery are ever present, and embedded into the psyche of people working to pursue proximity to whiteness.
The findings also reveal this sort of racial hybridness. Interviewees indicated that what they believed were the blueprint for beauty, and many of them mentioned straddling the line of both whiteness and blackness. For example, one interviewee shared when there is a straddling of the racial line, it appears as such: a proper education means an African American person would be too white, or they’d talk too white. The idea of being bourgie, per the interviewees, meant too white as well. These findings demonstrate how identity is performed and also highlights the difference between race and culture and the reach for social capital. Further, the findings showcased an exploitation privilege, i.e. exploiting proximity to whiteness in the sense that light skin has more privilege, and that same privilege is denied to people, women in particular, of a darker complexion. Another element of the findings display the need to maintain an aesthetic, regardless of the emotional violence one may experience in working to benefit from colorism, and also the hiring practices of many organizations and institutions. Participant responses reveal the understanding, awareness, the aspiration, as well as the disdain for colorism and internalized color trauma. The final section of the dissertation will move into the conclusion, future goals and recommendations.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated previously, the nuances of colorism are embedded in white supremacy and display how the origin of hierarchal racialization cements racial governance and identity formation. The scholarship surrounding the history of colorism and the origins of white supremacy reify a racial paradigm that imagines life through the lens of whiteness. This contribution to the erosion of complexion homogamy reveals the battery of racist ideology and illuminates the capital associated with skin tone. These dimensions of racism privilege lightness as the core of the racial landscape in the United States (Hunter 2002) and abroad.

Strmic-Pawl et. al (2021) emphasizes three gaps in the colorism scholarship: measurement of colorism, intersectional nature of colorism and global expansion and interaction of colorism” (Strmic-Pawl et. al 2021) and suggests further analysis is needed to understand the matrix of skin stratification. The study of skin tone bias, will maintain its significance as the world continues to racially shift. Monk (2021) discusses the significance of color and emphasizes why further analysis is fundamental to understanding demographical shifts in the United States. Supporting Monk’s analysis, Reese (2021) asserts how skin tone stratification and racial reorganization are on the brink of change (Reese 2021). The author focuses on the complexities that will contribute and determine how one will racially identify within the changing landscape of racial categorization.

Sociologists situate the effects of colorism as cyclical and ethnoracial categories are fluid, yet concrete. Research displays the intricacies of skin tone bias and how these explicit forms of racism (Monk 2021) continue to marshal racial governance and attainment. In convergence with Monk, and surveying the future of whiteness, Twine (2008) suggests a third wave of research is required to understand how whiteness governs the racial landscape. Relying on Dubois’s foundational scholarship, the author examines identity formation among racial and ethnic groups and the recuperation of white innocence and supremacy in various contexts. Future analysis is needed to continue dismantling dimensions of colorism, the racialized nature of beauty (Hunter 2005) and how as a nation, we’ve come to understand the core of identity and racialization. Future research will determine if achieving a post-racial America and world is plausible or, if obtaining this level of equality is a myth (Norwood 2014). As this dissertation has detailed, colorism has a domino effect.

All of the findings in the study demonstrate that beauty is racialized and that in parts of Africa, particularly in Senegal, while women are encouraged to embrace their melanin, the remnants of colonization and slavery are ever present, and embedded into the psyche of people working to pursue proximity to whiteness. For the next stage of this research, the highlighting of beauty apps and filters that work to transform bone structure, complexion, hair texture and body image will serve as the next phase of this research, as this gap is worth exploring to determine its connection and reinforcement of achieving proximity to whiteness in real time. Lastly, as displayed throughout the dissertation, sociological literature informs the racial construct of complexion capital and provides the foundation for further investigating racialized beauty, skin bleaching and its connection to colorism.

