The Color of the Middle Class:  
an Analysis of Colorism in the Black Middle Class  

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Introduction
- Colorism is the preferential treatment of people based on skin tone (Forster-Scott, 2013).
- Colorism is typically discussed in terms of intraracial discrimination and prejudice, but colorism permeates racial boundaries and can occur interracially (Forster-Scott, 2013).
- The effects of colorism can have negative social, economic, and personal impacts on both individuals and groups (Diette, T. M., et al., 2008).
- Research Question: how, if at all, does colorism present itself within the Black middle class?
- This quantitative analysis examines different life outcomes of members of the Black middle class based on their skin tone—wealth, income, and education.

Data and Methods
- This study is part of a larger project that consists of a population of 74 members of the Black middle class in the Washington, D.C. metro area.
- Respondents are 25 years or older, single, living alone, and childless (SALAs)(Marsh et al., 2007).
- Respondents were interviewed and given a self-reported survey. Respondents and interviewers reported skin tone* Data was recoded and analyzed in SPSS:
  - Skin tone: “lighter” (tones 1-3) and “darker” (tone 5), tone 4 omitted.
  - Wealth and income: “below $50,000” and “$50,000 or more”
  - Education: “Bachelor’s degree or less” and “Advanced degree”
  - Age: “below 35” and “35 and older”.
- The final sample consists of 37 respondents. 
- Bivariate analyses with a Chi-Square test:
  - Independent variable: skin tone
  - Dependent variables (life outcomes): wealth, income, and education
  - Control variables: gender and age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Central Tendency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>$96,814</td>
<td>$94,500</td>
<td>$34,500-$150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td>$87,486</td>
<td>$124,500</td>
<td>$4,500-$150,000</td>
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Results and Discussion
- The results of the descriptive statistics:
  - More than half (64%) of the sample consists of women
  - There is a higher percentage of lighter skin women (59%) than lighter skin men
  - Two-thirds (65%) of darker skinned respondents are women
- Life outcomes:
  - The results of the Chi-Square tests for skin tone and the outcome variables are:
    - Education, income, and wealth are not statistically significant
  - Statistical significance of Chi-Square tests controlling for gender:
    - Education, income, and wealth are not statistically significant
  - Statistical significance of Chi-Square test controlling for age:
    - Education, income, and wealth are not statistically significant
- Discussion:
  - Results indicate that skin tone is not a significant factor amongst SALAs.

Limitations and Future Research
- This analysis only compares the outcomes of individuals of the Black middle class who are single (not married), living alone (without a romantic partner), 25 or older, and childless. As a result, this study cannot be considered a complete analysis of the Black middle class.
- A qualitative analysis of the experiences of people in the Black middle class who have experienced forms discrimination related to colorism.

References
http://doi.org/10.1177/1523422316616339