California State University, Monterey Bay

Digital Commons @ CSUMB

Capstone Projects and Master's Theses

Capstone Projects and Master's Theses

12-2019

Teaching High Schoolers About Colorism

Charenee LaChelle Brown
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all

Recommended Citation

Brown, Charenee LaChelle, "Teaching High Schoolers About Colorism" (2019). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses.* 718.

https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all/718

This Capstone Project (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Capstone Projects and Master's Theses at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Teaching High Schoolers About Colorism in the USA

Chareneé LaChelle Brown

California State University of Monterey Bay

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

The workshop is held at Marina High with Mrs. M's freshman class, that previously done service learning there for 2 semesters. The main focus of the project will be implementing the effects of Colorism in the U.S. Colorism has been a major issue in all media throughout the years. Colorism can be a community based problem as well. Media has the idea that lighter is better, and dark is not flattering. "The term colorism refers to the biased treatment of individuals based on their skin color and can occur interracially (similar to race bias) or intraracially (with members of the same race expressing bias against fellow members based on skin color)" (Berry, pg.147,2009). Colorism has started in the African American community since slavery had begun.

A powerpoint presentation was given, it was held during the teachers third period. After the presentation, there was a post-survey conducted. There was a discussion on the history behind Colorism. Main focus was on how colorism affects the person's self image/self-esteem. Colorism can affect the minority communities. In the presentation it included that racism and colorism are two different terms that are mistaken to be the same. Colorism is the product of racism, which means that racism gave birth to the actions of colorism.

Needs Statement

Colorism can start within the family and community. I have overheard multiple conversations with some of the students discussing their preferences. They would mention to have a lighter skin tone girl rather than that dark girl. Like, the dark girl is pretty, but I prefer my girl to be lighter. I'm light it would not mix to have someone darker than me. This is why the students need to know passing judgement based on skin tones is wrong. Referring back to that Colorism can be learned at home or television. Colorism awareness is hard to come by, so helping people or students know there are wrongs in this discrimnation.

During Slavery, the slave owners would promote that darker slaves were out in the fields and lighter slave will be in the house. Which means the lighter slaves were product of rape from the slave owner, so they kept the child close to home. Later, after slavery in the 1900s, there was more inequality that was concerning the skin complex. "During this era, blacks with a lighter complexion were provided opportunities to earn a college degree, maintain a successful career, and not face as many obstacles that darker skin blacks endured" (Smith, pg.1, 2015). Colorism is more relatable in the Black Community. Colorism can make itself present in other countries and communities. Students will see how colorism can make the person feel oppressed within their community or society. Colorism affects someone's self-esteem, personal relationships, and beauty standards.

Referring to the book called, "Color me dark", by Nellie Lee, talks about when Lee had moved to Chicago with her family. She started to notice that in the area or school preferred lighter than darker. She didn't want to be this to be true. "Some people are so color struck. They think being light-skinned is better than being dark! Mama says that's nonsense and I think so, too" (McKissack, 2000). Colorism is a topic that needed to be discussed in the

age group chosen because colorism exist in all ethnic groups. If Nellie Lee can notice the colorism around the end of World War I. Making students aware that colorism has existed for years in different forms.

Conducting a group discussion/survey as an activity. The activity will consist of the students discussing whether they ever experienced or has done an act of colorism. This where they will tell each other their encounters and discuss if they ever seen colorism in the media. I believe that this activity will give students an idea how colorism affects people. Colorism is a form of oppression against someone's skin tone. The following videos will be shown to the targeted audience, "Light Skinned Privilege" and Lupita Nyong'O interview. Students will discuss their feelings with one another in their groups about the presented image for assessment. They will be given different types of images related to colorism that consist of darker skinned actress being replaced by lighter actresses of famous shows or magnizes.

"The phenomenon of colorism is not exclusive to African American women, but the manifestations on this group are diverse, and the effects are rather unique." (Bivens,2017) If we can make a change and teach the next person that making any judgement based off someone's appearance. I will discuss if they want to further their knowledge in colorism there are books that they can read. For example, Like A Tree Without Roots by Teresa Ann Willis and Maud Martha by Gwendolyn Brooks are books that are considered for the age group in High school.

