UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

What does it mean to be Black-ish?: A Grounded Theory Exploration of Colorism on Twitter

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

SKYLA PARKER
Norman, Oklahoma
2021

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BLACK-ISH?: A GROUNDED THEORY EXPLORATION
OF COLORISM ON TWITTER

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE GAYLORD COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS
COMMUNICATION

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Jensen Moore, Chair

Dr. Cynthia Frisby

Dr. Julie Jones

Abstract

This research examines the discussion of colorism that Twitter audience members posted after viewing an episode of ABC's *Blackish* which explicitly identified colorism as its central theme, and in response to the casting of light-skinned Black actors on Netflix's *BlackAF*. Colorism is a form of skin color stratification in which light-skinned people are privileged over dark-skinned people in terms of access to education, work opportunities, and perceived attractiveness (Hunter, 1998; Gullickson, 2005; Mathews & Johnson, 2015; Morfitt, 2020; Blay 2021; Martin et al. 2017; Norwood 2015; Russell et al., 2013; Void 2019; Wilder, 2010). Derived from critical race theory (CRT), critical skin theory (CST) was applied to this research as a guide to determine power structures in the media that perpetuate colorism. Specifically, critical skin theory poses that colorism operates as an extension of race as the new basis for discrimination whereby skin color stratification is used to promote and reinforce privilege. Rooted in colonialism, colorism is a complex phenomenon that stems from slavery and racism wherein colonizers maintain power and control, by using observable human characteristics of skin color as a metric for worth in society (Hunter, 1998). Past scholarly research has examined colorism in the media as it relates to models used in advertising but seldom has colorism in television been studied (Keenan,1996; Mayo et al., 2006; Meyers, 2008 & Frisby, 2006). Therefore, this study explored how television as a media power structure portrays and establishes colorism and how viewers use social media (specifically Twitter) to discuss these portrayals. A qualitative content analysis was used to identify themes in the Twitter discourse, then a grounded theory approach revealed how these themes were similar to and different from what CST proposes in the discourse about colorism. Through the exploration of colorism themes in the

data, the findings revealed audience members a) shared personal experiences of colorism, b) discussed representation in casting and c) shared how the Black experience isn't monolithic in response to Black-oriented media.

Key Words: *BlackAF*, *Black-ish*, colorism, Kenya Barris, Twitter, Critical Skin Theory

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction

"Colorism is born of racism. It is the daughter of racism"

-Lupita Nyong'o, Kenyan-Mexican Actress

The prominent Hollywood actress, Lupita Nyong'o's figurative statement offered a simple yet poignant assessment of colorism in modern society (BBC Newsnight, 2019). Colorism has been researched across disciplines since the term was coined by Alice Walker (1983), in her book *In Search of our Mother's Garden* which she described as the "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on the color" (p. 291). Intraracial discrimination is prejudice within a racial group, as preference is conferred by the lightness or darkness of an individual's complexion in comparison to darkness of another's (Mathews & Johnson, 2015; Russell et al., 1993). Although the term is now widely adopted by researchers and scholars, the concept of colorism is historically rooted in American consciousness as a remnant of slavery. Historically, colorism arose from the enslavement (and rape) of Black people wherein lighter skin was created by intermingling of Black slaves and White slave owners (Hunter, 1998; Dhillon-Jamerson, 2018; Gullickson, 2005). Slavery served as an institution that allowed White "authorities" to exert control over Black persons and establish power structures that kept Black person from advancing (Hunter, 1998). Black persons who appeared closer to the "White European ideal" were allowed small affordances, to the detriment of those who were dark skinned. This study is important because colorism is often overshadowed by racism and seen as an issue that only occurs within a racial group however, Dhillon-Jamerson (2018) explained that colorism functions within interracial relationships as well but is often ignored and understated even though it contributes to inequality in the same ways as racism. Colorism is a global issue that functions to perpetuate racism by conferring that proximity to whiteness grants

privilege or preference (Harpalani, 2015). Furthermore, the implications of colorism are seen across various media wherein a skin color hierarchy perpetuates racist ideals (Erves, 2019; Leary, 2018; Frisby, 2006; Ducille, 1996; Neal & Wilson, 1989).

Studies have shown that there is a significant link between images in the media, racial identity, and informing perceptions about other races (Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017; Happer & Philo, 2013; Koch, 2010; Mutz, 1989). Nyong'o detailed her experience with colorism, growing up in Kenya, Africa where media imagery was saturated with only lighter skin women; there were no women with her rich dark complexion represented (BBC Newsnight, 2019). Nyong'o also disclosed an experience during an audition where she was told that she was "too dark to be on television" (BBC Newsnight, 2019) which reinforced what she'd seen growing up - that there was a preference in the media for lighter skin tones. Such prejudices are framed as preferences for lighter skin which then affects darker skin individuals' social mobility and quality of life (Hall, 2018; Hunter, 1998; Gullickson, 2005; Mathews & Johnson, 2015). These inequalities are rooted in history but perpetuated in media messages, that present images that reflect cultural values of what is preferred (Hunter, 2007). The existing literature places race as the central theme and does not clearly distinguish between racism and colorism (Hall, 2018). Thereby leaving a gap in what is known about colorism as a concept.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) established that race is embedded in social systems which include institutional power structures (Hall, 2018). Derived from CRT, Critical Skin Theory (CST) is a theoretical framework which argues that the presence of colorism operates alongside a racialized social system and institutional power structures that uphold these ideals (Hall, 2018; Reece, 2019). Hall (2018) created CST to unify past scholarship on Critical Race Theory (CRT) with focus on skin color hierarchies as a system of oppression. CST examined social, political,

and economic power structures that were based on race, but have evolved, and are now based on skin color. According to CST skin color takes precedent over race as a signifier of privilege (Hall, 2018). The present study will be extending CST to media, specifically television, wherein the power structures and institutions responsible for the colorism are media organizations, writers, and producers that control images and stories that viewers are exposed to (Happer & Philo, 2013).

Past research has focused on the representation of racially diverse characters in media and what affects the characters have on different diverse audiences (Banjo, 2013; Davis & Gandy, 1999). Media portrayals have been found to have significant impacts on perceptions (Banjo, 2013) because, "media representation plays an important role in informing the ways in which we understand social, cultural, ethnic, and racial differences" (Davis and Gandy, 1999, p. 367). Television is a powerful medium for spreading messages that has allowed researchers to explore more salient topics such as the way racially oriented media and skin color affects perceptions (Banjo, 2013).

This study examines two shows created by Black writer, producer, director and actor, Kenya Barris who has had a career spanning more than 20 years, in which he has accumulated 27 writing credits and 20 producing credits. Some of the programs he is associated with include *America's Next Top Model, The Game, Black-ish, Grown-ish, Mixed-ish* and *BlackAF* to name a few (IMDb, 2021). Barris is one of only a handful Black creators in Hollywood (i.e., Tyler Perry, Oprah Winfrey, and Ava Duvernay) in Hollywood who have power to control a narrative and the casting of characters. Additionally, Barris is someone who has been widely criticized by the media for colorism in his casting also has themes of colorism throughout his shows (Well, 2019; Essence, 2019). Thus, this level of power to control black-oriented programming and the fact

that the media routinely address the colorism themes present in his shows makes Barris' content worthy of study.

Barris has made it a point to address certain aspects of colorism in his shows such as in *Black-ish* and *BlackAF* (Erves, 2019). In his shows, Barris portrays conversations through characters surrounding colorism and purposefully places persons of diverse skin colors in the conversation. *Black-ish* addressed the issue of colorism directly in the episode "Black Like Us" and *BlackAF* addressed the issue indirectly through Barris' commentary on why he cast light-skin actors in the series. By creating "colorism" content and casting choices, Barris functions as a contributor to the media as a power structure.

Emphasis was placed on Barris' shows that center around the Black American experience, how viewers discussed colorism in the show, and casting of characters. Barris' sitcom was the first to make its debut on ABC and its success established Barris as a power player in television. This resulted in a stream of spin-offs inspired by his actual family including *BlackAF,* a more realistic and uncensored version of *Black-ish* on the media streaming site Netflix. *Black-ish* has become one of the more popular shows on cable television garnering 3.1 million viewers as of 2020 (Porter, 2021). Although *Black-ish* is considered Black-oriented media the show has a diverse viewership which consists of 58% of white (non-Hispanic) viewers compared to 28% Black (non-Hispanic) viewers as of May 2018 (Stoll, 2021). This trend falls in line with a report by Nielsen in 2017, that found that Black-oriented shows attracted substantial non-black viewership (Nielsen, 2017). Although Netflix does not release viewership data, *BlackAF* has recently been renewed for a second season following a 75 percent viewer rating (Goldberg, 2020). The significance of these viewership demographics as it regards this study is

that it gives substance to how colorism is perpetuated in the media and how non-minorities understand the skin color hierarchy.

Audience members took note of Barris' choices and took to social media to discuss what his choices meant. Social network sites are designed for audience member experience, while also allowing audience members to express and communicate their identity with cultural exchanges authentically through an online platform (Maragh, 2018; Lovelock, 2016). Twitter is a primary social media platform for this type of exchange. More specifically Black audience members have become a significant presence on Twitter earning the moniker "Black Twitter" in which this subcategory of audience members can be observed frequently discussing "Black American Culture" and relevant racial topics (Florini, 2014, p. 225). It should be noted that the race of individual audience member was not coded in this study, nonetheless Black Twitter audience member often guide conversations relating to social issues like colorism on social network sites (Florini, 2014).

In addition to being a primary source of "Black" information and dialogue Twitter is important to this study because audiences are consuming television content and using social media to create a social viewing experience by posting and replying with their reaction simultaneously as the shows air (Cameron & Geidner, 2014; Smith & Boyles, 2012). Thus, Twitter allowed the researcher to explore how individuals identified and deal with the intraracial concept of colorism within Barris' show as conversations occurred in real time. Thus, the present study examined audience posts on Twitter about the colorism episode of *Black-ish* and the casting choices for the show *BlackAF*. This fills a gap in the literature as prior research established that colorism exists and has been internalized in power structures but did not examine how colorism is discussed unprompted on social media (Webb & Robinson, 2017).

The two research questions guiding this study are: 1) how the discourse about colorism is being framed by Twitter audience members based on their conversations regarding content created by Kenya Barris, and 2) how are power structures discussed in regard to Barris himself as the creator of these shows, the networks that air his shows, and the writers of these shows. A qualitative content analysis method was used to code and analyze tweets and explore themes related to colorism discourse surrounding the shows. A grounded theory approach was then applied for data analysis that allowed the researcher to examine how these themes were similar to and differed from CST and other theories (Martin & Turner, 1986). Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) grounded theory allowed the researcher to approach the topic with an open mind and let the theoretical framework emerge from the data (Martin & Turner, 1986). The common themes that emerged about colorism provided rich data for theoretical grounding and expanding the concept.

Findings from this study are important because they support existing data on colorism that poses that light skin individuals are given preference and privilege over those with darker skin. Additionally, the preference for lighter skin can be observed in television portrayals that inspired viewer discussions on Twitter about how television networks, producers, writers, and directors are responsible for casting actors of diverse skin colors (Leary, 2018). This is important because colorism is a subtle manifestation of racism that if gone unchecked contributes to the discrimination and misrepresentation of people of color with dark skin.

Chapter II: Background and Significance

The present study looked at Twitter conversations related to colorism content and casting on the shows *Black-ish* and *BlackAF* produced by Kenya Barris (Wells, 2019; Essence, 2019). Additionally, Twitter was where Barris addressed criticism of colorism to which Twitter

audiences responded (Wells, 2019; Essence, 2019). These Television shows were specifically

selected because media messages on television shape perceptions, especially when it comes to

how Black-oriented media affects how other racial groups view Black people (Sullivan &

Platenburg, 2017; Vickers, 2018; Banjo, 2013). Colorism in the media has predominately been

studied in advertising and film but has seldom been studied in relation to television (Erves, 2019;

Leary, 2018; Frisby, 2006; Ducille, 1996; Neal & Wilson, 1989).

While some in Hollywood prefer the story to take precedent, producer Kenya Barris takes

on race directly, specifically how the Black experience is portrayed in his various shows

(Vickers, 2018) . While Barris has attempted to address the issue of colorism directly and

responsibly, he has not been exempted from facing accusations of preference for "lightness" in

the casting of his characters as well as criticism of how colorism was addressed within the shows

(Wells, 2019; Essence, 2019). Barris received great criticism of colorism accusations when the

cast photo was released on Twitter for *BlackAF* (Essence, 2019). Barris' response to criticism of

colorism in the casting of his shows prompted discussions to ensue on Twitter and a callback to

the colorism episode of *Black-ish* by audience members. Barris tweeted and later deleted his

rationale for casting.

> "I'm…not gonna make up a fake family that genetically makes no sense just for the sake
>
> of trying to fill quotas. I LOVE MY PEOPLE," Barris tweeted "[And] everything I does
>
> [sic] reflects that love. But to cast people like some kinda skin color Allstar game would
>
> actually do more harm than good" (Essence, 2019). "These kids look like my kids. My
>
> very Black REAL kids & they face discrimination every day from others outside our
>
> culture and I don't want them to also see it from US" (Essence, 2019). "I'm going to say

this and then let what happens happen…Colorism is a divisive tool used by the powerful

to separate the truly powerful" (Meara, 2019).

Black-ish

Black-ish was the first of a stream of shows created by Barris, which were inspired by his

family (Wells, 2019). Premiering on September 24, 2014, *Black-ish* garnered 7.4 million viewers

from the ages of 18-49 providing ABC with the boost in ratings needed for their primetime

television slots (Kissell, 2015). As the show has continued Barris has addressed a vast array of

issues through the lens of his experience as a Black man in America while maintaining a strong,

diverse viewership resulting in comparisons to *The Cosby show*. While inspired by *The Cosby*

Show Barris approached *Black-ish* in a different way where "race is not treated as an incidental

background detail but part of the show's identity" (Khaleeli, 2017, para. 2). After its initial

airing, many critics expressed concern with the name *Black-ish* claiming that the name was off-

putting to white audiences and divisive (Vickers, 2018). However, as the show continued to air

many critics switched from criticism to praise as the name *Black-ish* became clear as race

emerged as a primary narrative in the show (Harris, 2015).

Recognizing that his children were growing up in a different era, Barris wanted to

explore conversations about race today - lamenting that his children had become privileged

making them '*Black-ish*' instead of Black (Gross, 2016; Vickers, 2018). The "Black Like Us"

episode of *Black-ish* tackled colorism, a taboo subject that has seldom been portrayed in

mainstream media. In a guest column for the Hollywood Reporter, executive producer Peter Saji

noted that the topic was no approached lightly, and that the producer knew that if the subject

wasn't approached correctly, they would get "dragged on Twitter" (2019, para. 6). The reference

to "dragged" is a colloquial term meaning to face large amounts of criticism on the online social platform (Griffith, 2016).

The "Black Like Us" (season 5, episode 10) episode aired on ABC on January 15, 2019. The conversation about colorism in the episode began when the character Diane (Dré and Rainbow's daughter) showed them her school picture in which she can't be seen due to lighting that is uncomplimentary to her dark skin tone (Butler, 2019). The family then explored several points of contention surrounding the topic of colorism. Before, the discussion went further Dre, (played by Anthony Anderson), broke out into a narration paired with animations that explained the historical context of colorism (Butler, 2019; Barris, 2019). As other members of the family went on to discuss their issues with colorism Diane exclaimed, "No one in this family is as dark as me" (Butler, 2019, p.1; Barris, 2019). As Diane (played by Marsai Martin), explained her ostracization from the family she pointed out how society reinforces that light skin is preferred followed by a montage of her experiences.