This dissertation has been able to accomplish a plethora of things. Firstly, this dissertation has been able to shine a light on how racialized beauty is reproduced on both domestic and international spectrums. Additionally, this dissertation comes with lived experience
and the experience of being in a different place and time and setting foot in a global market expected to grow exponentially within the next five years in the utilization of skin bleaching products. Secondly, the dissertation has been able to accomplish taking on a positionality not available in the current body of literature surrounding colorism. This study has allowed me to identify gaps in the scholarship and chart my own path of innovation and contribution to the literature. From my research, I learned and was informed by the participants the real detriment this phenomenon has on people’s lives. And I want to work to shift that narrative and shift those conversations. This study contributes to the emerging scholarship surrounding colorism and provides an innovative approach in examining and analyzing how colorism saturates the landscape of race relations.

The future of this research will further examine the use of facial modification apps, pretty privilege, and its usage in the more developed world and the overexploited and underdeveloped world to highlight how colorism is reproduced through digital access. Additionally, this research will investigate the marketing strategies beauty companies use both in the United States and abroad to reproduce colorism and whiteness as capital with the language used on beauty products. This would also provide the leverage to explore the digitized Black face with and without Black people in digital spaces for profit, appropriation, and exploitation. Finally, the epistemologies, and methodologies that support this work, and other scholars who want to engage in this research, the continued investigation of how colorism permeates many parts of the global landscape will be imperative. The relevance of this research and my own positionality demonstrates the continued need to shift the narrative, inform conversations surrounding colorism and complexion privilege, and contribute to the emerging scholarship surrounding the intersectional components of how colorism governs race relations and reinforces racialized hierarchies.
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74. Beauty companies distanced themselves from 'skin-whitening.' But outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now - CNN Style


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78. Hip Hop and Rap: The Not So Silent Approach to Political Protest in Senegal (wisconsin.edu)


Figure 3: Lucky Brown Skin Lightener
A Label from Lucky Brown Skin Lightener, African-American Cosmetic and Food Label Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution
https://www.si.edu/spotlight/health-hygiene-and-beauty/skin-care
White Witch for the Skin: "cleanses - softens – whitens
https://www.si.edu/spotlight/health-hygiene-and-beauty/skin-care
Figure 4: White Witch Skin Lightener
White Witch for the Skin: "cleanses - softens – whitens
https://www.si.edu/spotlight/health-hygiene-and-beauty/skin-care
IS YOUR SKIN ROUGH, DARK?

Here's a swift way to hurry along the natural “flaking off” of outer skin layers which helps you to a fairer, lighter skin.

Get Black and White Bleaching Cream used by thousands of women with dark skin from wind and sun.

It aids in removing blackheads, acts as an antiseptic dressing for pimples and blemishes due to external causes.

Get Black and White Bleaching Cream today—Money back if not satisfied. 50c, 30c. Trial size, 10c—at drug and toilet goods counters.
Figure 6: Nadinola Bleaching Cream Advertisement

https://envisioningtheamericandream.com/2015/06/16/black-like-me/
Figure 7: Nadinola Bleaching Cream Advertisement

Nadinola Bleaching Cream Vintage Ad - Ebony Magazine, August, 1958
Nadinola Bleaching Cream Vintage Ad - Ebony Magazine, August, 1958 | Flickr
If You Fear “Tan” Here Are Beauty Ways to Prevent It

Summer is the time of delightful outdoor sports. Golf, tennis, swimming, riding or motoring are healthful and beauty-giving pastimes because in enjoying them you breathe an abundance of fresh air, which quickens your color, brings a new sparkle to your eyes and adds grace to your step, but your complexion may suffer if you don’t take care to protect it.

Tan and freckles are considered to be attractive in moderation only, while a fair, smooth skin is always to be desired.

If your skin is becoming tanned through exposure to the sun you should use both a bleaching cream and an emollient. The bleaching cream will soften and whiten your skin and the emollient cream should be applied to your face, neck, and hands before you expose them to the sun.

One of the best skin bleachers is made partly of cucumber juice. A cucumber cream which is said to possess great bleaching qualities is made of:

- Almond oil ........4 ounces
- Spermaceti ........1 ounce
- White wax ..........1 ounce
- Cucumber ulce ......2 ounces

Select cucumbers ripe enough for table use and chop them fine, pound them to a purée and extract the juice by squeezing through a jelly bag. Perfume with a half drachm of violet extract. After melting the wax and spermaceti and adding the almond oil, pour this cucumber juice and beat into a cream.