Skin tone trauma has affects emerging adults, which in result of anxiety, PTSD, and many more. Due to have traumatic experiences when encounter discrimnation. The Carlson

Model was developed in 1997, about 22 years ago, but has been brought up as a new concept to help emerging adults. "African Americans who experienced colorist incidents report feelings of humiliation, irritability, resentment, pride about skin tone, inclusion, rejection, distrust, frustration, anger, and shame." (A. Landor and S. Smith, pg. 801-802, 2019) Over the past few years there have been reports of discrimnation against skin tone. Emerging adults have reported having mental health problems from skin tone discrimnation. Which are ages 18-29 years old, "For instance, while not all who experience trauma dissociate in response, 90% of individuals in a community-based study reporting clinically significant dissociation reported a history of trauma." (Briere, 2006)

"Past studies have focused on the effects of variations in skin tone on mental-, physical-, and behavioral health outcomes." 'For example, studies have documented associations between skin tone and psychological adjustment, including self-esteem." (Coard et al., 2001) The study showed that only darker skinned individuals had reported that their self-esteem and body satisfaction rather than their lighter skinned peers. The present study wants to determine whether the skin trauma theories true, when it comes to emerging adults getting posttraumatic stress. "Further, coping strategies specifically employed to deal with racial discrimination will also be associated with dissociative symptoms such that individuals utilizing more active strategies (e.g., try to do something; talk to others about it) will be less likely to report dissociative symptoms than individuals utilizing more passive coping strategies (e.g., keep it to yourself; accept it as a fact of life)." (Polanco-Roman, L., Danies, A., & Anglin, D. M., 2016)

Theory and Development

The workshop that was conducted had the ages 14-16 at Marina High School. This age group is still trying to find their ethnic identity. During my services in the class, I have noticed some type of colorism behavior amongst the grade. The plan is to incorporate Jean Phinney's Ethnic Identity into my research. I believe some of the ages I have encountered while I was doing my service hours, they are in Stage I is Unexamined Ethnic Identity; most of them do not seem to want to explore their identity. "Developmental approaches focus on the process by which an ethnic identity is formed, typically during adolescence and young adulthood." (Phinney,1996)

Theory connection to Colorism is that I believed that Jean Phinney's theory intertwines with Colorism. Reasons are that student's skin color can be challenged by the discrimination of Colorism. The challenges from the discrimination forces the student into wanting to explore their ethnic identity and then achieving Stage III. Colorism challenges the person ethnic identity, making wonder who am I? If they feel that they do not fit in their community or society light or dark.

Understanding their identity can be complex, but for them to take the steps in exploring their identity; they have to encounter a life changing event. "Ethnic identity has been conceptualized as a complex construct including a commitment and sense of belonging to one's ethnic group, positive evaluation of the group, interest in and knowledge about the group, and involvement in activities and traditions of the group (Phinney, 1990)." Most of the students have not yet experienced that event, and the teacher I have worked with hopes that they never have to. There are students that are in foster care and they deal with events that brings them to the second stage of Phinney's Ethnic Identity.

Which will bring them to Stage II: Moratorium, is when the adolescent chooses to explore the ethnic identity of oneself. "However, experience probably plays a more important role, as adolescents move into a larger world, encounter more people from backgrounds different from their own, and are increasingly exposed to discrimination." 'These experiences trigger the desire to understand the history, traditions, and current situation of their group." 'Ethnic clubs on campuses can assist students in this process, as can efforts by educational institutions to develop courses, to invite speakers, and to promote activities that give recognition to diverse cultural and ethnic groups." (Phinney, 1993) In 1968, Erikson says that when someone is in the process of exploration may be stimulated in a development issues such as being influenced by ego identity. I agree with Erikson, because your ego can influence you to explore or choose not to know your identity. Our egos can blind us from seeing the benefits of finding out who we are.