The episode continued with the characters confronting colorism within their family unit, as members of the family detailed how it impacted them. At the end of the episode, the narration continued with Dré, calling for more discussions of colorism to take place. In the final narration, Dré laments, "Colorism is our secret shame and the pain it causes keeps growing because we rarely talk about it. But as I looked at my multicolored black family, I realized that because we talked about it, our wounds could finally start to heal as we learn to love ourselves out in the open. Because nothing gets better in the shadows" (Butler, 2019, p.1; Barris, 2019). Thus, the selection of *the Black-ish* episode "Black Like Us" provided a basis for audiences to continue conversations regarding colorism.

BlackAF

The Netflix show *BlackAF* premiered on Netflix on April 17, 2020, and is a mockumentary sit-com starring Barris as himself and actors as his family. The inception of the show *BlackAF* followed Barris' departure from ABC upon having a *Black-ish* episode that criticized Donald Trump shelved by the network in the fourth season (Rose, 2018). According to the Hollywood Reporter, the shelved show was Barris' breaking point and prompted his departure from the media conglomerate Disney, which owns ABC (Rose, 2018). Seeking more creative freedom Barris ended his newly signed four-year contract with ABC Studios and took his talents to Netflix for a $100 million deal in 2018 (Lynch, 2018). The freedom at Netflix allowed for *BlackAF* to be created with a more realistic and satirical representation of Barris' family similar to *Black-ish*. At the time of this study, *BlackAF* provided the most recent insight into colorism discourse compared to the *Black-ish* "Black Like Us" episode which aired a year before *BlackAF*.

The show portrays Barris' family as they navigate race and culture as a new successful Black family in Hollywood. Initially titled *#BlackExcellence* the discussion of the show *BlackAF* began with audience member's reactions to the cast photo (Jones, 2019). The cast photo comprised of primarily lighter-skin cast members which then spawned audience members to accuse Barris of colorism (Jones, 2019). In response, Barris defended the casting of the characters because of their likeness to his actual family (Essence, 2019). However, many critics also believed the outrage was due to the expectation that *BlackAF* would be a departure from his other shows like *Black-ish*, which is also loosely based on Barris' real-life family (Jones, 2019).

Veronica Wells (2019) of Madame Noire critiqued Barris' response to colorism stating he avoids the issue by scapegoating those shows are about his family. Even with the success of his

various shows, viewers and critics alike found an issue with Barris' casting of characters,

noticing that there are very few darker-skin actors and actresses portrayed in the shows (Wells,

2019). Wells (2019) pointed out that the issue is not as simple as Barris claimed it to be, and that

his role as a producer in Hollywood is to make room for those who have not been given the same

opportunities as those with lighter skin. The criticism by viewers supports Leary's (2019) study

found that viewer's want those who control the media to be held responsible and understand that

the casting of characters according to skin tone matters just as much as racial diversity (Leary,

2018).

Overall, these shows provide evidence of colorism that audience members responded to –

most vocally on Twitter where Barris is active. Shows like *Martin* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-*

Air have tropes of colorism but producers, directors and writing staff do not enjoy the same

status as Barris (Sorella Magazine, n.d.). An exception is Shonda Rhimes' *Bridgerton* that also

faced criticism of colorism by audience members because the character with lighter skin on the

show were portrayed in nobility positions compared to darker skin actors as the antagonist

villains (Oliver, 2021).

Chapter III: Literature Review

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a multi-dimensional approach to assessing how race

affects multiple components of one's life through power structures made up of social

organizations, systems, and institutions (Burton et al., 2010, p. 442; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000,

p. xvii; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Brown, 2003). CRT was derived from the work of American legal

scholars of the 1960s and '70s who were examining how the law and legal institutions served the

interest of the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the poor and marginalized (Hall, 2018).

CRT emphasized equitable treatment under the law for all races was not true and challenged the theory of legal "color blindness" (Hall, 2018). According to Hall (2018), the basic premises of CRT are that; 1) race is socially constructed and socially significant, 2) race is embedded within American systems and institutions, 3) any gains or decisions, legally, tend to serve the interest of the dominant white group and 4) members of minority groups are subject to racialized negative stereotypes depending on the needs or interest of whites. CRT recognized that the systemic nature of racism is primarily responsible for reproducing racial inequality (Hall, 2018). CRT asserted the relevance of including the experiences of people of color in scholarly research (Hall, 2018).

Developed by interdisciplinary scholars and activists, CRT attempted to challenge, "the relationship between race, racism, and power" (Hall, 2018, p. 2138). Though initially based within the context of law, critical race theory has expanded to include intersectionality lamenting that racism is a multifaceted system that affects multiple aspects of life through power structures (Hall, 2018). CRT provides a basis for researchers to bridge together how social systems affect groups with race as a centralized component of the research (Burton et al., 2010). Although usually combined in American references, race and skin color operate separately and have different implications regarding how power structures and institutions affect individuals (Harpalani, 2015) .

Among the early researchers who adopted CRT outside the context of law, Brown (2003) drew a link between CRT and mental health issues, explaining that social structures have a significant impact on an individual's psychological health. Brown (2003) posed that because CRT focused on how racial stratification operates in society, the theory can also explain how racial stratification contributes to emotional problems. Racial stratification is due to a system of

oppression that causes mental health problems wherein stressful circumstances and can cause

emotional distress (Brown, 2003). The research poses that the mental health of Black people is

compounded by race-related experiences along with regular life stressors. Although there is

limited conceptualization and measurements of how discrimination affects mental health, many

researchers have focused on the experiences of Black individuals to gauge mental health. In the

first wave of the National Study of Black Americans (NSBA) it was found that perceptions of

racial discriminations correlated to high levels of psychological distress and a lower level of life

satisfaction (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000; Williams et al, 2019). Brown (2003) concluded

that future researchers should advance scholarly research by explaining why certain racial

phenomenon impact mental health. Additionally, Brown (2003) examined how structural barriers

impact people of color interpersonally, other scholars used CRT to understand how racial

stratification affects individuals socially.

   Burton and colleagues (2010) researched on families of color by synthesizing relevant

research on critical race theories and colorism literature. In their review of decades of literature

Burton and colleagues (2010) found a gap in the literature that indicated that past researchers

have used elements of critical race and colorism perspectives but lacked a robust incorporation of

the elements together. To synthesize this literature Burton and colleagues (2010) characterized

multiracial families have diversified the American population contributing to how social and

intrapersonal factors of racial identities affects relationships in families of color (Bratter & King,

2008). Through the lens of critical race and colorism perspective Burton and colleagues

summarized that power and privilege designated through a racialized system contributes to

inequality and a lack of social mobility for families of color (2010). These inequalities included

how segregation, a discriminatory housing practice based on race, contributed to limitations for

family income and educational attainment (Burton et al., 2010; Caughy & O'Campo, 2006; Ogbu, 2003). As well as how light skin African American and Latinos are afforded more opportunities than those with darker skin creating racial disparities for individuals within and across racial groups (Burton et al., 2010; Goldsmith et al., 2006). The conclusion of this empirical study was to provide a basis for future researchers to understand and account for how racialized systems affect family dynamics (Burton et al., 2010).

Similarly, Ray and colleagues (2017) took a sociological approach to understand how race and ethnicity contributed to narratives of racial progress. CRT and afro-pessimism were used to evaluate how racial progress, specifically how anti-blackness contributes to economic immobility for Black people (Ray et al., 2017). Afro-pessimism is a concept that distinguished anti-blackness as a distinct form of racism (Ray et al., 2017). Ray and colleagues (2017) utilized CRT because the theoretical framework is inherently based on the pursuit of racial progress. Their study sought to challenge how racial progression is described -- posing that progress doesn't occur linearly. Ray and colleagues (2017) concluded that Black people face unique challenges in the labor market such as economic exclusion, racialized policing, and disproportionate poverty. Similar to Burton and colleagues (2010) Ray and colleagues (2017) finds that housing and employment discrimination contributed to wealth inequality by limiting opportunities for social mobility. Furthermore, Ray and colleagues (2017) assert that standardized racial categories offer little variation to account for how multi-racial individuals may benefit in the labor market because of their skin color or familial ties. For instance, "multiracial individuals who identify as black with a black parent and white parent may have access to some of their white parents' social networks and may be advantages in the labor market relative to those who identify as black" (Ray et al., 2017, p. 154). This supports Cancio and

colleagues (1996) research on racial differences in wages which accounted for parental education and work experience, which found that white men (with White parents) earned 15% more than Black men (with Black parents).

Taken together the studies by Brown (2003), Burton et. al (2010), and Ray et. al (2017) extend CRT in sociological disciplines and describe how racial stratification impacts the lives of racial minorities in multiple aspects of life such as family dynamics, marriageability, mental health, and the labor market. In these studies, CRT was used to guide the studies' exploration into nuanced topics within each discipline wherein which the theory helped support the argument that race contributed to a multitude of social organizations and systems.

Critical Skin Theory

Critical Skin Theory (CST) is a theoretical framework that centers skin color as a hierarchy that contributes to inequality and discrimination in U.S. institutions that function as power structures. Hall (2018) created CST to unify past scholarship on Critical Race Theory (CRT) with a theoretical framework focused on skin color hierarchies as a system of oppression. Although synonymously defined in American culture, race and skin color operate separately and have different implications regarding how power structures and institutions affect individuals (Hall, 2018). Hall argued that there was not a unified understanding of colorism hence Critical Skin Theory (CST) was developed to bring together past scholarship under a unified theoretical framework (2018). Additionally, Hall (2018) sought to broaden the concept of colorism beyond what past researchers' attributed to preference and prejudice. Through historical analysis Hall (2018) explored how the institution of marriageability and how the power structure of the economy gave advantages to light skin Black Americans. The historical analysis of the Census in Hall's (2018) research pointed to how the racial hierarchy was reorganized after slavery to

encompass lighter skin black Americans per the 'color line' (Hall, 2018). This 'color line'

established that white Americans held privilege and power, wherein one drop of Black blood led

to the absence of both. However, before the 'color line' was rigidly defined those of lighter skin

were able to attain certain privileges. Within the racial group, light skin signaled 'superior'

status, which allowed social, economic, and political advantages such as achieving higher

education attainment, social mobility, income, beauty ideals, and marital outcomes (Hunter,

1998; Gullickson, 2005; Mathews & Johnson, 2015). Thus, Black individuals with light skin can

navigate these social structures more easily because of their proximity to whiteness (Hall, 2018).

      Hunter's (1998) analyzed how skin color stratification affects the lives of Black women.

Specifically, her study examined how skin color hierarchies functioned as a system that operates

in conjunction with racialized systems of oppression. Hunter's (1998) research is important

because it allowed researchers to understand how Black women face a multitude of intersecting

oppressions such as race, sex, and class that they must navigate through a racialized white

majority worldview, which refers to the categorical domination of one perspective over others

(Collin, 1986; Robinson-Moore, 2008; Griffin, 2003). Hunter (1998) hypothesis was accurate,

which posed that lighter-skin African American women would have higher levels of educational

attainment, earn a higher average income level, and marry highly educated men more than dark

skin women. Hunter's research contended that the skin color hierarchy has been internalized by

society thus leading to continued advantages through selectivity of person's with lighter skin or

conversely discrimination of person's with darker skin.

      Additional research on colorism focused on preference as a determinant for privilege.

Goldsmith and colleagues' (2007) hypothesized the "preference for whiteness" was a predictor

for the wage gap. Their study predicted that having a lighter skin shade gave both in-group and

out-group advantages of privilege because of the greater proximity to whiteness (Goldsmith et al., 2007). They examined Black Americans and used two separate national surveys that categorized participants by skin color, income, education, and demographics to determine if skin shade affected wages. Goldsmith and colleagues found that mean hourly rate increased as skin color lightened, where $11.72 was the average earnings for black persons with dark skin in comparison to $13.23 black persons with medium skin (2007). Using statistical analysis, the researcher's created a wage equation in which they concluded lightness for Black Americans is rewarded in the labor market because of the proximity to whiteness (Goldsmith et al., 2007). Overall, the study found that phenotypic characteristics such as skin color affect socioeconomic placement in society (Goldsmith et al., 2007).

Further research using the "preference for whiteness" hypothesis expounded on the globalization of colorism, where researchers found that skin color bias goes beyond race. Painter and colleagues (2016) found that immigrants faced skin color bias similar to Black Americans, where darker-skin immigrants faced more disadvantages than their lighter-skin counterparts, such as wealth inequality. This wealth inequality is mainly due to immigrants not having a financial basis for building wealth in a new country but as it relates to skin tone stereotypes about darker skin minorities that already exist can impact earning potential. Using a new immigrant survey skin color as well as other variables, Painter and colleagues (2016) statistically analyzed financial earnings which showed that skin tone is a significant indicator of earning potential "each shade darker is associated with 11 percent or $134 less wealth" (p. 1166). Overall, the findings of the study determined that the racial/ethnic inequalities of immigrants coupled with darker skin complexions resulted in a double disadvantage because of the racial

minority status and skin tone of Asian and Black immigrants, compared to lighter-skin or white counterparts in the U.S (Painter et al., 2016).

Similarly, in Reece (2019) studied the historical marriage selections of light-skin Black Americans to assess their economic status and the deeper structural implications of social mobility. Reece's (2019) research acknowledged that there have been attempts at creating a colorism model that was centered around the "preference of whiteness" (Reece, 2019, p. 6). The argument used for the colorism model was that "white people simply prefer people who look similar to them" thus influencing larger color-based discrimination (Reece, 2019, p. 6; Goldsmith et al., 2007; Painter et al., 2016). Preference factors into color stratification in such matters as social mobility where even as the racial structure changed, lighter skin Black Americans were still able to preserve economic advantages (Reece, 2019). Reece (2019) posed that before the color-line was defined, lighter skin Black Americans were able attain higher education and affluence through marriage. In all, the research supports that there is a preference or prejudice-based framework for colorism as well as combinations of prejudicial and structural based factors (Reece, 2019).

Thus, CST findings have shown that colorism is a concept supported by past research that establishes that prejudice based on skin color functions as preference that affects structural based factors (Hunter, 1998; Painter et al., 2016; Reece, 2019). This is important to this study because CST is used to centralize skin color to extend the media as a power structure that comprises of writers, producers, and television networks.

Historical Background of Colorism

Colorism began when slaves with lighter skin were given preferential treatment because of the slave owners, "… affinity, and/or obligation toward their offspring" (Dhillon-Jamerson &

Hall, 2018, p. 2090; Gullickson, 2005). To understand the skin color hierarchy that persists within the Black community, one must acknowledge the historical basis of colorism. The beginning of color stratification was the raping of slaves by white slave owners resulting in lighter skin slaves (Hunter, 1998; Dhillon-Jamerson & Hall, 2018; Gullickson, 2005). The result of this sexual violence was mixed-race offspring who were still considered slaves and were placed under the oppression inherited by their mothers due to the notion of hypodescent (Hunter,1998). Hypodescent was the rule that made slavery a legal attribute passed on by the mother (Hunter, 1998). It was also used to define what constituted Blackness where one drop of Black blood determined your racial category (Hunter, 1998). When the one-drop rule reorganized the racial order, the separation of light skin and dark skin remained in the Black American consciousness, leaving residual intraracial hierarchies that persist in American mass media.