Lettuce and iris creams made in the same way are said to possess special efficacy in bleaching a tanned skin. To make lettuce cream several heads of lettuce should be scalded with boiling water. Let them stand a few moments, then pour the water off and pound the lettuce to a paste in a mortar or earthen bowl. Strain through a cloth.

To make the iris cream, extract the juice from the fresh flowers and the whitish parts of their stems. Obtain enough from the deep purple flower petals to tint the cream a violet color. Violet perfume is suited to both these creams.

In the above formula iris or lettuce juice is substituted for that of the cucumbers.

If you anoint your face at night with bleaching cream and then expose your skin unprotected to the sun next day you will do more harm than good, because these bleaching creams soften your skin and make it more susceptible to the action of the sun. Before going out you should apply an emollient.

Figure 8: Preventative Advertisement to Maintain Light Skin
Tennessee Electronic Library
https://basic.newspapers.com/image/348193697/?terms=bleaching%20cream&match=1
Figure 9: Black and White Bleaching Cream Advertisement

*Tennessee Electronic Library 02 Aug 1939, 4 - Chattanooga Daily Times at Newspapers.com Basic*
Whiten your skin this double-quick way

Do away with tan and freckles, muddy, sallow color, the quickest, safest way. No need to endure a dull, lifeless, tired-looking skin when with just one wonderful beauty-aid — Nadinola Bleaching Cream, you can whiten, smooth and clear your skin to precious new beauty while you sleep.

Just before bedtime tonight smooth over your skin a little of this white fragrant cream. Instantly you feel its tonic effect on your sluggish skin tissues. It brings whiteness and velvety-smoothness up from underneath the dull, sallow surface.

No tiresome waiting, no disappointments. Start using Nadinola at once. See how quickly it restores exquisite whiteness, clear smooth beauty. Written money-back guarantee and directions in every package. At all good toilet counters 50c and $1.00. The fifty cent Nadinola package contains as much as most dollar bleaching creams. The dollar size is more than twice as large. National Toilet Co., Paris, Tenn.

Figure 10: Nadinola Bleaching Cream Advertisement
Tennessee Electronic Library
17 Sep 1941, 4 - Chattanooga Daily Times at Newspapers.com Basic
Whiten, clear and smooth your skin!

THE soft, captivating allure of smooth, white skin—how men will admire you—how women will envy you! It is the greatest charm a girl can possess—and Nadinola Bleaching Cream will capture and hold it for you!

Now you can know the witchery of a glowing, velvety complexion, and can keep it surely and easily, with this amazing, unfailing aid to beauty. Nadinola Bleaching Cream is the trusted tonic beauty-aid of thousands of women who have forgotten what it is to have a sallow, washed-out, freckled, uninviting skin.

Simply smooth on this fragrant, skin-whitener at bedtime. Use it on your face, neck, shoulders, arms or hands. The results will astonish you. Gently, safely, Nadinola will bleach out all imperfections. No tedious waiting—no disappointments. Oiliness, roughness, redness, disfiguring blackheads and pimples quickly give way to adorable whiteness, satin-smoothness—precious skin beauty.

Remember, Nadinola is unfailing. Yet so gentle is its action that it is harmless even to the most delicate skin. Your first night’s application will start to show definite improvement—then every day your complexion will grow fairer; smoother, lovelier. Positive, money-back guarantee and full, simple directions accompany every package. Sold at all good drug stores and toilet counters. The 50c Nadinola package contains as much as other dollar bleaching creams—the dollar Nadinola package is more than twice as large. National Toilet Company, Paris, Tenn.

Nadinola Bleaching Cream
Brings Skin Beauty While You Sleep

Figure 11: Nadinola Bleaching Cream Advertisement
Tennessee Electronic Library
17 Sep 1941, 4 - Chattanooga Daily Times at Newspapers.com Basic
Figure 12: Black and White Bleaching Cream Advertisement

Tennessee Electronic Library
17 Sep 1941, 4 - Chattanooga Daily Times at Newspapers.com Basic
Figure 13: Whitenicious Lighting Cream Before and After
Beauty companies distanced themselves from 'skin-whitening.' But outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now - CNN Style
Beauty companies distanced themselves from ‘skin-whitening.’ But outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now - CNN Style
Beauty companies distanced themselves from 'skin-whitening.' But outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now - CNN Style
Beauty companies distanced themselves from 'skin-whitening.' But outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now - CNN Style
Beauty companies distanced themselves from 'skin-whitening.' But outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now - CNN Style
The global market for skin whitening was estimated at $8 billion in 2020 -- and projected to increase by nearly half that within six years.