The final stage: Achieved Ethnic Identity is where the person has developed a clear understanding and confidence of their identity. They have built a sense of security within the minority group that they belong to. "Individuals at this stage have abandoned anger toward the majority group and are generally open to other groups, but their personal relationships with other groups may vary." (Cross, 1991) This stage gives you a sense of relief within yourself.

Diversity

The participants of my study are consisted of the races from the African American, Latino Community and other races. The group is very diverse in all cultures and religions. The school has a high population of Hispanics, 54%. Asians and Whites are 15% of the

school's population. Two or more races, Blacks and Pacific islander are 5% and 6%. There is 65% of students that are from low income families. The school is pretty well diverse, and the class that I used has an even amount of diverse students.

Colorism does not occur only in the African American community, but in the cultures of Filipinos, African, India, Asian Cultures, Brazil, and many more. According, to The Melanin Project, they talked about that colorism is present in other countries, by showing the public face and private face in compare and contrast of the country preference to who they find acceptable. They are spreading awareness of the countries discrimnation act towards their people. The school has a variety of ethnic backgrounds and discussing colorism by connecting all countries colorism. The diversity of the school has made me decide to bring awareness to a topic that no one dares to speak upon it. This diverse and age group is where to end the cycle of Colorism. At least it could be a start to put an end to it. Colorism has been a topic on mind for a few years now, when doing service at Marina High has brought it to light.

Learning Outcomes

During the workshop, students will learn the history of Colorism, the effects it has on the person's self esteem, where it originated from and prevention tips. By the end of the workshop students will be able to:

- 1. Students will be able to define "colorism" and explain how does it differ or relate to racism.
- 2. Students will be able to identify the effects of colorism on people's self-esteem and self-image.

3. Students will be able to identify examples of colorism in the media.

Method Section

Participants

The workshop was at Marina High School in Marina, California. The participants are from Mrs. M's 9th grade English class. The class was about 29 students present that day, a few students were absent. There were more boys than girls in the class. The class was diverse in ethnic backgrounds, mainly had Hispanic students. The students were roughly between the ages of 14 to 16. The socio-demographics of the students were that some came from low-income families, foster care, or only spanish speaking parents. Some students are their parents language interpreters. Some of the parents have low education or none at all. However, some of the parents in middle or upper class has some college degrees

Procedures and Materials

The presentation was held on November 13, 2019, one workshop was held, because the participants understood the content given to them. The presentation was given to students, and a disclaimer was told to them, to let them know if they have any questions or concerns to inform the presenter. The content was about a topic that is refused to be discussed and wanted the participants to feel comfortable. The participants seemed to be attentive during the topic.

After the presentation a post-survey given to the students, to see if they were listening during the presentation. There was some false information given by participants in the gender

section of survey, but there is enough data to get clear results. During the assessment, the participants had discussed each question with a partner about given pictures provided. They were to analyze the picture, give describe how it relates to colorism, how does colorism differs from racism, how does colorism portray through media with these images, and ways to prevent colorism or how to cope with it. How does colorism affect people's self image and self esteem. Images that were used were from older 90's and 2000 television shows, showing how the producers had replace the darker skinned actor with a lighter skinned actor.

Results

Learning outcome one was that students will define "colorism" and explain how does it differ or relate to racism. This learning outcome was fully met. These results were based off the history of colorism, assessment and post-survey. Learning outcome two was that students will be able to identify the effects of colorism on people's self-esteem and self-image. I use the answers from the assessment and post-survey. I feel that this learning outcome has been partially met, due to the students understood the community and society based effects on the person's self-esteem and self-image. They gave me feedback from the post-survey from a rate of 1-5, which means 1 is the least and 5 is greater. I had at least 16 students say 5, that means that colorism does have a greater effect on the person's self-image and self-esteem. Others were 16.7% and 10% felt that colorism has minimal effect on the person. See appendix B for figures.