Thus, race became the primary way to separate white from other races (e.g., Black, Asian, Hispanic, etc.) while colorism was an extension of race that claimed proximity to whiteness as "better" than proximity to a darker (i.e., less white or European) color (Hunter,1998). Although proximity to white-ness did not equal white, any light-skin slaves dubbed "Mulattos" were able to attain privileges of white Europeans by "passing" as white at the expense of hiding their African-American roots (Harris, 2018, p. 2076). Harris (2018) defined passing as having phenotypical characteristics closely related to those of European descent. This allowed light-skin African Americans, "to bypass such structural barriers by acknowledging their White heritage as their most dominant ancestry" (Harris, 2018, p. 2074). "Passing" was a way for lighter skin individuals to attain privilege in a hierarchical system of race ranked or stratified in skin color. Having darker skin was seen as un-pure and better suited for hard labor while lighter

skin was considered more acceptable for indoor housework (Harris, 2018). Thus, the historical

impactions of colorism suggest that being perceived as more "white" or "European" leads to a

better chance of social mobility for those with light skin (Hunter, 1998; Gullickson, 2005;

Mathews & Johnson, 2015).

Colorism research has established that colorism exists as a preference or prejudice of for

lighter skin over darker skin within one's own race (Norwood, 2015; Mathews & Johnson, 2015;

Russell et. al 1993). Colorism assigned value based solely on the color of one's skin and was

stratified by the lightness or darkness of one's complexion (Mathews & Johnson, 2015; Russell et

al., 1993). Simply put, colorism is the practice of preference or discriminating against a person

based on their distance from "whiteness" (Maddox, 2004). Furthermore, colorism research on

color stratification showed that being perceived as more "white" or "European" leads to a better

chance at achieving higher education, social mobility, hire ability, beauty ideals, and marital

outcomes compared to their darker-skin counterparts (Hunter, 1998; Gullickson, 2005; Mathews

& Johnson, 2015). Thus, this research has provided a rich sociological understanding of how

colorism affects one's ability to move through society. Whereas racism historically has been the

overt form of discrimination, today colorism operates covertly to discriminate (Mathews &

Johnson, 2015; Russell et al., 1993) making it important to bring the conversation into the light

and increase awareness about the concept and how it is discussed currently.

Colorism in Advertising

Much of the media research on race and colorism has focused on advertising depictions

with the majority focused on women and how likely consumers would be to buy products based

on how models look (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Specifically, these studies evaluated how colorism

was perceived with Black models as the endorser and attractiveness related to skin color.

Keenan's study (1996) found that the majority of Black women depicted in Black magazines were of a lighter complexion than those in editorial photographs. Their study provided a basis for future research to look at salient topics of colorism in other aspects of advertising.

Mayo and colleagues (2006) studied how Black models were being portrayed based on skin color. They found darker-skin Black models were depicted in more sports-related magazines while lighter-skin models were found in more fashion magazines. This led them to suggest media outlets believed lighter-skin models were more fit to sell beauty products. Mayo and colleagues (2006) examined five years of advertisements from *Sports Illustrated* and *Vogue* magazines using the Pantone Matching System (PMS) to accurately code the skin color of models. While Mayo and colleagues (2006) found that there was more representation of Black models overall in both publications, there was a significant difference in skin color represented in a sports-oriented publication versus a beauty-oriented publication. In summation, 93% of dark-skin models were represented in *Sports Illustrated* compared to 48% in *Vogue* (Mayo et al., 2006).

Meyers (2008) specifically looked at skin color and the responses of Black consumers to evaluate what variation of skin color is more preferred. Meyers (2008) found that Black participants demonstrated a predilection for lighter-skin models in advertisements. In an experiment where skin tone served as the independent variable and attitude toward the ad, product, model, and purchase intention served as the dependent variables, participants were shown three advertisements two of which were fake ads with one stimulus ad (Meyers, 2008). The stimulus contained the same Black model with her skin color digitally altered between "light" and "dark" versions (Meyers, 2008, p. 45). Meyers (2008) concluded the use of a lighter skin tone model yielded the most positive responses by consumers, in regard to attitude and purchase intent (Cowart & Lehnert, 2018). However, Meyers (2008) explicitly stated that this

research did not serve to justify using lighter skin models in advertisements, but instead

suggested companies should use models of all skin tones. "Companies would be both successful

in advertising outcomes by utilizing Black models of varied skin color and also socially

responsible in their attempt to showcase the array of Black skin tones" (Meyers, 2008, p. 85).

Although Meyers (2008) found what consumers preferred, he pointed out that advertisers should

not represent Black models with the preferred lighter skin tone because the depictions had real

social implications.

Similarly, Frisby's (2006) research found that the depiction of light brown skin models

was reviewed more favorably as attractive than dark or pale skin models by both white and Black

participants. Frisby's (2006) study specifically examined perceptions of physical attractiveness

based on skin tone. The theoretical framework used in this research was skin color to test the

hypothesis that darker skin tone will be judged negatively or less attractive than the same woman

with lighter skin tone (Frisby, 2006). Participants were shown photos of four people with three

different levels of darkness of skin tone. In which the hypothesis of this study was proven correct

with black and white audiences perceiving lighter skin as more attractive (Frisby, 2006).

Taken together the significance of Keenan (1996), Mayo and colleagues (2006), Meyers

(2008), and Frisby's (2006) research finds Black models with Eurocentric features, namely

lighter skin, satisfy mainstream ideals of beauty. Additionally, the positive characteristics of

attractiveness and likeability being attributed to lighter skin models in advertising has broader

impacts on how other mediums, such as television evaluate representation. Centralized the

images of light skin, in the media, as ideal contributes to audiences understanding of how value

is placed on people of color based on skin color (Gerbner et al., 2002).

Colorism in Television

As a part of American culture, television provides insight into the culture, people, and environments that are not always accessible (Harrison et al., 2008). Much like advertising, skin color in television research has looked at how the content affects Black audiences, where the race was at the center of these studies (Pornsakulvanich, 2007; Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017; Tukachinsky et al., 2015; Erves, 2019). Images portrayed on television frame our understanding of others, especially when there is no prior knowledge (Gerbner et al., 2002). Limited understanding of other race and cultures by viewers gives power to images portrayed as truthful and normal when it's the only thing one has to compare knowledge to (Harrison et al., 2008). That is particularly important to consider due to the changing landscape of television, where there is a growing representation of minority portrayals on prime-time television, particularly Black Americans (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Television is important to evaluate because it plays an important role in informing viewers with images that define normalcy and what's acceptable (Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017; Harrison et al, 2008). As a part of American culture, television provides insight into the culture, people, and environments that are not always accessible (Harrison et al., 2008).

Pornsakulvanich (2007) reviewed and analyzed empirical research on how television portrayals of minorities influence perceptions on group vitality and identities in the U.S. The study found that "people usually select particular programs to satisfy their own need that reinforce their group identities and vitality" (Pornsakulvanich, 2007, p. 27; Harwood, 1997; Harwood,1999). Overall, Pornsakulvanich (2007) suggested that group members tended to watch shows that depict their group's identity positively and avoided negative portrayals.

In a study by Tukachinsky and colleagues (2015) attitudes of viewers in response to the depictions of other racial groups were evaluated over time. The race/ethnicity portrayals in primetime television were evaluated over 20 years and found that ethnic minorities are underrepresented and portrayals often depict stereotypes (Tukachinsky et al., 2015). Over time the prevalence of Black characters has fluctuated overtime while other minority groups remained almost absent from being portrayed on television. The rise of the representation of Black characters is attributed to sit-coms that have been found to influence "viewer's perceptions of Blacks' educations attainment and income level" (Tukachinsky et al., 2015; Busselle & Crandall, 2002).

Additionally, depictions of Black characters in real crime shows have been found to influence viewer's perceptions of Black criminality (Tukachinsky et al., 2015; Oliver & Armstrong, 1998). The hypothesis guiding this research was that the quantity and quality of ethnic and racial representation on TV influenced the attitudes of white American's toward these racial groups (Tukachinsky et al., 2015). The methods used to understand this data were a survey to evaluate the attitudes of white Americans toward ethnic minorities in the U.S. as well as content analysis to examine the representation of minorities on the most viewed prime-time television shows between the years of 1987-2008. Multiple surveys were sent out over the course of this study, purposefully overlapping with at least one television season. This added to the validity of the research looking to understand the relationship between representation and public opinion over time (Tukachinsky et al., 2015). The findings of the research were that both the prevalence and social status of Black and Latino characters significantly impacted attitudes toward Black and Latino people. Blacks and Latinos were among the only ethnicities that could be studied due to the lack of representation of Asian Americans and Native Americans in prime-

time television shows. All together the results of the study revealed that the television

representation of Blacks and Latinos as hyper-sexual or unprofessional can reinforce racial

stereotypes. For which, Tukachinsky and colleagues (2015) highlighted the importance of how

Black and Latino characters are represented as characters on television, because it can cultivate

or reinforce stereotypes. The significance of these stereotypes influenced by representation, is

that Black Americans are disproportionately represented in sit-coms and crime dramas

reinforcing these depictions as normal (Tukachinsky et al., 2015).

Erves (2019) researched the representation of beauty among women of color, specifically

looking at colorism through a content analysis of the television shows *Black-ish, Dear White

People, Empire, Grown-ish,* and *The Carmichael Show.* The purpose of the study was to examine

the representation of women and how colorism affects beauty and self-esteem as well as to

evaluate if colorism still exists in 21st-century television. The findings of this study were that

colorism still exists and often upholds stereotypical portrayals of Black women, such as darker

skin women are angry and hyper-sexual (Erves, 2019). The study found that within these shows,

lighter-skin women had more "authoritative roles" versus darker-skin have more negative

portrayals. Erves (2019) argued that it, "is clear that there is an authoritative hierarchy that exists

based on skin color and a negative stereotype is projected that dark complexion African

American women are angry Black women" (p. 65). Erves (2019) concluded that beauty was

correlated to skin color suggesting what was portrayed on television has an impact on

perceptions and self-esteem if these stereotypes are internalized as truthful. The "authoritative

hierarchy" reported in Erves's (2019) research is consistent with how colorism has operated

historically, providing insight into how it has been perpetuated in the media.

Overall, television depictions often help construct a worldview that can be internalized; thus, it is important to understand how representation can impact the way groups are viewed and treated by society (Pornsakulvanich, 2007; Tukachinsky et al., 2015). Sullivan & Platenburg (2017) researched the impact of the media on racial identity, where they concluded that there was a correlation between the consumption of Black information and a greater sense of Black identity. Furthermore, Tukachinsky and colleagues (2015) found that the representation of racial groups also impacts how other racial groups perceive them by cultivating or reinforcing stereotypes.

Rhaman (2020) pointed to how the 21st Century Western film industry contributed to stereotypes by preventing darker-skin actors and actresses from getting roles. Instead, the Western entertainment industry prioritized lighter-skin or mixed-race actors or actresses to downplay distinct racial categories (Lo, 2017). Thus, the use of light-skin actors and actresses promoted racial ambiguity that exempted those in Hollywood from acknowledging the ethnic, cultural backgrounds, and histories of people of color (Lo, 2017). This allowed for race to be minimized and for the story being portrayed to take precedent for viewers. While some forms of casting seek to disregard race as a central part of a character, other forms contribute to negative stereotypes. For instance, when the casting call for *Straight Outta of Compton* went viral on the internet, it cemented what some in Hollywood already knew about light skin as the preferred skin color for main roles. The casting call was for extras in the movies ranking girls from 'A' to 'D'. The 'A' girls were described as being any race with real hair and a nice body, 'B' girls were explicitly described as having light-skin and Beyoncé should be the prototype, 'C' girls were described as medium to light skin with weave, and 'D' girls were described as African American with medium to dark skin in poor physical shape (Webb, 2014). The A-B-C-D

grouping is not new to Hollywood casting but the blatantly racist stereotypes in casting

exemplified the inequities for actors with darker skin. Central to television colorism in casting

still persists as dark skin actors are hardly cast in main roles. This is exemplified in popular

Netflix shows *(Ginny and Georgia, Never Have I Ever, Outer Banks)* in which the main

character in these shows is of lighter complexion with little or no representation of darker skin

character (Newman-Bremang, 2021). In this way, true representation is hampered because

stereotypes diminish the complexities of colorism.

Thus, colorism findings in both advertising and television have shown that underlying

issues of representation in the media also encompasses skin color. At the surface research has

found that the typecasting of racial groups to specific television genres can develop or reinforce

existing stereotypes (Tukachinsky et al., 2015; Webb, 2014). Subsequently, these stereotypes

often include remnants of colorism that pit negative attributes of darker skin against positive

attributes of lighter skin. Understanding, how television shapes perceptions through images and

portrayals is important to this study because reinforcing one skin color (light skin) as acceptable

over another (dark skin) is both detrimental interpersonally (with other racial groups) and

intrapersonally (with one's own-self perceptions and self-esteem). While scholarship has

provided how tropes of colorism on television affect viewers, it is also important to understand

how the media influences perceptions and become a part of viewers' realities, thus normalizing

or mainstreaming media content.

Media as a Power Structure

The media are a powerful tool that can not only change social narratives but enforce

harmful one's and legitimize perpetuated stereotypes (Happer & Philo, 2013). Early research by

Adoni and Mane (1984) integrated theories of mass communication to offer a well-rounded view

of the role mass media plays in the social construction of reality, which establishes a relationship between culture and society. Social construction of reality is defined as the process individuals use to both create and produce components of their social world by internalized meaning, experiences, and actions (Adoni & Mane, 1984). Adoni and Mane (1984) used the media dependency hypothesis in their study, which poses the media's impact on an individual's reality depends on their own experiences and amount of exposure to the media in line with Happer and Philo's (2013) study. Their early integration of media theories drew on the role mass media has on constructing worldviews dependent on the viewer's level of interaction with the media (Adoni & Mane, 1984).

For instance, in Happer and Philo's (2013) research of the role of the media in the construction of public belief and social change they identified common topics discussed in the news. Their findings suggest that public topics of discourse are shaped by powerful groups in society but also account for how popular (more common) opinions may dominate understanding of the subject matter (Happer & Philo, 2013). Their research went on to explain that the audiences' understanding of subject matter occurs at various levels based on direct experience or knowledge of an issue (Happer & Philo, 2013). Utilizing the news reporting of climate change as the media content Happer and Philo (2013) found that participants with the least amount of exposure to the topic adjusted their views. While participants with more exposure to the content were least likely to adjust their opinion (Happer & Philo, 2013). Although focused on subjects occurring in the news, Happer and Philo's (2013) research can apply to a larger discussion of the media's role in perceptions about colorism. Where depending on the audience's awareness or interaction with the concept determines their ability to come up with their understanding of an issue hence the use of personal anecdotes to describe their experiences.