Figure 19: Image for Skin Whitening

*Beauty companies distanced themselves from 'skin-whitening.' But outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now - CNN Style*
Because lighter skin remains desirable in South Africa, Rwanda and Ghana -- where skin whitening products are banned -- illegal, black-market sales persist.

Figure 20: Image for Skin Whitening

*Beauty companies distanced themselves from 'skin-whitening.' But outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now* - CNN Style
Beauty companies distanced themselves from 'skin-whitening,' but outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now - CNN Style
The Asia-Pacific market accounted for over half of global revenue in 2018 and is expected to grow the most, with China being among the fastest growing markets globally.

Figure 22: Image for Skin Whitening

*Beauty companies distanced themselves from 'skin-whitening.' But outside the West, it appears to be business as usual for now* - CNN Style
For U.S. Latinos, skin color shapes life experiences
% of Latino adults saying ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having a darker skin color hurts Latinos' ability to get ahead</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a lighter skin color helps Latinos' ability to get ahead</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin colors shapes their daily life experiences</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination based on race or skin color is a very big problem in the U.S.</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Share of respondents who did not offer an answer and other answer options not shown.
“Majority of Latinos Say Skin Color Impacts Opportunity in America and Shapes Daily Life”
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 23: Image for Skin Color and Life Experiences
Figure 24: Image for Yearly Income by Color
Figure 25: Image for Monk Skin Tone Scale
https://afrotech.com/google-improves-skin-tone-representation-monk-skin-tone-scale?item=1
Figure 26: Image for Racial Demographics of Participants
Informed Consent Document for Interview Research
Principal Investigator: Natasha P. Ellis
bht288@vols.utk.edu

Project Title: The Commodification of Complexion: Examining Racialized Beauty vis a vis Colorism, Identity, and Life Chance

Project Description:
Critical Race and legal scholars approach colorism as a mainstay of white supremacy. Scholars evaluate geographical consolidations of whiteness by examining white supremacy’s role in the formation of colorism and the relationship between how race leverages and regulates beauty. Colorism like whiteness as capital, are rooted in the institution of slavery. Current manifestations of racialized beauty operate in conjunction with colorism and impact the outcomes of economic capital and beauty. Because beauty is racialized, examining the intersection of colorism with skin bleaching, and facial modification apps provides a framework for surveying the advantages associated with light skin privilege. The racialized nature of beauty gives rise to the core of identity formation and racial designation. Beauty standards approximate whiteness and reinforce racial governance and dominance central to canonizing the framework of white supremacy. Colorism, also known as light supremacy, shadeism, pigmentocracy, shade stratification, and skin tone bias operate as racialized systems that stratify on the basis of complexion. Skin tone bias is a gendered, intra-racial prejudicial system implemented during slavery that prioritized whiteness. This project examines how historically induced entities of racism racializes beauty and continues to pose a detriment to identity formation. Further, I will argue that the racialized nature of beauty situates whiteness as capital within the framework of colorism. This project will survey how complexion has been cemented as a driving force of social interaction, and leverages the hierarchies that racialize beauty, restrict access to economic capital and reproduce racism via colorism. I will argue that colorism is the consumption of whiteness in a capitalist framework. Further, I will argue how the racialized nature of beauty prioritizes and positions light skin as proximal to economic capital. Because the consumption of whiteness is commodified through various markets, circuits of colorism leverage the historical constructions of identity by reproducing whiteness via the threat of blackness.

Informed Consent for Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Natasha Ellis from University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the lived experience of colorism. I will be one of approximately 35 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. I have every right to decline to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty.

