

## Health Equity & Social Justice Discussion Club

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

*A curated collection of virtual content*

---

*The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line...which show themselves chiefly in the color of the skin and the texture of the hair - will hereafter be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization."*

- W.E.B Du Bois, [To The Nations of Our World](#)

---

## Recommended Resource List

### Definitions of Colorism:

---

- A practice of discrimination by which those with lighter skin are treated more favorably than those with darker skin. This practice is a product of racism in the United States, in that it upholds the white standards of beauty and benefits white people in the institutions of oppression (media, medical world, etc.).  
— National Conference for Community and Justice: <https://www.nccj.org/colorism-0>
  - Jamaican American writer, Michelle Cliff, in her essay "Journey into Speech" traced the process of cultural alienation through which light-skinned Jamaicans, like herself, internalized and reproduced the Anglo-centrism of their British colonizers, "...we learned to cherish that part of us that was them- and to deny the part that was not."  
  
"Under this system of colorism—the system which prevailed in my childhood in Jamaica, and which has carried over to the present—rarely will dark and light people co-mingle. Rarely will they achieve between themselves an intimacy informed with identity."  
— Michelle Cliff, Journey Into Speech, pp 26-27; No Telephone to Heaven, p 27
  - "...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, Search of or Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, 1983, p.291
  - "Prejudice or discrimination especially within a racial or ethnic group favoring people with lighter skin over those with darker skin." - Miriam Webster  
Colorism: American spelling; Colourism; British spelling.
-

## Articles:

---

- **"What's Colorism":** <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2015/whats-colorism>
- **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>
- **The impact of skin color on mental and behavioral health in African American and Latina adolescent girls: A review of the literature** <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2012-27188-014>
- **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 Videos:

---

- **This is Colorism:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02Pb2jggjJg> (11:11 min.)
- **People of Color Discuss the Impact of Colorism:** (6:18 min.)  
<https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Style/video/people-color-discuss-impact-colorism-71914978>

## 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.)

## Podcast:

---

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

## Short Stories:

---

- **If I Could Write This in Fire** by Michelle Cliff  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/574dd51d62cd942085f12091/t/597cdf86a4963f14f6527bd/1501356026606/Michelle\\_cliff>If+I+could+Write+this+In+Fire.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/574dd51d62cd942085f12091/t/597cdf86a4963f14f6527bd/1501356026606/Michelle_cliff>If+I+could+Write+this+In+Fire.pdf)
- **Journey Into Speech** by Michelle Cliff  
In “Journey into Speech,” an essay that she revised as the preface to this collection, Cliff traces the process of cultural alienation through which light-skinned Jamaicans, like herself, internalized and reproduced the Anglo centrism of their British colonizers (“we learned to cherish that part of us that was them--and to deny the part that was not. Believing in some cases that the latter part had ceased to exist” [pp. 26-27]). Cliff’s passionate fury is also one of the most gripping aspects of her writing, since it epitomizes her unflinching and uncompromising resolve to speak up against and (literally) curse the very forms of social and racial privilege from which she benefited as a light-skinned Jamaican growing up in a “hierarchy of shades” (p. 11). She thus offers a map outlining a way out of “a system of colorism” from which one may originate but which need not determine one’s allegiances (p. 27).

## Worldwide Trends in Skin Whitening

---

### Articles:

- **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/>

### Short Videos:

- **Why the market for skin whitening is growing** (6:26 min.)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cjzvvgmg1NU>
- **The DocTalk Show: Skin Bleaching** (10:38 min.)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODAoc803ODI>

## Action Planning

---

Participants should consider their 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?
- Should cultural competency training and implicit bias assessments be mandatory in medical training? Consider implicit bias assessment for yourself:
  - 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>

## Deeper Dive:

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

#### Websites:

- **National Conference of Community and Justice:**  
<https://www.nccj.org/colorism-0>
- **Caring for African American Hair:**  
<https://www.dermatologytimes.com/view/caring-african-american-hair>
- **Black Women's Health Imperative:**  
<https://bwhi.org/>

#### Articles:

- 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**

#### 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://jordaninstituteoffamilies.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/>

#### Documentary Series:

- **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=k7p30a4aayA> (52:07 min.)
  - **Black in Latin America-Brazil**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh7c46U5hhY> (53:05 min.)