Learning outcome three was that students will be able to identify examples of colorism in the media. I believe this outcome was fully met. The participants understood how to identify colorism in their daily social media interaction. In the post survey, only 70% of

the participants admitted to witnessing colorism in the media. 40% of the participants said no to never witnessing. I ask the participants if they will ever prevent colorism in their community on the post survey. The answer options were yes, no, or maybe. 50% said yes, 40% said maybe and 10% said no, overall the goal was to get the participants a better understanding on how to identify colorism. See appendix B for figures.

Discussion

Successes:

The point of the project was to aware students of the effects that Colorism can do to ones' self-esteem and body image. I wanted to teach them what was the difference between racism and Colorism. I wanted to give students an awareness that Colorism is present in all media aspects. The successes of the project was the participants understood the topic, they were engaging with questions and activities. Some participants were eager to discuss their findings to the class and one participant was eager to have a discussion about the differences between colorism and racism. Like, the information explaining how they are intertwined with one another. Therefore, the students fully met learning outcome number 1. Which states, students will define "colorism" and explain how does it differ or relate to racism.

The theory chosen is Jean Phinney's Ethnic Identity, as talked about in theory section, regards the stages the students goes through if they ever encountered Colorism. The age group chosen has yet to experience a tragic incidents that forces them to leave stage one. Most of them are currently still have no interest in finding who they are within their ethnic identity. I have followed up with the teacher, I worked with to do my workshop, told me that her students enjoyed learning about something that was not a planned curriculum. Some told

her they told their family about what colorism can do to a person's perspective of themselves.

Limitations:

I feel the limitations to my workshop was that I was not fully in control, because the teacher did not want any of the students to feel uncomfortable and get bored. I also had complications with my printer, so I had to put the images used in the assessment activity onto the presentation. I feel if my printer was able to print out the pictures, I could had control over my workshop. Overall, I felt that I had very little control over my workshop, and I understand why the teacher did so. Overall, learning outcome one was fully met and learning outcome two and three were partially met. I feel that I will make sure that the pre-survey is done as planned. So, the students were able to get some type of idea, before getting the presentation. I feel that I would want to try an older audience to see if I would get different results.

Diversity

Overall, I had a diverse group of students, but I wish I had more African American students. The targeted audience that I wish I used in my workshop, would relate more towards the African American community. I felt that my diverse group had some inclusive results, due to some of the students had answered my survey saying that they were an alien as gender. I also feel that the students just put any response for that made sense to them. Some understood the concept of the topic. I would like to try having a workshop with older young adults in the African American and Bi-racial communities. I wanted to see if the group of people in mind has been through some sort of colorism discrimnation. I feel that my results

would not be inclusive. The results might help me reach my targeted goal. By giving these prevention tips to help cope and stop Colorism in their communities.

References

Berry, B. (2009). Colorism. In J. O'Brien (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Gender and Society (Vol. 1, pp. 147-150). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

 $\underline{https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3073900091/GVRL?u=csumb_main\&sid=GVRL\&xid=9e}\\ \underline{9ca733}$

Bivens, A. (2017, September 05). How Colorism In The Media Really Affects Black Women. https://www.theodysseyonline.com/colorism-in-the-media

Fultz, Lauren A., "The Psycho-Social Impact of Colorism Among African American Women: Crossing the Divide" (2013). Browse all Theses and Dissertations. 770. https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/etd_all/770

McKissack, P. (2003). Color me dark: The diary of Nellie Lee Love, the great migration North. New York: Scholastic. Landor, A., & Mcneil Smith, S. (2019).

Phinney, J. S. (1989). Stages of Ethnic Identity Development in Minority Group Adolescents. The Journal of Early Adolescence, 9(1–2), 34–49.

Phinney, J.S., Horenczyk, G., Liebkind, K. and Vedder, P. (2001), Ethnic Identity, Immigration, and Well- Being: An Interactional Perspective. Journal of Social Issues, 57: 493-510.

Polanco-Roman, L., Danies, A., & Anglin, D. M. (2016). Racial discrimination as race-based trauma, coping strategies, and dissociative symptoms among emerging adults. Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice and policy, 8(5), 609–617. doi:10.1037/tra0000125

Skin-Tone Trauma: Historical and Contemporary Influences on the Health and Interpersonal Outcomes of African Americans. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 14(5), 797-815.

