



WHAT IS... COLORISM



DEFINITION:

COLORISM is the prejudicial or preferential treatment of people of the same ethnicity based on their [skin] color alone. Often, colorism is thought to be restricted to people who belong to the same ethnic group. However, colorism exists across all nations, with lighter-skinned people preferentially treated over those with Caucasian features.

Colorism is based on “color hierarchy” that puts white people and traditionally white features at the top and black/African features at the bottom. Thus, colorism is a legacy of slavery and colonialism. Within cultural groups, it created classes of people based on mixed-race heritage. Colorism still exists in terms of who is most thought to be safe and who is thought to be a threat.

A once popular Southern saying explains colorism best:

If you are white (light), you're all right.

If you are brown, stick around.

If you are black, get back.



BIBLICAL/SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

COLORISM CONTRADICTS Colorism the belief that all humans are created in the image of God regardless of their attributes (Genesis 1:27). Furthermore, colorism contradicts the Biblical teaching that God has no favorites (Romans 2:11). Colorism often emphasizes physical attributes instead of inner qualities, gifts, and graces, which is contrary to 1 Samuel 16:7.



EXAMPLE(S):

EXAMPLES OF COLORISM INCLUDE:

Internalized oppression is an example of how colorism works within ethnic groups. Some ethnic social clubs use things like the “brown bag test” to determine admission. In some Asian and Spanish-speaking countries, people are admonished to stay out of the sun so as not to get “too dark.” Despite detrimental effects, the skin-whitening industry sells billions of dollars of products in African, Asian, and Spanish-speaking countries.¹ It is also possible for oppressed ethnic groups to engage in colorism against other oppressed ethnic groups.

¹Karishma Daftary, Neha S. Krishnam, Roopal V. Kundu, “Uncovering the roots of skin bleaching: Colorism and its detrimental effects,” Wiley Online, May 5, 2022, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/doi/full/10.1111/jocd.15049>



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REFLECTION:

QUESTION #1

This week, notice how often darker-skinned people are portrayed positively on television compared to white or lighter-skinned people.

1

QUESTION #2

Review one of the suggested resources and think about how colorism is portrayed and how it shows up in our society today, and what response we should give based on Scripture.

2



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Lori L. Tharp, *Same Family, Different Colors: Confronting Colorism in America's Diverse Families*
- Tanya K. Hernandez, *Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality*
- Margaret Hunter, *Race, Gender and the Politics of Skin Tone*
- Nikki Khanna, *Whiter: Asian American Women on Skin Color and Colorism*
- The Guardian, "In Their Own Words, How Dark Skinned Women Broke Through The Entertainment Industry" (www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2019/apr/12/black-women-on-colorism-hollywood-entertainment-industry-panel)
- Blackish, "Black Like Us" television episode, January 15, 2019 (www.imdb.com/title/tt9422670/)
- ABC News, "People of color discuss the impact of 'colorism'" (abcnews.go.com/GMA/Style/video/people-color-discuss-impact-colorism-71914978)



EXAMPLE(S) CONTINUED:

Like racial bias, colorism is often hidden and taught at home. Several studies have found clear evidence that colorism has economic and social consequences for both darker and light-skinned people of the same race in terms of "who gets hired, who gets convicted, and who gets elected." According to one study, light-skinned Mexican Americans earn more money, earn more years of education, live in more integrated neighborhoods, and have better mental health than darker-skinned Mexican Americans.² The entertainment industry also suffers from colorism, with white or lighter-skinned actors often cast in lead roles and darker-skinned actors usually portrayed as inferior.³

²Lori L. Tharpe, "The Difference Between Racism and Colorism," Times, October 6, 2016, <https://time.com/4512430/colorism-in-america/>

³Terry Tang, "Colorism reveals many shades of prejudice in Hollywood," ABC News, January 16, 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/wireStory/colorism-reveals-shades-prejudice-hollywood-60418557>