Mainly focused on how exposure to television cultivates viewers' worldview, understanding of reality, Gerbner and colleagues (2002) looked at the processes of engaging with messages, audiences, and contexts of television. Their research centered on viewer construction of realities because "television's central role in our society makes it the primary channel of the mainstream of our culture" (Gerbner et al., 2002, p. 51). Central to this research is mainstreaming, which poses that heavily viewing the same content diminishes the viewer's ability to come up with their own understanding. Gerbner and colleagues (2002) argued that television as a source of broadly shared images and content that have the ability to centralize opinions through mainstreaming. For example, Gerbner and colleagues (1980) found that in correlation with television drama's underrepresenting older people, heavy viewers found that the population of people 65 and older was declining even though this was not factual (Gerbner et al., 2002).

Television, as a tool that shapes narratives and informs culture operates as a power structure made up of networks, writers, producers, and showrunners (Happer & Philo, 2013). Those creating television content do so from their own social construction of reality that then influences culture and impacts perceptions (Adoni & Mane, 1984). The commonalities between past scholarly studies are that perceptions are dependent on a multitude of factors including the viewers' understanding, awareness, and interaction with the media (Happer & Philo, 2013; Adoni & Mane, 1984; Gerbner et al., 2002).

Thus, media are a power structure that are important to understand because of the influential effect television has on normalizing and popularizing media content in which meaning, experiences, and actions can be internalized (Gerbner et al., 2002; Adoni & Mane, 1984). This is important to this study as CRT and CST attribute the discrimination by race and

skin color to power structures made up of social organizations, systems and institutions (Burton

et al., 2010, p. 442; Delgado & Stefancic, p. xvii; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Brown, 2003; Hall, 2018).

Wherein which the present study seeks to extend these power structures to the media,

specifically television. As it occurs to colorism research mainstreaming has already been

identified in advertising (Keenan,1996; Mayo et al., 2006, Meyers, 2008; Frisby, 2006) lending

the concept to be studied in other forms of media. The present study looked at the Black-oriented

shows of *Black-ish* and *BlackAF* to offer a more centralized look at colorism in television,

specifically these two shows have identifiable themes of colorism to be textualized.

Role of Black-Oriented Media Content on Perceptions

Black-oriented media such as shows produced by Barris can offer insight into the topic of

colorism because the concept is acknowledged in these shows unlike other forms of media

(Vickers, 2018). Unlike other forms of media, Barris sought to, "challenge stereotypes, and give

White America a look inside the lives of an affluent Black family" in his show *Black-ish*

(Vickers, 2018). Similarly, what Barris portrays on television contributes to mainstream culture

and informs viewers with images (Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017; Erves, 2019; Pornsakulvanich,

2007; Tukachinsky et al., 2015; Gerbner et al., 2002).

Banjo (2013) explored the perception of Black audiences and their attitudes when

viewing Black-oriented media with an all-Black audience versus a racially mixed audience.

Attitudes were measured on a 7-point Likert scale which measured enjoyment and an 11-point

Likert scale was adapted to measure hostile media perceptions. The findings of the experiment

were that Black audience members were more critical when viewing with an all-Black audience.

Conversely, Black audience members were neutral to the Black-oriented media when viewing

with a mixed audience (Banjo, 2013). The theories guiding this research include hostile media

and third-person perception which together both describe how viewers will negatively attribute the impact of what is being viewed to out-groups (Banjo, 2013). These findings disproved the hypothesis in which the research thought Black audiences would be more critical of the Black-oriented content when watching with a mixed-race audience (Banjo, 2013). However, these findings were consistent with past research that found that Black audience members would enjoy Black-oriented media, "regardless of the race of their co-viewer" (Banjo, 2013, p. 317; Appiah, 2002; Brigham & Giesbrecht, 1976). Overall, Banjo's study revealed that the Black audience's enjoyment of Black-oriented media was not hindered by mixed-race audience members (2013). However, there was still concern about the perception of other races, specifically white persons who could be influenced by the content of the media (Banjo, 2013). When viewing culturally significant and representative, Black-oriented media there is concern with how other races view the content. "Although they are able to form their independent judgments about the content, black audiences have little trust in white individuals to share in their enjoyment of black cultural media" (Banjo, 2013, p. 317). Thus, Black audiences understand that ethnic media is consumed by out-groups and are concerned about how their race is being portrayed.

 Banjo (2013) presents that the third-person effect is central to evaluating how perceptions of ethnic media influence beliefs or opinions. The third-person effect essentially characterizes how "individuals are more likely to believe that other people are more affected by media messages than themselves" (Banjo, 2013, p. 310; Davison, 1983). For instance, a Black person who had experienced colorism watched a show dealing directly with colorism will believe the content will have greater influence on a non-Black persons perception than their own.

 Taken together, prior research found the Black audience members had an over-awareness of how the perceptions of non-Black audiences could be skewed when exposed to Black-oriented

media. This awareness could be part of why Barris was critiqued for his casting of lighter skin cast members, because there are implications that white audiences are being informed by what is being portrayed on the show. The concern for white audience is that they will internalize the content as ideal thus perpetuating a preference for light skin (Banjo, 2013; Hall, 2018). Specifically *Black-ish,* exemplified how diverse viewership of Black-oriented media could potentially signify the third-person effect among Black audiences. Andrew McCaskill, senior vice president of Communications and Multicultural Marketing at Nielsen said, "storylines with a strong black character or identity are crossing cultural boundaries to grab diverse audiences and start conversations" (Nielsen, 2017, p. 1). Therefore, the selection of shows created by Barris is significant because of their intent to express or explain the Black experience/Blackness to an overwhelmingly white audience (Banjo, 2013).

The studies of Black-oriented media programs have shown that there is sensitivity among viewer's when it comes to culturally significant representations. The way Barris depicts his fictional family may be non-Black viewer's only exposure to Black American culture (Vickers, 2018; Adoni & Mane, 1984). This is important to this study because Barris has the unique opportunity to dismantle stereotypes by contributing to mainstream media, which informs viewers (Gerbner et al., 2002). Although Barris has achieved wide acclaim and success for his approach to discussing race relations and Blackness he has faced criticism for his consistent casting of lighter skin actors. This criticism of colorism is documented in think piece articles about Barris, in which tweets by audience members supported that ongoing conversation about the concept was relevant (Essence, 2019; Wells, 2019).

The Second Screen Effect

The phenomenon of using another device while simultaneously watching television has become commonplace in recent years. Researchers have begun calling this phenomenon the "second screen effect" that has continued to stay on an upward trend as technology has become more widely available (Giglietto & Selva, 2014). Use of the second screen means that viewing television has become more interactive as audiences can use social media to communicate with each other as well as the characters and producers of the show (Giglietto & Selva, 2014). An early Nielson (2009) report proposed that 57% of Americans watched television and browsed the internet at the same time at least once per month (Nielsen, 2009). As of 2013, Nielsen reported that 46% of smartphone owners and 43% of tablet owners used their devices while watching television (2013a). The report found that second screens were used for viewers to browse and search the web, but also to participate in activities related to the content being viewed (Nielsen, 2013a). Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook encouraged viewer to viewer conversations. In 2013 Nielsen created a Twitter TV rating system that recorded that 19 million people composed 263 million tweets about live television in the U.S. in quarter two of one year alone (Nielsen, 2013b).

Giglietto and Selva (2014) conducted a study that evaluated second screen participation on Twitter in response to a political talk show on Italian television. A content analysis was used for tweets posted over an entire television season to determine the relationship between the types of scenes broadcasted, style of comments, and the way the audience participated with the content (Giglietto & Selva, 2014). The findings of the study were that Twitter viewers' expressed their personal opinions in general or address key members of the show (Marwick & Boyd, 2011;

Giglietto & Selva, 2014). The study by Giglietto and Selva (2014) concluded that the level of engagement depends on the television content.

Racial Discourse on Twitter

Twitter provides qualitative data on thoughts, opinions, experiences, and beliefs communicated through posts and replies (Brock, 2018). As a critical race scholar, Brock (2018) developed a tool to derive how cultural exchanges occurred through technology and could be analyzed. Brock's initial research on Black Twitter, and how race is communicated online, served as the baseline for establishing social networking sites as a source for understanding how beliefs and meaning are communicated through technology (Brock, 2018). Wherein the research on Black Twitter found that discourse served as a reference point for online exchanges and encouraged conversations (Brock, 2018).

Maragh's (2018) research analyzed racial authenticity using a social identity approach to look at how race is displayed on Twitter. Maragh (2018) explored the cultural phenomenon of "Acting White" as rhetoric among Black Americans, where Twitter was used to evaluate how criticism of racial authenticity affected belonging within an ingroup. Maragh's (2018) research analyzed textual data contained in tweets compared to interviews that allowed the researcher to see how race is displayed online versus in person. Maragh (2018) employed 14 Black Americans from various on-campus Black-identifying organizations at an unspecified Midwest University. The in-depth interviews allowed participants to define "Acting White" based on their experience coupled with an analysis of participants tweets to track themes and patterns through "critical race, communications-based analysis" (Maragh, 2018, p.598). The findings of this study were that Twitter acted as a way for audience member's to determine how race is portrayed and authentically displayed online (Maragh, 2018). Additionally, Maragh's (2018) study contributed

a fuller understanding of the construction of race and how it is communicated through

interactions online by examining implicit forms of user interactions that could only be identified

through with in-group knowledge.

In line with the present study, Webb and Robinson's (2017) research on how people used

Twitter to communicate individual experiences about colorism to reveal personal constructions

of reality. Using critical discourse analysis, the researcher analyzed threads of tweets that

contained the term colorism to analyze how the topic was being discussed. Grounded in critical

discourse analysis, Webb and Robinson (2017) used content analysis in which they concluded

that the diverse amount of audience members uses "Twitter to argue, agree, share, and probe

about the issues of colorism" (p. 32). Webb and Robinson (2017) reported that discourse on

Twitter allowed audience members to reinforce, broaden, or learn their identities. Webb and

Robinson's (2017) research are inherently important because it guides the current study and

allowed parallels to be drawn such as audience members using the social media site to

communicate their thoughts, opinions, beliefs and explanation of the world. While Webb and

Robinson (2017) looked at colorism discourse on Twitter on a broader scale, this study offers a

more focused look at colorism discourse in response to television media.

Overall, the second screen effect and racial discourse on Twitter show evidence that

colorism discourse occurs. This intersection of media uniquely allows researchers to view

attitudes about colorism and how their formed in relation to specific stimuli (Webb & Robinson,

2017). This study seeks to examine the unprompted discourse related to colorism when it is the

explicit topic of viewer content utilizing television and Twitter. The following research questions

address themes and subthemes that emerged from the data and are organized around the two

research questions that guide the study.

Research Questions

This study seeks to examine audience conversations about colorism prompted by viewing

Black-ish and the casting of BlackAF. The colorism conversations are important because they

offer insight into how the concept of colorism is constructed through shared experiences, beliefs,

and opinions (Webb & Robinson, 2017). The concepts included in this study are colorism, power

structures in the media (television) and Twitter discourse. Wherein these concepts intersect due

to the second screen effect (Giglietto & Selva, 2014) and provide an identifiable stimulus for

colorism discourse to occur. Television as a contributor to media as a power structure has the

power to shape perceptions (Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017, Happer & Philo, 2013; Adoni &

Mane, 1984; Gerbner et al., 2002). These perceptions can be observed in social spaces where

scholarship supports that audience members are often compelled to share their worldview on

Twitter among other platforms (Webb & Robinson, 2017). These concepts are important to the

study because they help illustrate how colorism in the media can be perpetuated by powerful

entities but also showcase a collective level of change wanted by audience members for true

diversity, which included a diversity of skin tones (Happer & Philo, 2013). The powerful entities

are alluded to Barris' Twitter response to colorism accusation in which he said, "Colorism is a

divisive tool used by the powerful to separate the truly powerful" (Meara, 2019). Colorism as a

divisive tool used to separate people based on power aligns with the basis of CST, which also

lends that colorism is a means of discrimination that delineates power and privilege. Taken

together, these concepts helped shape the present studies research questions:

The following research questions provided insight into how discussions involving

colorism are taking place on Twitter within the confines of black-oriented television shows

produced by Barris. These questions yielded insight into American viewers' perceptions about colorism through themes that emerged in Twitter discourse.

RQ1: What colorism themes emerge within the discourse on Twitter centered around Kenya Barris and shows produced by him, specifically Black-ish and BlackAF?

Colorism themes centered around these specific shows are important to examine because they offer insight into salient issues that occur within racial groups but have broader implications. Television is a medium that shapes audience members perceptions and has the power to normalize media information; while Twitter is a social media platform that allows audience members to communicate and affirm worldviews through shared experiences. Thus, making them both ways that contribute to audience member social construction of reality, which entails the way media is understood from an individual's own beliefs, experiences, and perceptions (Adoni & Mane, 1984). Previous CST findings show that colorism is the preferential treatment of lighter skin individuals over darker skin individuals, resulting in the adverse mistreatment of those with darker skin (Hall, 2018). Thus, a pattern of themes showing evidence of a preference for lighter skin would support CST. The research question posed was important to explore because of the way television shapes perceptions, especially when it comes to how black-oriented media affects how other racial groups view black people (Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017; Vickers, 2018; Banjo, 2013).

RQ2: What colorism themes emerge within the discourse on Twitter centered around power structures namely Barris himself as the creator of these shows and the networks that air his shows?

Colorism themes centered around these power structures are important to examine because these institutions are in control of what become mainstream contributing to how

television normalizes U.S. culture (Gerbner et al., 2002). Barris, the network, writers portrayal of the Black experience/Blackness have the opportunity to inform a majority white audience (Banjo, 2013; Porter, 2021; Stoll, 2021). This presents showrunners the opportunity to either perpetuate or dismantle harmful stereotypes about Black Americans stereotypes (Tukachinsky et al., 2015; Erves, 2019). Acknowledgment, of the influence of these stereotypes in the media is important because they have implications on how other races view Black Americans (Banj0, 2013). Thus, there is concern that these oversimplified depictions of a racial are internalized into non-Black audience members perceptions (Vickers, 2018; Banjo, 2013;Happer & Philo, 2013; Adoni & Mane, 1984). Previous CST findings show that colorism contributes to skin color by discriminating against darker skin individuals, limiting their ability for education, job attainment, marriageability, beauty ideals (Hall, 2018; Hunter, 1998; Gullickson, 2005; Mathews & Johnson, 2015). Thus, a pattern of themes of the over-representation of lighter skin actors in shows points to discrimination of darker skin actors as it relates to casting shows evidence that would support CST (Rhaman, 2020; Leary, 2018). Taken from the principles of CRT social organization, systems, and institutions create power structures that impact racial groups wherein CST centralizes skin color and is used to extend the media as a power structure.

Chapter IV: Methodology

This study used a qualitative content analysis to explore themes related to colorism in the discourse on Twitter within the context of Black-oriented shows produced by Kenya Barris. This method was used because, "it requires the researcher to focus on selected aspects of meaning, namely those aspects that relate to the overall research questions" (Schreirer, 2014, p. 170). In this way the qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to be flexible in that the categories developed from the coding process are guided by the data (Schreirer, 2014). This process

allowed initial coding and analysis of data to occur and helped the researcher evaluate the data

without assumptions or expectations (Schreirer, 2014).

Why Twitter?

