

Health Equity & Social Justice  
Discussion Club

# **Colorism: A Silent Pandemic on Physical and Mental Health**

A curated collection of virtual content

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Ohio Academy of Family Physicians



OHIO ACADEMY OF  
FAMILY PHYSICIANS



Ohio Artist Robbie Rozay, as commissioned by TRU-COLOUR BANDAGES to advance the ideal of "diversity in healing."

# Welcome...

Thank you for participating in a courageous cultural conversation about colorism, the practice of discrimination by which people with lighter skin are treated more favorably than people with darker skin. This discussion is a continuation of OAFP's Health Equity & Social Justice Discussion Club and will dive into the undeniable impact colorism has on the health of our patients of color and on the medical community as a whole.



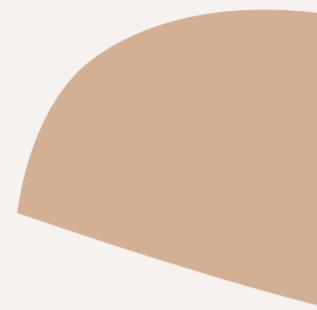
The practice of colorism predates the modern history of slavery and has co-existed with systems of oppression that valued one group of people above another. Most prevalent in Asia, Africa and the Americas, it's everywhere shades of color exist among people.

It is the malignant outgrowth of white supremacy and caste systems, relying on the false premise that lighter or white skin is not only ideal, but perfect. Colorism is the discrimination, dehumanization, and devaluation of someone with dark skin, by those with lighter skin, and often occurs within one's own ethnic group & family.

It is noteworthy that this learned mistreatment, common during colonialism & American slavery, was quickly internalized to define one's self-worth and value; this mindset lingers to present day civilizations.



A note from the  
facilitator,  
**Karin Small**  
**Wurapa, MD, MPH**



REFLECTIONS FROM A THOUGHTFUL HUMAN



"This topic spans generations & is entrenched in our daily lives more than most people would imagine."

- Unknown

# What is colorism?

"...unless the question of colorism - in my definition, prejudicial or preferential treatment of same race people based solely on their color - is addressed in our communities and definitely in our black "sisterhoods," we cannot as a people progress. For colorism, colonialism, sexism, and racism, impedes us."

- Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, 1983, p.291

## What is colorism?

"...prejudice or discrimination especially within a racial or ethnic group favoring people with lighter skin over those with darker skin."

- Miriam Webster Dictionary

Colorism: American spelling; Colourism; British spelling.

# What is colorism?

“Discrimination against an individual based solely on the color of their skin; gives preference to lighter skin tones over darker skin, and is customary around the world. Unlike racial and ethnic discrimination, it focuses on the actual physical features of the individual rather than ethnic, social, geographic identity and often times is perpetrated by individuals within the same ethnic community; it systematically privileges lighter skinned people in areas such as income, education, housing and marriage market by associating them with positive traits such as intelligence, attractiveness, and competency whereas darker skinned persons are perceived as unattractive, dirty, lazy and ignorant.”

– Hosts, “Colorism, the Sister of Racism” June 2020

# Recommended Resources

A complete list of recommended resources is available on the OAFP website at <https://www.ohioafp.org/education/health-equity-and-social-justice-discussion-club/>

The content provided includes a thoughtful array of videos, public articles, movies, medical literature, books, and personal essays by those who have lived and studied the issue of colorism.

Learners are encouraged to consume as much of the material they wish by working independently or by following the reading guide contained within.

**Certain resources are strongly suggested and noted by a star.** 

# Guided Reading - Step 1

## Understanding Colorism

To understand colorism is to recognize that the “split consciousness and matrix of identity” is the byproduct of racism which leaves a trail of social, economic, and health problems in its wake.

The curated content provides an overview of the crisis of colorism in America and around the world. Participants are asked to reflect on the list of resources provided on the following page. As you digest these materials, please consider:

**How does this issue of colorism reveal your own “split consciousness” surrounding your identity and the identity of others? As health care professionals, how does colorism impact the care you provide to your patients?**

# Recommended Resources for Step 1: Understanding Colorism

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## Short Videos:

- **What is Colorism** | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKDjwP88XxE> (11:11 min.)
- **People of Color Discuss the Impact of Colorism** | <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Style/video/people-color-discuss-impact-colorism-71914978> (6:18 min.)

## Feature-length Films:

**"Skin" available on Netflix** (1hr. 10 min.)

Article about the film | <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/03/africa/colorism-documentary-africa/index.html>

★ **"Dark Girls" available on Amazon, You Tube, Hulu or your local library** (1hr. 5 min.)