Slawson, N. (2017, October 08). Dove apologizes for ad showing black woman turning into white one. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/08/dove-apologises-for-ad-showing-black-woman-turning-into-white-one

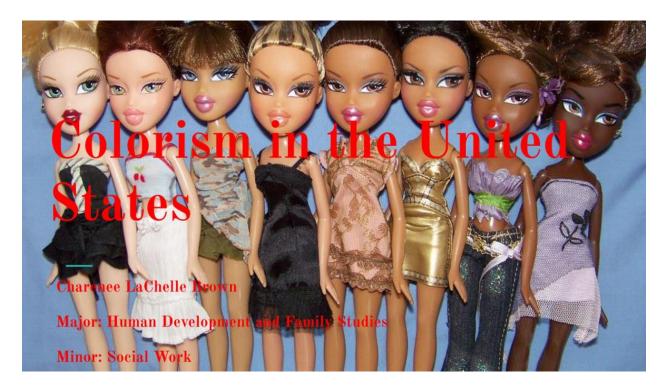
Stamps, Danielle T., "The Effects of Skin Tone on the Perception of Discrimination in Young African American Women" (2018). Honors Theses. 590.

https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/590

"Whitewashing" in Mass Media: Exploring Colorism and the Damaging Effects of Beauty Hierarchies. (2014, December 10).

https://raceandtechnology.wordpress.com/2014/12/10/whitewashing-in-mass-media-exploring-colorism-and-the-damaging-effects-of-beauty-hierarchies/

Appendix A
Capstone Project Presentation



Topics:

- 1. Students will define "colorism" and explain how does it differ or relate to racism.
- 2. Students will be able to identify the effects of colorism on people's self-esteem and self-image.
- 3. Students will be able to identify examples of colorism in the media

What is Colorism?

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 the lighter skin people in the institutions of oppression.



Is Racism and Colorism Connected?

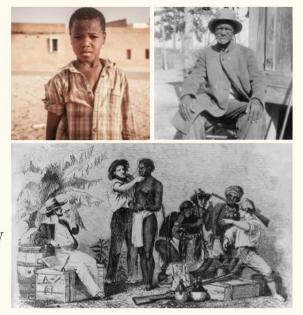
Racism: The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress people of color (Blacks, Latino/as, Native Americans, Asians, and etc.).

Colorism and Racism are distinctive, but they intertwined as the system of hierarchy and power structure.

Colorism is a product of events that occurred from Racism.

Colorism in Slavery

- Slavery is where colorism originated from.
- It started with the lighter skin slaves were granted house privileges, and granted reading privileges. While, the darker skin slaves were left to work in the fields.
- The lighter skin slave were usually product of rape from past or previous slave owner. They were able to be closer to their relatives.





Negative Colorist Language

Community Based

"Ooh! She got good hair like her momma, hopefully it don't get nappy like her daddy"

"Ooh! You are too light to be my grandchild, how did you come out light like this?"

"I hope that she does not get too dark this summer, make her stay in the house"

"Only reason you are pretty because you are light skin with freckles and pretty eyes"

Society Based

"Nobody love a black girl. Not even herself"

— Nicole Dennis-Benn, Here Comes the Sun

#TeamLightSkin

"Oh you are pretty for a black girl, you must be mixed with something"

"You must be adopted because you are darker than your mother, yeah you are adopted"

Effects of Colorism on Self-Image/Self-Esteem

Self-Image

- Research says that darker skinned participants were taught that lighter skinned is today's preference.
- Leads to having a lower body satisfaction and depression
- Self-image is seen by two dimensions, like moral worth and lack of success

Self-Esteem

- Thoughts that they are not beautiful
- Fear of not being loved
- They will distance themselves from society and community
- Trying to live up to society's standards of lighter is better
- Not being Black enough or fit within the community

Colorism and Peer Influence

- Some peers do not know that they are consciously or unconsciously having negative skin tone beliefs.
- Can trigger feelings of distrust, isolation, and withdrawal
- Some high school students report that popularity and greater social success of a peer was because their skin was lighter
- There a division created between the peers of different skin tones or social groups are made based off skin tone