Twitter was chosen because it is a platform on social media that offers a large sample of

audience members as well access to a forum where individuals communicate their worldview

(Webb & Robinson, 2017; Carney, 2016; Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014). Twitter's advanced

search was used to input the search terms and find original posts and replies containing *Black-ish*

or *BlackAF* and colorism. Results from the search terms about *Black-ish* were collected from the

timeframe of January 15, 2019, to January 15, 2020, because January 15, 2019, marked the

premiere of the "Black Like Us" episode on colorism. Results from the search terms about

BlackAF were collected from the timeframe of April 17, 2020, to April 17, 2021, because April

17, 2020, marked the premiere of *BlackAF* on Netflix.

Only original posts and replies that talked about colorism in response to *Black-ish* and

BlackAF were analyzed. There were 245 original posts and replies collected and coded for the

present study. In total, 178 posts and replies were examined for *Black-ish*, and 67 posts and

replies were examined for *BlackAF*.

Along with original posts and replies, threads where multiple audience members take part

in the discussion were also noted in which a stream of replies are connected to one initial post.

Original posts refer to a tweet and replies refer to comments under original posts. Specifically,

original posts and replies were collected under the following search terms: Blackish, colorism,

Black like us and colorism, Black-ish and Black AF, Kenya Barris, colorism, and colorism,

#blackAF. These search terms provided the best results for posts and replies containing discourse

on colorism and these shows. The initial name of the show *BlackAF* (*BlackExcellence*) yielded

mostly articles linked to Twitter, which was not pertinent to the data collection. Other search

terms such as #blackish or #KenyaBarris alone produced promotional content for the show and

articles about Barris or the show. Thus, these posts and replies were excluded from the study as

they did not address colorism or power structure concepts necessary for this study. The only

hashtag used in this study was #blackAF because of the metadata tag's use in the name of the

show title. Subsequently, pictures, memes, and gifs contained in tweets were also excluded from

the study and only the text of the tweets was used. Additionally, as a source for observing data

Twitter allowed uninhibited by researcher bias for audience members. Participants can alter their

words or behavior when being observed and evaluated for a known reason also described as the

Hawthorne or observer effect (Webb & Robinson, 2017; Stacy, 2013).

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis used for this study was Twitter posts and replies containing discourse

about colorism. Colorism discourse was defined as conversations about skin color (i.e., light skin

or dark skin) from audience members who viewed the television shows *Black-ish* and *BlackAF*.

This means the audience members shared their perceptions, thoughts, opinions, and beliefs of the

shows as they related to their familiarity with the concept of colorism. For example, an audience

member that agreed with Barris' framing of colorism posted,

> "First break on Blackish's colorism episode… Immediately, (I) like that they highlighted
>
> colorism as a global issue for people of color and that for Black people in the US, it has
>
> roots in our ancestor's enslavement. Hoping they tie the pervasive nature to white
>
> supremacy soon."

Another audience member that disagreed with Barris' framing of colorism posted,

"Well, let's hope this is readdressed in future episodes. By no means was the topic of

#colorism really resolved of fully understood from Ruby and Diane's perspective.

Colorism is deep and still effects people socially, economically and psychologically to

this day. #blackishABC."

Original posts and replies were then coded for audience member's mention of their own life

experience, mention of Barris, and mention of a network.

An Excel sheet was formatted for coding in the following way: the search terms used for

each post and reply, the date of the tweets, whether the posts were in favor of the shows' framing

of colorism by Barris or not in favor of the shows' framing of colorism by Barris, if the person

mentioned of their own life experience, mention of Barris and mention of a network.

Additionally, a screengrab of each tweet was also linked in the Excel document, and the number

of likes, retweets, and replies were recorded for each tweet.

The initial categories coded in the qualitative content analysis were selected to answer the

study's research questions. **RQ1** dealt with how discourse on Twitter was being framed by

audience members based on their interaction with content created by Kenya Barris. **RQ2**

examined power structures, which included large media corporations that are in charge of

producing popular content to mass audiences. Other power structures included the producers,

writers, and Barris himself as the creator, writer, and producer of his shows. To explore **RQ2**

original posts and replies that mentioned Netflix/ABC or writers/producers were noted.

Measurement Categories/Initial Analysis

In the 'Black Like Us' episode of *Black-ish*, every member of Barris' family is presented

as dealing with colorism regardless of skin tone. Although *BlackAF* did not deal with colorism

directly, the show represents Barris' real-life family who have different skin tones. Thus, original

posts and replies were subject to initial analysis to substantiate the relationship between Barris'

shows and discourse on colorism.

   Agreement or Disagreement. To address **RQ1** tweets were coded for agreement or

disagreement with Barris' framing of colorism in his shows. Agreement with Barris' framing of

colorism was determined by positive reactions wherein audience members praised the show for

addressing colorism, encouraged others to watch the show to learn more about the issue, or

defended Barris' casting of the show as it related to *BlackAF*. Disagreement with Barris' framing

of colorism was determined by negative reactions wherein audience members criticized the

shows and/or Barris directly or suggested that Barris did not address the issue of colorism

accurately.

   If Agreed/If Disagreed. The category that was observed when audience members agreed

with Barris' framing was, 'if agreed with Barris' then a larger conversation is needed' where the

audience members positively responded to the show, but felt that there was a need for a larger

conversation that should happen outside of the show and in the real world. When an audience

member disagreed with Barris' framing the category observed was, 'if disagreed with Barris the

issue should be taken more seriously' where the audience members negatively responded to the

show and felt that the issue of colorism should not be addressed in a sit-com format when the

issue has societal and political impacts.

   Personal Experience. In line with **RQ1,** a consistent theme that emerged was audience

members communicated their personal experience. Audience members described their personal

experience with colorism by either specifying their own skin color and how they were treated or

detailing the skin color of various family members and how they saw colorism take place.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BLACK-ISH?   43

Mention of Barris/Network. To address **RQ2** the present study refers to the tenant of CRT which pose that power structures are made up of social systems, social organizations, and institutions. Specifically, CST is used to centralize skin color to extend the media as a power structure that comprises of writers, producers, and television networks. While both of these categories function as a power structure they were separated to capture direct mention of Barris versus broader mentions of the network in the posts and replies. As the showrunner, Barris' name is prominently known therefore attributed to the show while mention of a network was defined for this study as meta-tagging the show through hashtags, with an @ sign or sometimes inferred by the use of "they," "the writers," and "the producers" in reference to those who control the content in the show. The initial categories were looked at to determine whether power structures in the media were discussed by audience members.

Grounded Theory Approach

Because of the nuanced topic of colorism, this research utilized grounded theory, which allows for meaning to emerge from the data (Martin & Turner, 1986). Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) grounded theory allowed the researcher to approach the topic with an open mind and let the theoretical framework emerge from the data (Martin & Turner, 1986). Martin and Turner (1986) defined grounded theory as, "an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data" (p.141; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 1 contains an example of the focused coding.

Table 1. Grounded Theory Data Coding

Element	Description	Colorism Study Example
Phenomenon	The concept of interest that ties everything together	Using Twitter to engage in discourse about colorism. Ex: "Colorism has seriously caused trauma and mental health issues in our community. Ever since slavery separated us from color in the house and fields, it's been an unnecessary divide between us. The more we talk about the shame of colorism the more we can heal from it. #blackish"
Causal Conditions	The conditions that influenced the phenomenon to occur	Need to express thoughts, views, and opinions of colorism as a result of being exposed to content with themes of colorism. Ex: "One thing #blackAF is doing, it(s) exposing (on Twitter at least) centuries-old pain Black Folks still carry with colorism. I mean, folks are really showing their true colors. No pun intended."
Action Strategies	The activity performed in response to the phenomenon	Communicating how viewing the media with colorism themes impacts audience perceptions. Ex: "The colorism episode of Black-ish is something i genuinely didn't understand before watching but now have a better understanding of"
Consequences	The result of the action strategies	Concerned with how portrayals of colorism influence audience members. Ex: "For the record, I've seen several white women reference #BlackAF as 'race education.' They really think that Kenya Barris' colorism and flattened interpretations of Black culture not only represent American Blackness but serve as an AfAm history/sociology lesson."

In line with grounded theory, open coding was utilized for initial analysis in which the text of every original post and reply was examined line by line which allowed a deeper understanding of the data. Patterns and constant comparison of responses were used to identify

themes (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). These initial codes were determined as, 'agreed with

Barris' framing of colorism', 'disagreed with Barris' framing of colorism', 'if agreed with

Barris' then a larger conversation is needed', 'if disagreed with Barris the issue should be taken

more seriously', 'mention of personal experience', 'mention of Barris' and 'mention of network'

were coded to address **RQ1** and **RQ2**. After these initial codes were created, focused coding

took place in which the researcher selected the most frequent codes that best captured the data

and raise these codes to conceptual categories (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). This approach is

consistent with grounded theory which allows for themes or categories to emerge from the data

as it is being analyzed.

From this focused coding approach, actions were analyzed in which the researcher asked,

"what caused these actions?" and "what were the consequences for these actions?" This allowed

for conditions to be examined (i.e., phenomena, causal conditions, actions, and consequences)

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Moore et al., 2019). The final stage of the process was theoretical

coding in which the researcher integrated focused codes with literature and memos in a related

conceptual framework. Because the theory guiding this research already existed the "theoretical

codes refer to underlying logics that could be found in pre-existing theories" (Thornberg &

Charmaz, 2014, p. 159). During theoretical coding, the researcher used CST to guide the

structural process occurring with the data.

The causal conditions to the concept of colorism were that the Twitter audience members

viewed *Black-ish, BlackAF*, or responded to Barris' response to criticism of colorism. Thus, the

actions taken in response to the causal conditions emerged in themes that were categorized as

follows: 'agreed with Barris' framing of colorism', 'disagreed with Barris' framing of colorism',

'if agreed with Barris' then a larger conversation is needed', 'if disagreed with Barris the issue

should be taken more seriously', and 'mention of personal experience.' The significant theme

that emerged from this data were 'shared personal experience with colorism,' 'discussed

representation of colorism in shows with other users,' and 'shared how Black experience isn't

monolithic.' In regard to the action of audience members sharing how the Black experience isn't

monolithic the only consequence was audience members communicated how the portrayal of the

Black experience or Blackness influenced perceptions. Figure 1 contains an example of the

colorism discourse model.

Figure 1. Colorism Discourse Model
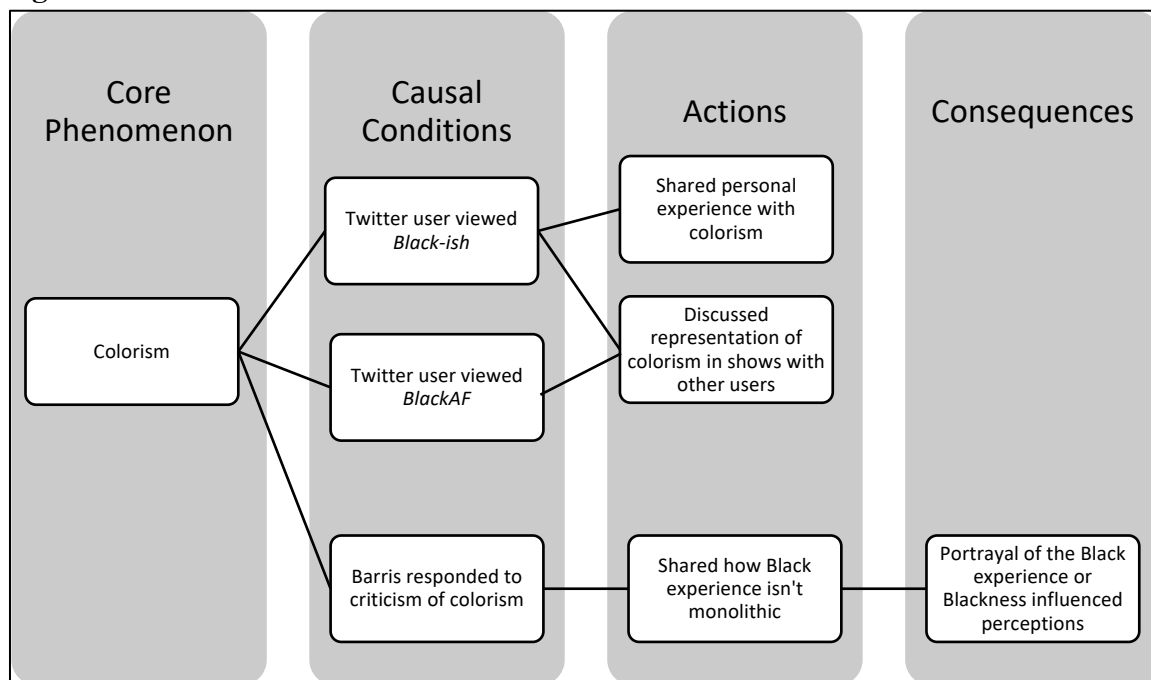
Chapter V: Findings

Original posts and replies from Twitter were collected as they related to colorism in

response to Kenya Barris and his shows *Blackish* and *BlackAF*. The objectives and goals of this

study were to 1) to determine how the discourse about colorism is being framed by Twitter users

based on their interaction with content created by Kenya Barris and 2) to investigate how users

identified power structures as it related to the media.

What colorism themes emerge within the discourse on Twitter centered around Kenya

Barris and shows produced by him, specifically *Black-ish* and *BlackAF*?

To address **RQ1** initial themes were identified as **'agreed with Barris' framing of**

colorism' and **'disagreed with Barris' framing of colorism.'** These themes described audience

members positive and negative reactions to the shows in the study. The themes allowed for the

identification of discussions of colorism as it related to the shows to be established.

Subsequently, this articulation of agreement or disagreement also included strong opinions about

how the conversation of colorism should be approached. This subcategory of themes was

identified as **'if agreed with Barris' then a larger conversation is needed'** and **'if disagreed**

with Barris the issue should be taken more seriously.' Audience members that agreed with

Barris' framing wanted the topic of colorism to be discussed more in real life. For example, and

audience member posted,

 "this episode of #blackish is great black people need to talk about colorism."

 While, those that disagreed with Barris' framing thought the conversation of colorism

 should not take place in a sit-com. One audience member stated,

 "Not totally satisfied with the analysis of colorism in on #blackish, but it is a half hour

 show & I think it was a net positive. As a light skin those jokes aren't the same as the

 oppression darker skin folks face & I've never met someone who TRULY though[t] I

 wasn't 'Black enough'."

 To which these initial categories did not extend past initial observation. Significant to this

research was audience members disclosing their personal experiences with colorism aligning

with how CST poses that there is preferential treatment of lighter skin individuals and adverse

treatment of darker skin individuals (Hall, 2018; Goldsmith et al., 2007; Painter et al., 2016;

Reece, 2019).

       Shared Personal Experiences with Colorism. There were 31 posts and replies that were

coded for audience members who posted their own life experiences with colorism after viewing

the shows *Black-ish* and *BlackAF*. The theme that emerged was, 'mention of own life

experience' where the audience member's included their personal experience with colorism in

response to seeing the show providing rich data and insight into an individual's experience.

Aligning with CST audience members acknowledged that colorism is experienced differently by

individuals, where those with darker skin face more systematic disadvantages and harsher

treatment from society (Hall, 2018). For instance, one audience member posted,

> "Coming from a biracial family, tonight's episode of #Blackish about colorism hit close
>
> to home. My grandfather was hard on black people with a dark complexion, including
>
> family members. It's a conversation that needs to happen."