Film Trailer | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7GeGRulqYE> (2:01 min.)

★ **"Colorism: The Sister of Racism" Panel Discussion (hosted by Ruthless Magazine)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiDiWjZ4CT4> (1hr. 12 min.)

**"American Denial"** | PBS, American Lens: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvXQXGorLGg> (54:53 min)

# Recommended Resources for Step 1: Understanding Colorism (Continued)

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## Articles:

- **What's Colorism**  
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2015/whats-colorism>
- **Colorism Affects Latino Families—Here's What Parents Can Do to Stop It**  
<https://www.parents.com/parents-latina-magazine/colorism-affects-latino-familiesheres-what-parents-can-do-to-stop-it/>
- **More Than Skin Deep: Underrepresentation of Brown and Black Skin in Medical Education**  
<https://in-training.org/more-than-skin-deep-underrepresentation-of-brown-and-black-skin-in-medical-education-20360>

## Short Essays:

- **If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire** by Michelle Cliff  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/574dd51d62cd942085f12091/t/597cdff86a4963f14f6527bd/1501356026606/Michelle\\_cliff\\_If+I+could+Write+this+In+Fire.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/574dd51d62cd942085f12091/t/597cdff86a4963f14f6527bd/1501356026606/Michelle_cliff_If+I+could+Write+this+In+Fire.pdf)
- **Journey Into Speech** by Michelle Cliff

# Guided Reading - Step 2

## Impact on Mental, Physical & Social Health

The curated content provides an overview of the physical and mental impact that colorism has on people of color. Participants are asked to reflect on the list of resources provided on the following pages. As you digest these materials, please consider:

**How do healthcare professionals address the signs, symptoms, and clinical patient findings associated with colorism's impact? How do family physicians and their care teams identify treatments to minimize further disease and cure?**

# Recommended Resources for Step 2: Impact on Mental, Physical & Social Health

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## Articles:

- **Impact on Mental Health: Skin-Tone Trauma: Historical and Contemporary Influences on the Health and Interpersonal Outcomes of African Americans - PubMed**  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1745691619851781>
- **Mercury in Skin Lightening Products** | <https://www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/WHO-CED-PHE-EPE-19.13>
- **White and Beautiful: An Examination of Skin Whitening Practices and Female Empowerment in China**  
<https://onourterms.barnard.edu/article/white-and-beautiful/>
- **How Skin Whitening Reveals the Depth of the Beauty Industry's Colorism**  
<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2020/jun/30/how-skin-whitening-reveals-the-depth-of-the-beauty-industrys-colourism>
- ★ **The Price Of Racism: The Complicated Ethics of Being a Dermatologist in a Country Where Many People Want Whiter Skin:** <https://qz.com/india/1072367/skin-lightening-the-dangerous-obsession-thats-worth-billions/>

# Recommended Resources for Step 2:

## Impact on Mental, Physical & Social Health (Continued)

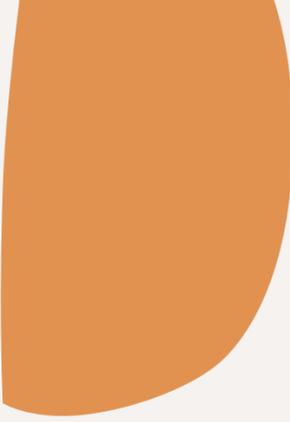
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### Podcast:

- ★ **The Effects of Colorism on Mental Health**  
<https://www.mentalhealthnewsradionetwork.com/the-effects-of-colorism-on-mental-health/> (43:23 min.)

### Short Videos:

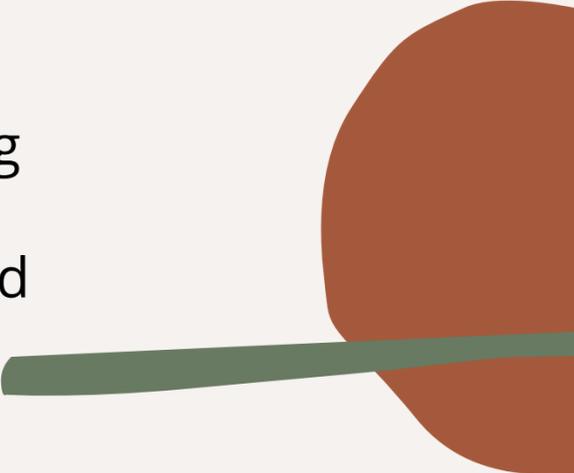
- ★ **Why the Market for Skin Whitening is Growing**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cjzvwgmg1NU> (6:26 min.)
- ★ **The Doctalk Show Skin Bleaching**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODAoc803ODI> (10:38 min.)