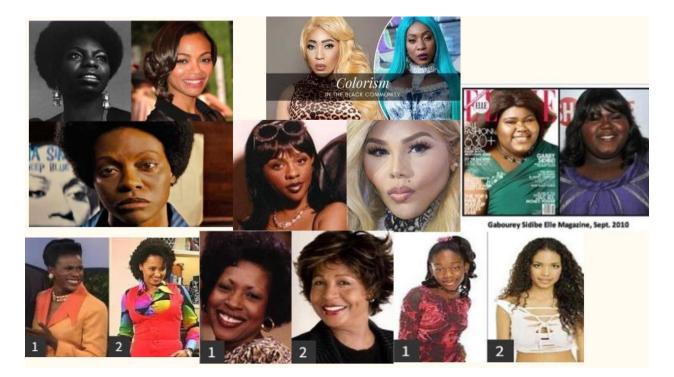
Celebrity Colorism



Lupita Nyong'o Opinions on Colorism







Activity: Colorism in Social Media (Group Discussion)

Questions:

- 1. What are your feelings/thoughts about the images that were shown?
- 2. In the images given, what are the signs of colorism that are present?
- 3. What do you think are ways to prevent colorism?
- 4. Why do you think that social media portray lighter is better?

Conclusion

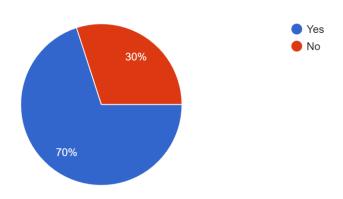
Positive Tips:

- 1. You are beautiful in whatever shade of color your are.
- 2. If you have experience Colorism talk to an adult, friend, or counselor.
- 3. Breathe, relax and let's mediate
- 4. Mirror pep talks: You are beautiful, I love you, You got this, No one is you, which makes you unique(Repeat if Necessary)
- 5. Put daily positive reminders around your room or binder
- 6. Follow self love accounts on social media for daily inspiration

Appendix B Post-Survey Results

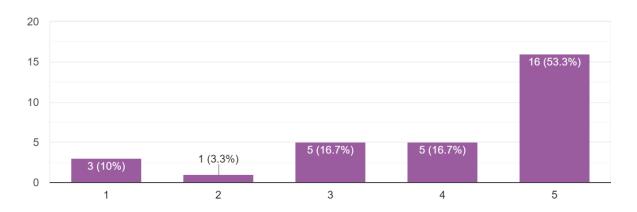
Have you ever witness colorism in the media?

30 responses



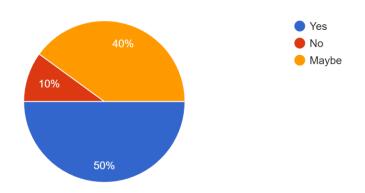
Do you think colorism is positive to a person's self esteem?

30 responses

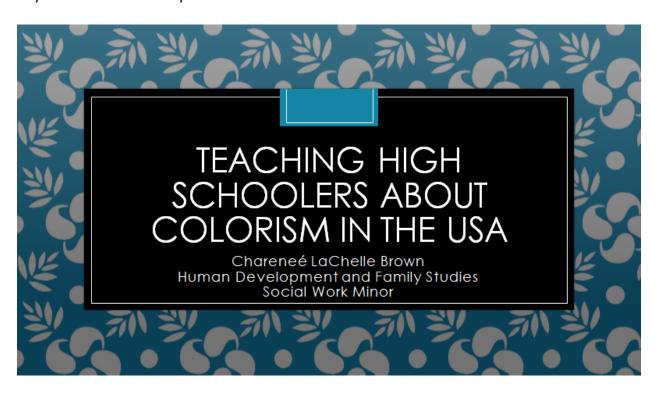


Will you stand up against Colorism in your community?

30 responses



Appendix C
Capstone Festival Powerpoint



Why is Colorism a Problem?