Similarly, another audience member posted,

> "#blackish colorism I can personally speak on this issue. Episode well done, and as I
>
> thought, brought up a lot of pain for me, as I was called 'eclipse' by the kids as I was the
>
> darkest kid on the block. The issue, like racism, won't be solved in my lifetime."

Additionally, audience members who identified themselves as having light skin spoke to

the privilege and preference they experienced they perceived by having lighter skin. One

audience member stated,

> "While I grew up identifying more with being fat than light, there is no pretending that us
>
> lightskints are preferred by whites, Blacks, & non-black POCs In, almost every sector of

life. The jokes are a small 'price' to pay & are clear & obvious reaction to systematic

oppression."

The same audience member continued on in a thread about their realization of colorism,

"I didn't understand and when I told my about it I was upset with her for not telling me

about colorism. But colorism & preference for lightskin is undeniable. I grew up hearing

the rhymes & knowing about paper bag test for colleges & sororities."

Overall, there were a significant amount of audience members' expressing their personal

experiences therefore opinions about colorism much like the past scholarship that explored

Twitter discourse as it relates to colorism or stimulated by viewing television (Marwick & Boyd,

2011; Giglietto & Selva, 2014; Webb & Robinson, 2017). Specifically, this study found that

audience members communicated that colorism was a significant part of their experience with

colorism where they recognized that preference for light skin is and mistreatment of those with

dark skin.

What colorism themes emerge within the discourse on Twitter centered around power

structures namely Barris himself as the creator of these shows and the networks that air his

shows?

In line with **RQ2,** power structures at play were determined to be producer, writer Kenya

Barris, the networks ABC and Netflix, the shows' producers, writers, and a general 'they' to

represent a larger notion of those in charge. To identify these power structures there were 52

posts and replies coded for **'mention of Barris'** and 101 posts and replies coded for **'mention of**

network.' While many of the power structures were alluded to mention of the power structures

were determined by meta-tagging the show with a hashtag, or with an @ sign. For instance, one

audience member uses the shows hashtag and tags the writers,

"Diane teaches adults a lesson in skin tones. Blackish once again doesn't sugarcoat,

proving over and over again why it is one of the most important programs in television

history – and very funny. BRAVO to all involved! #blackish @blackishwriters."

Another audience member posted,

"Never heard the 'pretty for a darkskinned girl' thing until senior year in college and had

to educate the young brother as to why it was rude. Only when I asked him how did he like being

told he was smart 'for a football player' did he get it. #blackish @blackishabc #colorism."

How audience members discussed each power structure varied but the most common

theme that occurred was discussion of casting. Wherein which the casting of the shows

exemplified colorism at play in the shows spawning continued discourse.

Representation in Casting. There were 96 posts and replies coded for the category of

'representation of colorism in the casting of the shows' in the shows. Both *Black-ish* and

BlackAF audience members discussed the casting of characters contributing to the representation

of colorism. Many audience members expressed that the shows should not have tackled colorism

without the representation of darker-skin characters, where *Black-ish* and *BlackAF* are shows

seen with an overrepresentation of light skin characters.

For instance, an audience member stated,

"But they shouldn't talk about colorism when they did the same thing that everyone else

does. They hypocritical to try to bring awareness to an issue that they contributed to."

Another audience member stated,

"It took them several seasons before they even discussed colorism. And they gave it one

episode. And still no cast members are darkskin. Tell me you'd be okay with this

scenario if it was all white people talking about racism for one episode and I'd laugh."

This representation of colorism surrounding casting aligns with viewer awareness of how those in Hollywood determine what is being shown (Rhaman, 2020). Lighter skin actors are portrayed as the main character most prevalently in American media, so these characters can be perceived a more racially ambiguous therefore the story being portrayed takes precedent for viewers (Lo, 2017). Overall, audience members recognize that colorism in the media prevents darker skin actors and actresses from receiving roles (Rhaman, 2020). One audience member stated,

> "I just feel lie there is sooo much biracial and mixed representation in all aspects of media but not enough black people (dark skinned) who get actual representation or credit, a lot of the times light skinned (mixed) people are choose over darker people."

While some felt as though Barris portrayed lighter skin characters too often in his shows, Barris, as the most prominent contributor to the shows, is mentioned directly by name in audience members posts and replies. As it regarded casting audience members discussed Barris' reasoning for casting light skin characters because they resembled his family. For example, an audience member stated,

> "The reason I'm not heavily critiquing #BlackAF and other Kenya Barris productions regarding the colorism issue is because he writes things based on his own family."

One audience member stated,

> "If I'm not mistaken I DO believe #blackAF is based on his life so the colorism arguments for casting don't apply."

Another audience member stated,

"People are mad that the show Black AF is being renewed because they feel that Kenya

Barris wife isn't "black"… like bro she's mixed, the series is based off his actual family.

Everybody doesn't have to be dark skinned to be black af. Stop the colorism shit!"

Audience member's defense of Barris creating shows based on his family is in line with Adoni

and Mane's (1984) research on how individual's produce and create their social construction of

reality based on their internalized meaning, beliefs and actions. In Barris' case his social

construction of reality is portrayed in his shows contributes to mass media's role in informing

audiences (Adoni & Mane, 1984).

Shared How the Black Experience isn't Monolithic. There were 49 posts and replies

that were coded for the category of 'shared how the Black experience isn't monolithic.' Where

audience members questioned what defines Blackness and how that definition could potentially

be defined by how Barris portrays characters in his shows *Black-ish* and *BlackAF*. Many of the

discussions that surrounded the Black experience were in direct response to Barris posting his

response to criticism of colorism on *BlackAF.* For instance, an audience member posted,

"kenya [B]Harris is getting so much hate for #blackaf as if… that's not the life of the

people you look up to live. the black experience is not universal at all, there are people

who struggle more, have it easier, etc…ie: colorism??? which y'all talk about every other

week."

Similarly, another audience member stated,

"Y'all gonna hate me, but I don't see anything wrong with the idea. Bc biracial & mixed

people have completely different experiences compared to other blacks. Having a

nonblack parent/family members is a completely different experience than having all

black family."

Barris responded to criticism of colorism of BlackAF by stating that the characters were a

representation of his actual family (Essence, 2019). Users defended Barris' right to portray what

constitutes his Black experience which involves his family.

An audience member posted, "And it's his life. It's not a documentary on the black experience.

People gotta chill. I thought it was funny."

Pertinent to this idea that the Black experience not being monolithic is a viewer's social

construction of reality, where viewers determine meaning from their experiences and actions

(Adoni & Mane, 1984).

Discussions about how Barris portrayed the Black experience in his show *BlackAF* soon

turned into threads where the conversation shifted to audience members discussing what defined

Blackness. The over representation of lighter skin characters in *BlackAF* made some audience

members question the way Blackness was demonstrated in the show. An audience member

posted,

> "Y'all skip #blackAF. It's another one of those performative Black shows that centers
>
> light-skin, white passing, and culture vulture Black folks who treats Blackness as
>
> aesthetic to appeal to the masses, rather than a true experience for US. The plot is typical,
>
> wack."

Another audience member replied in another thread,

> "I was literally just thinking this! it's just sad like everybody's 'black experience' is not
>
> the same experience and clearly half of the people that are mad about this TV show don't
>
> live in Hollywood with mixed race kids so & bc they're mixed it doesn't make them any
>
> less black."

While the conversations centered around colorism, discussions of race were often intertwined signifying how racial identity portrayed in the media influences perceptions (Vickers, 2018; Banjo, 2013). The data suggests that audience members understood everyone has their own Black experience and what is portrayed on television is just one version of this experience determined by writers, producers and showrunners. Similarly, perceptions of what constitutes the Black experience and blackness are dependent on the viewers' worldview and understanding of the media images (Happer & Philo, 2013; Adoni & Mane, 1984; Gerbner et al., 2002).

A consequence of portraying shows that encompass the Black experience is that these portrayals of Blackness influence the perceptions of non-Black viewers. As it involves Black-oriented media audience members communicated concern with how Black characters portrayed affected audience perceptions. For example, an audience member stated,

> "Let's talk about the real reason people are upset here. They fear erasure of self and the influx of people that don't look like them being able to define blackness due to their privilege. Which brings us back to colorism and proximity to whiteness #blackaf #colorism #blackness."

Discourse on Twitter as it related to perceptions influenced by Black-oriented media referenced power structures in the media such as writers and producers sometimes specifically mentioning Barris and expressing concern of how other races perceive this type of media. For example, an audience member posted,

> "It's obvious that the people behind those shows never felt 'black enough', and base their idea of 'blackness' through the lenses of YT [white] people. Those shows are just

televised huge micro-aggression regurgitating futile SJW [social justice warriors] twitter

narratives. The show is dated & lame.”

Another audience member stated,

“I wonder if other *races have the same feelings when shows casting them get the green

light… or is it just black people who have to define what is or isn’t black enough to

determine how ‘for something’ we will be. #supportblackactors.”

Similarly, another audience member posted,

 “For the record, I’ve seen several white women reference #BlackAF as ‘race education.’

They really think that Kenya Barris’ colorism and flattened interpretations of Black

culture not only represent American Blackness but serve as a AfAm [African American]

history/sociology lesson.”

 One audience member stated,

“I got no dog in this fight imma just step out lol but I agree that #BlackAf is performative

and cheap comedy dependent on bringing stereotypical Black family tropes to white

people while presenting them with mainly mixed actors as a form of colorism. ODR is

not my place.”

In line with Banjo’s (2013) research there was an overall concern with how other races

view content, specifically white audience members. Although the race of each individual

audience member could not be identified, there is significant concern about how Blackness or the

Black experience is communicated to non-Black audiences. The third person effect helps explain

the concern of audience members because individuals perceive other people are more affected by

the media than they are (Banjo, 2013; Davison, 1983). Furthermore, past scholarly research gives

validity to the concerns to those viewing Black-oriented media the non-Black audiences will

internalize what is being shown as factual (Harrison et al., 2008; Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017; Pornsakulvanich, 2007; Tukachinsky et al., 2015).

Chapter IV: Discussion and Conclusion

Critical race theory posits race as the center of to the everyday experience of people of color (Burton et al., 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, p. xvii; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Brown, 2003, Hall, 2018). Critical skin theory extends this further by positioning colorism as the center of persons of color's lived experience. Florini (2014) adds that Twitter users are influencer's of cultures and social change, often feel that their voices, experiences, culture and language are often omitted or misinterpreted within mainstream media. As these themes encompassed a broad category of findings, the following discussion will draw similarities and differences to key scholarly work in CST and colorism research. The discourse of the audience members that were sampled contributed to strategic communication scholarship by bringing the discourse provided to the forefront of the present study. The purpose of this research was to position the audience members as social agents to offer insight into understanding and examining the complex social phenomenon of colorism in their lives (Webb & Robinson, 2017). Guided by CST and colorism research, this study explored colorism themes that emerged.

What colorism themes emerge within the discourse on Twitter centered around Kenya Barris and shows produced by him, specifically Black-ish and BlackAF?

Discussion of Experiences of Colorism. The content about colorism in Barris' shows prompted several audience members to reflect on their experience with colorism. Audience member's detailed their experiences where there was privilege associated with lighter skin and adverse treatment of those with darker skin (Hall, 2018; Hunter, 1998; Gullickson, 2005; Mathews & Johnson, 2015). One of the primary themes that persisted was there remains a color

stratification process that still persists. In the discussion of the show and casting preferential treatment of those with lighter skin was a main topic (Goldsmith et al, 2007). The audience members confirmed their experiences of colorism and mentioned how colorism shaped how they saw themselves as well as how they interacted with others. While lighter skin audience member's understood that they had privilege or preference over others, in some instances they also felt their race was invalidated. This aligns with Webb (2014) article that found that light skin women have their race questioned constantly. Audience members confirmed with their tweets about feeling racially ambiguous and not fitting into any one racial category. This notion of undefined racial categories aligns with Hall's (2018) acquisition that society is moving away from racial categories into social categories based on skin color.

  Discussion of Families Influence on Colorism/Internalized View. Burton and colleagues (2010) research established that colorism impacts the family dynamics by asserting that outside social and intrapersonal factors of racial identities affect relationships in families of color (Bratter & King, 2008). Audience members explicitly refer to their families skin color composition when describing their lived or observed experience of colorism. Similarly, Maddox (2004) conceptualized the idea of skin tone bias as people behaving differently towards other people based on the lightness or darkness of one's skin supporting audience member's experience of darker people being treated differently by lighter skin family members. This preferential treatment is attributed to the skin color stratification system of slavery, which gave preference to those with skin color closer white (Dhillon-Jamerson, 2018; Gullickson, 2005; Hunter, 1998; Harris, 2018). Consequently, this skin color stratification system was internalized and perpetuated over time, most prominently in the Black community. This internalization of colorism through personal experiences and beliefs as well as their families affirming of skin

color bias can aid a person's constructed worldview (Adonis & Mane, 1984; Hunter, 2007). These findings converge with Webb and Robinson's (2017) study that found that discourse on Twitter offers insight into the construction of identity and how the "personal construct" of colorism is communicated (p. 32). Parallel to the current study, Webb & Robinson (2017) found a significant amount of personal experience as it regarded discourse on colorism, to establish their own authority or credibility of the concept. Furthermore, familial influences played an essential role as to how viewers understood their identities in relation to their skin color as well as how they understood skin color in general (Banjo, 2013; Collins, 1986; Hunter, 2007; Hunter, 1998).

The sub-theme of 'shared personal experience' emerged from the data revealing that there still remains a preference for lighter skin (Hall, 2018; Maddox, 2004). This finding is important because discrimination based on skin color functions in the same way racism, in which discrimination of those with darker skin have real life implications. Bringing the discussion of colorism out of the shadows and into a broader conversation highlights skin color bias as discrimination. This research supports those biases were confirmed in the textual analysis as being observed in the media, prompting audience members intrapersonally. Although, it should be noted that audience members did not go into the broader effects of colorism such as disadvantage affect marriageability, job attainment, social mobility, and educations attainment established by colorism scholars (Hunter, 1998; Gullickson, 2005; Mathews & Johnson, 2015). **What colorism themes emerge within the discourse on Twitter centered around power structures namely, Barris himself as the creator of these shows and the networks that air his shows?**

Discussion of Colorism Representation in the Media. The notion of power structures was taken from the tenant of CRT to extend the media as a power structure that contributes to colorism (Burton et al., 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, p. xvii; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Brown, 2003, Hall, 2018). From initial analysis these power structures were determined as writers, producers, and television networks. Along with these broader notions of those in charge, Kenya Barris was identified as a contributor these power structures. These power structures were mentioned in broader terms and specifically, as it related to casting. understanding of colorism through dissecting the representation of colorism in the shows within the casting of the show. In the past, advertisers have observed a preference for lighter skin by consumers (Keenan, 1996; Mayo et al., 2006; Meyers, 2008; Frisby, 2006), however, the Twitter discourse, along with recent research surrounding colorism, suggests that the preferences are changing. The colorism discourse in this study indicated that audience members wanted a more representative cast of characters, specifically more dark-skin representation especially if the topic of the show is colorism. Similar research such as Leary's (2018) study also found that viewers wanted to see more representation of darker skin actors and actresses.