# Guided Reading - Step 3

## Action Planning

### Consider your role in the following action steps:

- How has the medical data/community also fallen victim or intentionally promoted the malady of colorism? Identify a few ways in which medical literature or western medical practices promote the malady of colorism and set a plan to change it in your practice.
  - Identify two things learned that will influence your attention to:
    - 1) physical consequences of colorism
    - 2) mental health consequences of colorism
  - Identify screening tools/assessment tools or examination practices that can further excellence in care and HEALING around this issue for pediatric and adult patients of all genders and all colors?
  - What is our role as health care professionals in messaging, advocating, and influencing industry giants around the issue of colorism? Specifically, what ACTION steps can we take around this problem AND its cure with respect to clinical guidelines, practices, and social /economic, and health equity standards?
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# Guided Reading - Step 3

## Action Planning

- Should cultural competency training and implicit bias assessments be mandatory in medical training (eg self analysis)?
  - Complete the Implicit Association Test ([www.implicit.harvard.edu](http://www.implicit.harvard.edu))
  - Review the Intercultural Development Continuum by the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) <https://idiinventory.com/generalinformation/the-intercultural-development-continuum-idc/>
- View the video, "Seeing Color - Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man - Ep. 3 w/ Chip & Joanna Gaines + kids" and host a similar conversation with colleagues or patients in a safe and respectful group format. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfo1XJDJKSU> (9:55 min.)
- In light of the mental health damage caused by our history of rape, genocide, racism and caste systems in our nation and our global community, consider using Trauma Informed Therapy options in practice, for self-healing, and in medical education.  
Practice-based resources:
  - <https://girlsinc.org/trauma-informed-approach-responding-racial-injustice/>
  - <https://www.mhanational.org/racial-trauma>

## Additional Resources on Colorism, Clinical, Cultural, and Equity Issues

- **National Conference of Community and Justice**  
<https://www.nccj.org/colorism-0>
- Monteiro-Ferreira, Ana Maria, **The Fallacy of Colorism**  
Eastern Michigan University, December 2015
- Russell, Kathy and Wilson, PhD. Midge, **The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color in a New Millennium**
- **Caring for African American Hair**  
<https://www.dermatologytimes.com/view/caring-african-american-hair>
- **Black in Latin America**, PBS Documentary  
4 part series by Louis Gates, Jr.  
Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tvFAFUbrYQ>  
(2:00 min.)
  - **Black in Latin America-Cuba**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7p30a4auyA>  
(52:07 min.)
  - **Black in Latin America-Brazil**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh7c46U5hhY>  
(53:05 min.)

### Trauma Screening Tools:

- **Child Trends -**  
<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-to-support-childrens-emotional-well-being-amid-anti-black-racism-racial-violence-and-trauma>

### Screening Tools for Trauma Adverse Childhood Experiences

- **Screening & Racism:**  
<https://jordainstituteforfamilies.org/2020/racism-is-an-adverse-childhood-experience-ace/>
- **Guidance on Administering Screening:**  
[https://www.chcs.org/media/TA-Tool-Screening-for-ACEs-and-Trauma\\_020619.pdf](https://www.chcs.org/media/TA-Tool-Screening-for-ACEs-and-Trauma_020619.pdf)
- **What the test does and does not mean:**  
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/media-coverage/take-the-ace-quiz-and-learn-what-it-does-and-doesnt-mean/>

**Black Women's Health Imperative:** <https://bwhi.org/>



# Mark Your Calendar...

OAFP's Health Equity & Social Justice Discussion Club will meet to discuss these resources and your reflections on "**Colorism: A Silent Pandemic on Physical and Mental Health**" on **Thursday, July 15 @ 7:30 p.m.** Karin Small Wurapa, MD, MPH will serve as discussion moderator.



The Health Equity & Social Justice Discussion Club has been expanded from its original format to now include critical social justice issues that fall outside of the focus of race. The new discussion club will alternate between traditional books and a curated collection of virtual content.

This club is a safe and respectful virtual space to discuss important literature on topics of social justice and health equity all from the comfort of your home or office. Guided conversations will provide unique opportunities for insightful reflection and open minded sharing with your peers. Each session will take place via Zoom under the guidance of a physician moderator.

Registration is free and open to all Ohio Academy of Family Physicians (OAFP) members as a benefit of membership.

**Free Registration**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZluf-CorDIsHddBnvyja91IEo1pdkTDaTjt>

Join the conversation to better understand:

- Why colorism is so widespread but not often talked about,
- How colorism impacts our patients of color and the medical community as a whole,
- What are some actions to take around challenging and ending colorism, and much more.