- Colorism is a major problem, because the major affects that it can have on the person self esteem and self image
- In the age group used in the workshop, colorism can make an impact on the students lives, home environment, and peer groups.
- Colorism happens throughout a child's life if occurring within the community based.

Needs Statement

- 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 the lighter skin people in the institutions of oppression.
 - Conducting a group discussion/survey as an activity. The activity will consist of the students discussing whether they ever experienced or has done an act of colorism. This where they will tell each other their encounters and discuss if they ever seen colorism in the media.

Needs Statement

- Students were unconsciously discussing their preference on they like their girls or guys lighter
 - o Ages 14-15 Freshman
- Colorism can be taught based on community and society, Basically the student are learning by sight.
- Media and Society promoted that lighter is better, by the beauty standard of Eurocentric features and hourglass shaped

Theory: Jean Phinney's Ethnic Identity

 Stage I: Unexamined Identity- Where individuals has not explore their identity, they are aware of their ethnic background, but no motivation to explore.

Diffusion	Foreclosure
An individual has not encountered ethnicity as an issue or topic, ethnicity is not an issue of contention	An individual as collected information about ethnicity from family and peers and succumbs to information without interacting with individuals of the ethnic group

Theory Cont.

- Stage II: Moratorium- Individual has motivation to explore oneself ethnic identity.
- Individuals will stay in the first stage, until they are given or experienced a situation that make them want to explore the second stage.
- Example: The situations may involve: Harsh racism or less traumatic experience



Theory Cont.

- Stage III: Ethnic Identity Achievement
 - This stage is characterized by acceptance and clear understanding of one's ethnicity. This is the stage where individuals come to terms with cultural differences between one's ethnic group and the majority culture.

After individuals achieve their understanding of their identity:

- Individuals have a positive bicultural identity
- Individuals have a secure ethnic identity and a positive orientation toward the mainstream cultures



Theory Connection

- I believed that Jean Phinney's theory intertwines with Colorism.
- Reasons are that students ethnic background is challenged by the discrimination of Colorism.
- The challenges from the discrimination forces the student into wanting to explore their ethnic identity and then achieving Stage III
- Colorism challenges the person ethnic identity making wonder who am I? If they feel that they do not fit in their community or society light or dark

Learning Outcomes

- Students will define "colorism" and explain how does it differ or relate to racism.
- Students will be able to identify the effects of colorism on people's self-esteem and selfimage.
- Students will be able to identify examples of colorism in the media



Methods

- Location: Marina high school
- o Date/Time: November 13, 2019 at 10:43am
- Ages of 14-16 years old
- Participants of 29 students
- Ethnic Background of Black, White, Pacific Islander, Latino/Latina/Latinx, and etc.
- Post-survey after workshop
- Assessment based off LOs



Assessment Questions

- How is colorism present in these images that were shown?
- •In the images given, Why do you think these actors were swap with their lighter counterpart?
- •How would colorism affect these actors/ess self esteem and self image?
- What do you think are ways to prevent colorism?
- •Why do you think that social media portray lighter is better?

Post-Survey

- Do you think colorism is positive to a person's self esteem?
- Have you ever witness someone being discriminated based of the color of their skin?
- Have you ever witness colorism in the media?
- Does colorism differ from racism?

Assessment and Post Survey Results

- Learning outcome was that students will define "colorism" and explain how does it differ or relate to racism.
 - Fully Met 100%
- Students will be able to identify the effects of colorism on people's selfesteem and self-image.
 - Partially Met 70% participants
- Students will be able to identify examples of colorism in the media
 - Partially met 70% participants yes
 - 。30 % no



Discussion



Successes:

The participants were engaged with topic, asked questions, gave opinions about how they felt and ideas of prevention. Learning outcome #1 was successful.



Limitations:

I was not fully in controlled, because the teacher did not was the students to lose interest and get offended. The teacher took

The teacher took over assessment activity, was not able to explain where the image's sense of origin for activity.



Suggestions:

Choose an older audience of 16 or older.

Try to have better control over activity.