An additional theme that emerged from the data was about what affect media images had on perceptions. While some wanted a more representative cast of varying skin colors, others understood that Barris based the show on his family. Users often shared the notion that the Black experience is not a monolith and as a consequence audience members expressed hyper-awareness of how racial identity portrayed by the media influenced perceptions (Vickers, 2018; Banjo, 2013). Similar to Banjo's (2013) findings, Black audiences are apprehensive to the portrayals of Blackness to majority non-Black audiences, perhaps because there is a fear that what is portrayed as one person's experience becomes the standard for all experiences. Barris as a

prominent showrunner has the unique power to reinforce or dismantle stereotypes, as they relate to colorism (Tukachinsky et al., 2015). Leary's (2018) study concluded that those in power that control the narratives should understand the casting of character based on skin tone is just as important as racial diversity because it can affect viewer perceptions (Happer & Philo, 2013).

Limitations of Research

The limitations to this can be found in the selected method. Grounded theory allows meaning to be derived from data however when analyzing textual data clarifications cannot be made. Specifically, as it involves Twitter posts and replies can be deleted from threads at any time limiting understanding of the discourse being analyzed. Furthermore, the current study only looks at two shows - *Black-ish* and *BlackAF* produced by Kenya Barris - when there are other Black-oriented shows by other producers (e.g., Scandal, How to Get Away With Murder, Bridgerton by Shonda Rhimes). An expansive study about multiple, Black-oriented shows across multiple seasons would allow for a longitudinal data about viewer perceptions of colorism. This study cannot be generalized as colorism is a global issue that affect many racial group/ethnicities in different ways. This specific study looks at colorism in American society stimulated by American media and culture.

Future Research

Future research should combine audience member discourse on Twitter with interviews or focus groups to have a well-rounded scope of audience member perceptions. Thus, future research should provide a narrative of how colorism is experienced, constructed, and communicated with exposure to television content. A survey is also recommended for future research to account for demographic, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of audience members as it is related to colorism. Considering the numerous posts and replies for continuation colorism

conversations, it would be useful for future researcher's to conduct a longitudinal study to

evaluate larger amounts of original posts and replies. This would allow an entire season of a

show or shows regarding colorism to be evaluated and compared. In addition, future research

could expand beyond Twitter and look at Facebook for discourse about colorism. As Twitter is

limited to 240 characters, Facebook may provide more in-depth textual data to be analyzed.

Conclusion

Overall, the present study has concluded that colorism is a complex system of inequality

that has been internalized as a result of the racial skin hierarchy put in place by slavery in the

America. Through Twitter audience members posts and replies were able to be collected as

textual data. This data exemplified the complexities of colorism in American society which are

reinforced by television content (Gerbner et al, 2002). The data collection tools in this research

offered unique insight into the discourse on colorism and how images in the media reinforce or

dismantle certain notions. Specifically, this research is representative of colorism scholarship and

applied to the media with CST. Using the tenants of CRT, this research extends applies power

structures to CST as factors that contribute to skin color inequality (Hall, 2018). These power

structures were extended to the media and asserted that television is a powerful tool that

influences perceptions, cultures and opinions (Happer & Philo, 2013). The findings of this study

were that when exposed to Black-oriented media regarding colorism audience members shared

their personal experience, discussed representation in casting with audience members, and shared

how the black experience isn't a monolith.

The main goal of my research was to position the viewers as social agents to offer insight

into understanding and exploring the complex social phenomenon's in their lives (Jenkins,

2009). By affirming audience members discourse as important contributions to the scholarship of

colorism, this research provides them with not only a voice but also representation in the scholarship of colorism, and by extension the Black experience. The implications of this research suggest that true representation includes the portrayal of complex characters of diverse races and skin tones (Leary, 2018). Most prominently, this calls for true representation speaks to television networks and calls writers and showrunners to cast more divers actors of varying skin tones. As it functions, colorism is an extension of racism that operates in multiple facet of society. Thus, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts in the media should encompass skin color as a contributor to discrimination and recognize the power media images have in reinforcing or dismantling hierarchical systems of privilege or preference.

References

Adoni, H., & Mane, S. (1984). Media and the social construction of reality: Toward an

   integration of theory and research. *Communication research*, *11*(3), 323-340.

   doi.org/10.1177/009365084011003001

Appiah, O. (2002). Black and white viewer's perception and recall of occupational characters on

   television. *Journal of Communication*, 52(4), 776–793. doi:10.1111/j.1460-

   2466.2002.tb02573.x.

Banjo, O. O. (2013). For us only? Examining the effect of viewing context on black audiences'

   perceived influence of black entertainment. *Race and Social Problems*, *5*(4), 309-322.

   309-322. doi:10.1007/s12552-013-9106.

BBC Newsnight. (2019, October 8). *Lupita Nyong'o on racism, colourism and Justin Trudeau –*

   BBC Newsnight. [Video file]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iw8_f4a2xL8.

Barris, K (Writer), & Griffiths, J. (Director). (2019, January 15). Black Like Us (Season 5,

   Episode 10) [TV series episode]. In K. Barris (Executive Producer), *Black-ish*. Los

   Angeles, CA: ABC.

Bendick, M. J., Rodriguez, R. E., & Jayaraman, S. (2010). Employment discrimination in

   upscale restaurants: Evidence from matched pair testing. The Social Science Journal,

   47(4), 802–818. doi:10.1016/j.soscij.2010.04.001.

Blay, Y. (2021). *One drop: Shifting the lens on race*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of*

   racial inequality in the United States (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield

   Publishers.

Bratter, J., & King, R. B. (2008). ''But will it last?'' Marital instability among interracial and

    same-race couples. *Family Relations*, 57, 160 – 171. doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-

    3729.2008.00491.x.

Brigham, J. C., & Giesbrecht, L. W. (1976). ''All in the family'': Racial attitudes. *Journal of*

    Communication, 26(4), 69–74. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01938.x.

Brock, A. (2018). Critical technocultural discourse analysis. *New Media & Society*, 20(3), 1012-

    1030. doi: 10.1177/1461444816677532.

Brown, T. N. (2003). Critical race theory speaks to the sociology of mental health: Mental health

    problems produced by racial stratification. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 44, 292

    -301. doi: 10.2307/1519780.

Burton, L., Bonilla-Silva, E., Ray, V., Buckelew, R., & Freeman, E. (2010). Critical race

    theories, colorism, and the decade's research on families of color. *Journal of Marriage and*

    Family,72(3), 440-459. doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.0071.

Busselle, R. & Crandall, H. (2002). Television viewing and perceptions about race differences in

    socioeconomic success. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 46, 256-282.

Butler, B. (2019, January 16). 'Blackish' tackles 'lightskinned privilege' in an emotional episode

    about colorism. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-

    entertainment/2019/01/16/blackish-tackles-light-skinned-privilege-an-emotional-episode-

    about-colorism/.

Cameron, J. & Geidner, N. (2014). Something old, something new, something borrowed from

    something blue: Experiments on dual viewing TV and Twitter. *Journal of Broadcasting &*

    Electronic Media, 58(3), 400-419. doi:10.1080/08838151.2014.935852.

Cancio, A. S., Evans, T. D., & Maume Jr, D. J. (1996). Reconsidering the declining significance

of race: Racial differences in early career wages. *American Sociological Review*, 541-556.

Carney, N. (2016). All lives matter, but so does race: Black lives matter and the evolving role of

social media. *Humanity & Society*, 40(2), 180–199.doi:10.1177/0160597616643868.

Caughy, M. O., & O'Campo, P. J. (2006). Neighborhood impoverishment, social capital, and the

cognitive development of African American preschoolers. American Journal of

Community Psychology, 37, 141 – 154.

Chaudhary, Ali R. (2015). "Racialized Incorporation: The Effects of Race and Generational

Status on Self-Employment and Industry-Sector Prestige in the United States".

International Migration Review. 49 (2): 318-354. doi:10.1111/imre.12087.

Collins, P. H. (1986). The emerging theory and pedagogy of black women's studies. *Feminist

issues*, *6*(1), 3-17. doi:10.1007/bf02685634.

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and

evaluative criteria. *Qualitative sociology*, *13*(1), 3-21. doi:10.1007/bf00988593.

Cowart, K. O., & Lehnert, K. D. (2018). Empirical evidence of the effect of colorism on

customer evaluations. *Psychology & Marketing*, 35(5), 357-367. doi:10.1002/mar.21091.

Davis, J. L. & Gandy, O.H. (1999). Racial identity and media orientation: Exploring the nature

of constraint. *Journal of Black Studies*, 29(3), 367-397.

doi:10.1177/002193479902900303.

Davison, W. P. (1983). The Third-person effect in communication. *The Public Opinion

Quarterly*, 47(1), 1–15. doi:10.2307/2748702.

Delgado, R., & Stefanicic, J. (2000). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (2nd ed.).

Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Dhillon-Jamerson, K., & Hall, R. (2018). Euro-Americans Favoring People of Color: Covert

    Racism and Economies of White Colorism. American Behavioral Scientist, 62(14), 2087-

    2100. doi:10.1177/0002764218810754.

Ducille, A. (1996). *Skin trade*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Essence. (2019, December 24). *Kenya Barris responds to critics who slammed 'Black*

    Excellence' casting: 'These kids look like my kids'.

    https://www.essence.com/entertainment/kenya-barris-colorism-black-excellence.

Erves, A. R. (2019). *The impact of 21st century television representation on women of color:*

    Colorism myth or reality (Doctoral dissertation, Florida Atlantic University). Proquest

    Dissertation Publishing.

Florini, S. (2014). tweets, tweeps, and signifyin. *Television & New Media*, 15(3), 223-237.

    doi:10.1177/1527476413480247.

Frisby, C. M. (2006). "Shades of beauty": Examining the relationship of skin color to perceptions

    of physical attractiveness. *Facial Plastic Surgery*, 22(3), 175-179. doi: 10.1055/s-2006-

    950174.

Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Signorielli, N., & Morgan, M. (1980). Aging with television: Images on

    television drama and conceptions of social reality. *Journal of Communication*, *30*(1), 37-

    47.

Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., Signorielli, N., & Shanahan, J. (2002). Growing up with

    television: Cultivation processes. In *Media effects* (pp. 53-78). Routledge.

Giglietto, F., & Selva, D. (2014). Second screen and participation: A content analysis on a full

    season dataset of tweets. *Journal of communication*, *64*(2), 260-277.

    doi:10.1111/jcom.12085.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Griffin, E. (2003). *A first look at communication theory*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Griffith, B. (2016, Nov. 10). Dragging, the new form of bullying developed on Twitter, is getting

out of control. *Study Breaks*. https://studybreaks.com/culture/dragging/.

Goldberg, L. (2020, June 23). Kenya Barris' '#BlackAF' renewed at Netflix. *The Hollywood

Reporter*. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/kenya-barris-blackaf-renewed-

at-netflix-1299796/.

Goldsmith, A., Hamilton, D., & Darity, W. A. (2006). Shades of discrimination: Skin tone and

wages. American Economic Review, 96, 242 – 245. doi:10.1257/000282806777212152.

Goldsmith, A. H., Hamilton, D., & Darity, W., Jr. (2007). From dark to light: Skin color and

wages among African-Americans. *The Journal of Human Resources*, *42*, 701-738.

doi:10.3368/jhr.xlii.4.701.

Gullickson, A. (2005). The significance of color declines: A re-analysis of skin tone differentials

in post-Civil Rights America. *Social Forces*, 84(1), 157-180. doi:10.1353/sof.2005.0099

Gross, T. (NPR). (2016, May 18). *Fresh Air*: Kenya Barris on 'Black-ish' and what kids lose

when they grow up with more' [Audio podcast].

https://www.npr.org/2016/05/18/478414550/kenya-barris-on-black-ish-and-what-kids-

lose-when-they-grow-up-with-more .

Hall, R. E. (2018). The globalization of light skin colorism: From critical race to critical skin

theory. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *62*(14), 2133-2145.

doi:10.1177/0002764218810755.

Hamilton, Darrick; Goldsmith, Arthur H.; & Darity, William A., Jr. (2009). Shedding "Light" on

Marriage: The Influence of Skin Shade on Marriage for Black Females. Journal of

Economic Behavior and Organization, 72(1), 30-50.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2009.05.024.

Happer, C., & Philo, G. (2013). The role of the media in the construction of public belief and

social change. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *1*(1), 321-336.

doi:10.5964/jspp.v1i1.96.

Harpalani, V. (2015). To be white, black, or brown? South Asian Americans and the race-color

distinction. *Washington University Global Studies Law Review, 14*(4), 609. SSRN:

https://ssrn.com/abstract=2615461.

Harris, K. L. (2018). Biracial American colorism: Passing for white. *American Behavioral*

Scientist, 62(14), 2072–2086. doi:10.1177/0002764218810747.

Harris, A. (2015). How Black-ish earned the right to call itself Black-ish. *Slate.*

https://slate.com/culture/2015/04/black-ish-on-abc-the-shows-title-may-be-provocative-

but-its-not-offensive-video.html.

Harrison, M. S., Reynolds-Dobbs, W., & Thomas, K. M. (2008). Skin color bias in the

workplace: The media's role and implications toward preference. In *Racism in the 21st*

Century. pp. 47-62. New York, NY: Springer.

Harwood, J. (1997). Viewing age: Lifespan identity and television viewing choices. *Journal of*

Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 41, 203-213. doi:10.1080/08838159709364401.

Harwood, J. (1999). Age identity, social identity gratifications, and television viewing. *Journal*

of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 43, 123-136. doi:10.1080/08838159909364479.

Hirschman, C. (2004). The origins and demise of the concept of race. *Population and*

Development Review. 30, 385–415. doi:10.1111/j.1728-4457.2004.00021.x.

Hunter, M. (1998). Colorstruck: Skin color stratification in the lives of African American

women. *Sociological Inquiry*, 68(4), 517-535. doi:10.1111/j.1475-682x.1998.tb00483.x.

Hunter, M. (2007). The persistent problem of colorism: Skin tone, status, and inequality.

Sociology Compass, 1(1), 237-254. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00006.x.

IMDb (2021). *Kenya Barris*. IMDb. https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1244069/.

Jenkins, H. (2009). Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the

21st century. *The MIT Press*. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8435.001.0001.

Jones, M. (2019, December 23). Kenya Barris called out for colorism in '#blackexcellence' cast.

Shadow and Act. https://shadowandact.com/kenya-barris-called-out-for-colorism-in-

blackexcellence-cast.

Kahle, L. R., & Homer, P. M. (1985). Physical attractiveness of the celebrity endorser: A social

adaptation perspective. *Journal of consumer research*, 11(4), 954-961.

doi:10.1086/209029.

Keenan, K. L. (1996). Skin tones and physical features of Blacks in magazine advertisements.

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 73(4), 905-912.

doi:10.1177/107769909607300410.

Khaleeli, H. (2017, February 25). Obama loves it, Trump called it racist: why Black-ish is TV's

most divisive show. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-

radio/2017/feb/25/series-creator-kenya-barris-on-abc-sitcom-black-ish.

Kissell, R. (2015, April 2). Wednesday ratings: 'Black-ish' hits 2015 high as ABC wins night.

Variety. https://variety.com/2015/tv/news/wednesday-ratings-black-ish-hits-2015-high-

as-abc-wins-night-1201465227/.

Koch, C. (2010, June 1). Looks can deceive: Why perception and reality don't always match

up. *Scientific American*. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/looks-can-deceive/

Leary, R. V. (2018). *Colorism in media content: A qualitative study focusing on film and

perception* (Order No. 10751275). Available from Ethnic NewsWatch; ProQuest

Dissertations & Theses Global.