2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by Natasha P. Ellis. The interview will last approximately 1.5 hours or less depending on participant responses. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don’t want to be recorded, I will not be able to participate in the study. Be advised that interviews will be transcribed and recorded to ensure all information is included in the analysis. After transcription and analysis, audio and video recordings will be destroyed.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. Faculty and administrators from my campus or any organization I am affiliated with, will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes, videos, or transcripts, unless a translator is required. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted through utkirb@utk.edu.

7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

My Signature Date ________________________________

My Printed Name ________________________________

Signature of the Primary Investigator: Natasha P. Ellis

______________________________

For further information, please contact
The Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Engagement
1534 White Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697
265-974-7400 (fax)
Irb.utk.edu
COLORISM RESEARCH STUDY: INTERVIEWS

Critical Race and legal scholars approach colorism as a mainstay of white supremacy. Scholars evaluate geographical consolidations of whiteness by examining white supremacy’s role in the formation of color stratification. Colorism like whiteness as capital, are rooted in the institution of slavery. Current manifestations of racialized beauty operate in conjunction with colorism and impact the outcomes of economic capital and beauty. Because beauty is racialized, examining the intersection of colorism provides a framework for surveying the advantages associated with light skin privilege. The racialized nature of beauty gives rise to the core of identity formation and racial designation. This research will allow participants to discuss their lived experience and offer solutions on dismantling the practice of colorism.

To qualify, participants must be:

Between 18-45 years of age
Identify as African American, Hispanic, Asian, or Indian American

If interested in this research please email Natasha P. Ellis at bht288@vols.utk.edu
EXPERIMENTE COLORISME?

COLORISME | LA RECHERCHE: ENTRETIENS

LES SPÉCIALISTES DE LA RACE CRITIQUE ET DU DROIT ABORDENT LE COLORISME COMME UN PILIER DE LA SUPRÉMATIE BLANCHE. LES CHERCHEURS ÉVALUENT LES CONSOLIDATIONS GÉOGRAPHIQUES DE LA BLANCHEUR EN EXAMINANT LE RÔLE DE LA SUPRÉMATIE BLANCHE DANS LA FORMATION DE LA COLO STRATIFICATION. LE COLORISME, COMME LA BLANCHEUR EN TANT QUE CAPITAL, EST EN CONJONCTION AVEC LE COLISME ET A UN IMPACT SUR LES RÉSULTATS DU CAPITAL ÉCONOMIQUE ET DE LA BEAUTÉ. PARCE QUE LA BEAUTÉ EST RACIALISÉE, L'EXAMEN DE L'INTERSECTION DU COLORISME FOURNIT UN CADRE POUR ÉTUDIER LES AVANTAGES ASSOCIÉS AU PRIVILÈGE DE LA PEAU CLAIRE. LA NATURE RACIALISÉE DE LA BEAUTÉ DONNE NAISSANCE AU CŒUR DE LA FORMATION DE L'IDENTITÉ ET DE LA DÉSIGNATION RACIALE. CETTE RECHERCHE PERMETTRA AUX PARTICIPANTS D'ÉCHANGER SUR LEUR VECU ET DE PROPOSER DES SOLUTIONS SUR LE DÉMANTÈLEMENT DE LA PRATIQUE DU COLORISME.

A qualifier, participantes devoir être:

Entre 18-45 ans la age
Identite comme Afro American, Américain Hispanique, Américain Asiatique, ou Indien Américain

Si intéressée en la recherche, s'il vous plait à
Natasha P. Ellis à
bht288@vols.utk.edu
VITA

Natasha Patrice Ellis is a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee and an alumna of Howard High School in Chattanooga, Tennessee. After completing high school, Natasha attended Agnes Scott College where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Anthropology. Shortly thereafter, Natasha earned a Master of Arts in Sociology and later obtained a PhD in Sociology with a concentration in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies and Environmental Sociology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Natasha is a first generation scholar and her research interests seek to understand the racialized nature of beauty, its connection to colorism, economic and social capital, identity negotiation, and life chance. Natasha has studied and facilitated research in India and West Africa exploring social stratification, the transnational circuits of colorism, skin bleaching, and how digitization of imagery poses a sociological, psychological, and emotional detriment to one’s understanding of self, and racial identity.