Lo, V. M. (2017). *"We can't even play ourselves": Mixed-race actresses in the early twenty-first

century* (Order No. 10757753). Available from Ethnic NewsWatch; ProQuest

Dissertations & Theses Global. (2014419780).

Lovelock, M. (2016). Catching a catfish: Constructing the 'good' social media audience member

in reality television. *Television & New Media*. 18(3): 203–17.

doi:10.1177/1527476416662709.

Lynch, J. (2018, September 12). 'Black-ish' creator opens up about an 'anti-Trump episode

shelved by ABC that was reportedly one reason he left for Netflix. *Business Insider*.

https://www.businessinsider.com/black-ish-creator-left-abc-after-it-shelved-an-anti-

trump-episode-report-2018-9.

Maddox, K. B. (2004). Perspectives on racial phenotypicality bias. *Personality and Social

Psychology Review*, *8*(4), 383-401. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr0804_4.

Martin, L. L., Horton, H. D., Herring, C., Keith, V. M., & Thomas, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Color

struck: How race and complexion matter in the "color-blind" era*. Rotterdam and

Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Martin, P. Y., & Turner, B. A. (1986). Grounded theory and organizational research. *The Journal

of Applied Behavioral Science*, *22*(2), 141-157. doi: 10.1177/002188638602200207.

Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter audience

    members, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1),

    114–133. doi:10.1177/1461444810365313.

Mathews, T. J., & Johnson, G. S. (2015). Skin complexion in the twenty-first century: The

    impact of colorism on African American women. *Race, Gender & Class*, 22(1), 248-274.

    doi:10.4324/9780203487167-13.

Maragh, R. S. (2018). Authenticity on "Black twitter": Reading racial performance and social

    networking. *Television & New Media*, 19(7), 591–609. doi:10.1177/1527476417738569.

Mastro, D. E., & Greenberg, B. S. (2000). The portrayal of racial minorities on prime time

    television. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44, 609-703.

    doi:10.1207/s15506878jobem4404_10.

Mayo, D. T., Mayo, C. M., & Mahdi, S. (2006). Skin tones in magazine advertising: Does

    magazine type matter? *Journal of Promotion Management*, 11(2-3), 49-59.

    doi:10.1300/j057v11n02_05.

Meara, P. (2019, December 23). 'Black-ish' creator Kenya Barris slammed for dismissive

    comments about colorism. *BET*.

    https://www.bet.com/celebrities/news/2019/12/23/kenya-barris-new-netflix-comedy.html.

Meyers, Y. J. (2008). *Effects of African American skin tone on advertising communication*

    (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://repositories.lib.utexas.

    edu/handle/2152/3935.

Mills, B. (2009). *The sitcom*. (TV genres). Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

Moore, J., Magee, S., Gamreklidze, E., & Kowalewski, J. (2019). Social media mourning: Using grounded theory to explore how people grieve on social networking sites. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, *79*(3), 231-259. doi:10.1177/0030222817709691.

Moffitt, K. R. (2020). "Light-skinned people always win": An autoethnography of colorism in a mother–daughter relationship. *Women, Gender, and Families of Color*, 8(1), 65-86. doi:10.5406/womgenfamcol.8.1.0065.

Mutz, D. C. (1989). The influence of perceptions of media influence: Third person effects and the public expression of opinions. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *1*(1), 3-23. doi:10.1093/ijpor/1.1.3.

Nakagawa, K., & Arzubiaga, A. E. (2014). The use of social media in teaching race. *Adult Learning,* 25(3), 103–110. doi:10.1177/1045159514534190.

Neal, A. M., & Wilson, M. L. (1989). The role of skin color and features in the black community: Implications for black women and therapy. *Clinical Psychology Revie*w, 9, 323-333. doi:10.1016/0272-7358(89)90060-3.

Newman-Bremang, K. (2021, July 15). It isn't just Gossip Girl – TV has a major colorism problem. *Refinery29.* https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2021/07/10572505/colorism-tv-gossip-girl-black-women-representation.

Nielsen. (2009, September 2). Three screen report: Media consumption and multi-tasking continue to increase across TV, Internet, and mobile. *Nielsen Wire*. Retrieved from http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2009/three-screen-report-media-consumption-andmulti-tasking-continue-to-increase.html.

Nielsen. (2013a). Action figures: How second screens are transforming TV viewing. *Nielsen Wire.* Retrieved from http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2013/action-figures- -how-second-screens-are-transforming-tv-viewing.html.

Nielsen. (2013b). Nielsen launches 'Nielsen Twitter TV ratings.' *Nielsen.* Retrieved from https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/press-releases/2013/nielsen-launches-nielsen-twitter-tv-ratings/

Nielsen. (2017). For us by us? The mainstream appeal of Black content. *Nielsen.* https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2017/for-us-by-us-the-mainstream-appeal-of-black-content/

Norwood, K. J. (2015). If you is white, you's alright': Stories about colorism in America. *Washington University Global Studies Law Review*, 14, 585–607. doi:10.1163/2210-7975_hrd-9820-0006.

Ogbu, J. U. (2003). Black American students in an affluent suburb: A study of academic disengagement. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Oliver, M. B., & Armstrong, G. B. (1998). The color of crime: Perceptions of Caucasians' and African Americans' involvement in crime. In M. Fishman & G. Cavender (Eds.), Entertaining crime: Television reality programs (pp. 19-35). Aldine de Gruyter: New York.

Oliver, D. (2021). 'Bridgeton' isn't as progressive on race as it seems, and there's a clear reason why. *USA Today. https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/tv/2021/01/22/shonda-rhimes-bridgerton-netflix-has-problem-race-colorism/4173376001/.*

Painter, M. A., II, Holmes, M. D., & Bateman, J. (2016). Skin tone, race/ethnicity, and wealth inequality among new immigrants. *Social Forces*, *94*, 1153-1185. doi:10.1093/sf/sov094.

Pornsakulvanich, V. (2007). Television portrayals of ethnic minorities in the United States: The analysis of individual differences, media use, and group identity and vitality. *Journal of Business, Education, and Interdisciplinary Social Science ABAC*, 27(3). doi:10.1016/j.chb.2007.11.003.

Porter, R. (2021, January 27). TV ratings: 'Black-ish' hits season high, CBS dramas rise. *The Hollywood Reporter. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/tv-ratings-tuesday-jan-26-2021-4123138/.*

Ray, V. E., Randolph, A., Underhill, M., & Luke, D. (2017). Critical race theory, Afro-pessimism, and racial progress narratives. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, *3*(2), 147-158. doi:10.1177/2332649217692557.

Reece, R. L. (2019). Color crit: Critical race theory and the history and future of colorism in the United States. *Journal of Black Studies*, 50(1), 3–25. doi:10.1177/0021934718803735.

Rahman, M. (2020). *The Causes, Contributors, and Consequences of Colorism Among Various Cultures.* (71). [Honor's thesis, Wayne State University]. Digital Commons. https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/honorstheses/71.

Rice-Missouri, S. (2019, Oct. 17). 4 ways to support people dealing with colorism. *Futurity.* https://www.futurity.org/colorism-trauma-2186112-2/.

Robinson-Moore, C. (2008). Beauty Standards Reflect Eurocentric Paradigms-So What? Skin Color, Identity, and Black Female Beauty. *The Journal of Race & Policy*, 4(1), 66-85. https://search.proquest.com/docview/212407324/citation/CFE2D3A1C4D64678PQ/1.

Rose, L. (2018, September 12). 'Black-ish' creator Kenya Barris breaks silence on that shelved anti-Trump episode, his ABC exit and "unapologetic" Netflix plans. *The Hollywood*

Reporter. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/black-ish-creator-kenya-

barris-abc-exit-netflix-plans-interview-1141981/.

Russell, K., Wilson, M., & Hall, R. E. (1993). *The color complex: The politics of skin color*

among African Americans. ns. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Saji, P. (2019, Jan. 15). Why the 'Black-Ish' Colorism Episode Is So Terrifying (Guest Column).

The Hollywood Reporter. www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/blackish-colorism-

episode-explained-1176052/.

Schreier, M. (2014). Qualitative Content Analysis. In Flieck E. (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of*

qualitative data analysis, 5, 170-183. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications

Smith, A., & Boyles, J. L. (2012). The rise of the "connected viewer.*" Pew Research Center's*

Internet and American Life Project.

http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2012/PIP_Connected_Viewers.pdf.

Sorella Magazine. (n.d.). Your favorite classic Black sitcoms that are actually colorist.

https://sorellamag.org/colorist-black-sitcoms/.

Stacy, R. N. (2013). *Hawthorne effect*. Ipswich, MA: Salem Press Encyclopedia.

Steele, C. K. (2016). Pride and Prejudice: Pervasiveness of Colorism and the Animated Series

Proud Family, *Howard Journal of Communications,* 27:1, 53-67, DOI:

10.1080/10646175.2015.1117028.

Stoll, J. (2021, Jan. 13). Share of viewers of 'Black-ish' on ABC in the United States from

September 2017 to May 2018, by ethnicity. *Statista.*

https://www.statista.com/statistics/875939/blackish-tv-viewers-ethnicity/.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and

techniques (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sullivan, J. M., & Platenburg, G. N. (2017). From Black-ish to blackness: An analysis of Black information sources' influence on Black identity development. Journal of Black Studies, 48(3), 215-234. doi.org/10.1177/0021934716685845.

Thornberg, R., & Charmaz, K. (2014). Grounded theory and theoretical coding. In Flick E. (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*, *5*, 153-69. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Tukachinsky, R., Mastro, D., & Yarchi, M. (2015). Documenting portrayals of race/ethnicity on primetime television over a 20-year span and their association with national-level racial/ethnic attitudes. *Journal of Social Issues*, *71*(1), 17-38. doi:10.1111/josi.12094.

Vickers, J. (2018). *Black or Black-ish: Decoding Black-ish and it's place in the conversation of diversity*. Master's thesis, Syracuse University.

Void, A. N. (2019). *Colorism and skin tone messages in father–daughter relationships*. [Doctoral Dissertation, Walden University]. Walden University Scholar Works. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/6696/.

Walker, A. (1983). "Looking for Zora." *In search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist prose*. New York: NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Webb, S. L. (2014, July 19). Colorism in casting call for 'Straight Outta Compton' NWA Film. Colorism Healing. https://colorismhealing.com/colorism-casting-call-straight-outta-compton/.

Webb, S. L., & Robinson, P. A. (2017). Mentions and Melanin: Exploring the Colorism Discourse and Twitter Culture. In *Color struck* (pp. 19-35). Brill Sense.

Wells, V. (2019, December 23). Kenya Barris says he's not colorist… yet his 50-11 shows look

    like they were cast using the paper bag test. *Madame Noir.*

    https://madamenoire.com/1121680/kenya-barris-colorism/.

Wilder, J. (2010). Revisiting 'color names and color notions': A contemporary examination of

    the language and attitudes of skin color among young black women. *Journal*

    of Black Studies. 41(1), 184–206. doi:10.1177/0021934709337986

Williams, D. R., & Williams-Morris, R. (2000). Racism and mental health: The African

    American experience. *Ethnicity & health*, *5*(3-4), 243-268.

Williams, D. R., Lawrence, J. A., & Davis, B. A. (2019). Racism and Health: Evidence and

    Needed Research. Annual Review of Public Health, , 40, 105-125. doi:10.1146/annurev-

    publhealth-040218-043750.

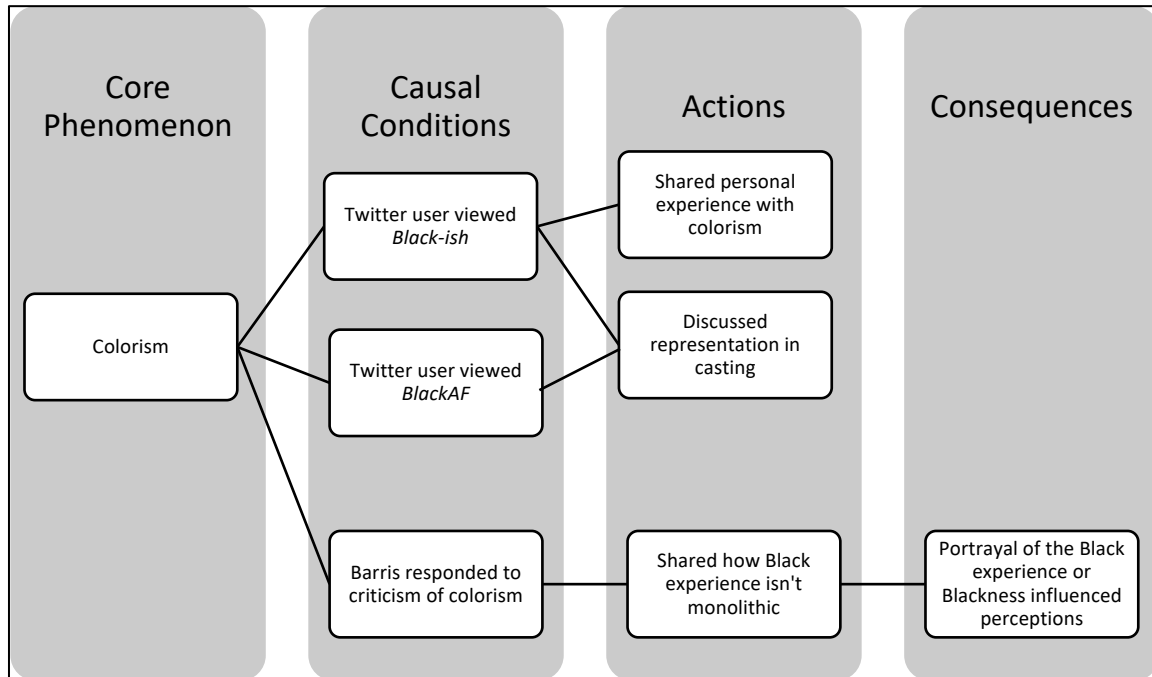**Appendix**

Figure 1. Colorism Discourse Model

Table 1. Grounded Theory Data Coding

Element	Description	Colorism Study Example
Phenomenon	The concept of interest that ties everything together	Using Twitter to engage in discourse about colorism. Ex: "Colorism has seriously caused trauma and mental health issues in our community. Ever since slavery separated us from color in the house and fields, it's been an unnecessary divide between us. The more we talk about the shame of colorism the more we can heal from it. #blackish"
Causal Conditions	The conditions that influenced the phenomenon to occur	Need to express thoughts, views, and opinions of colorism as a result of being exposed to content with themes of colorism. Ex: "One thing #blackAF is doing, it(s) exposing (on Twitter at least) centuries-old pain Black Folks still carry with colorism. I mean, folks are really showing their true colors. No pun intended."
Action Strategies	The activity performed in response to the phenomenon	Communicating how viewing the media with colorism themes impacts audience perceptions. Ex: "The colorism episode of Black-ish is something i genuinely didn't understand before watching but now have a better understanding of"
Consequences	The result of the action strategies	Concerned with how portrayals of colorism influence audience members. Ex: "For the record, I've seen several white women reference #BlackAF as 'race education.' They really think that Kenya Barris' colorism and flattened interpretations of Black culture not only represent American Blackness but serve as an AfAm history/sociology lesson."