The Politics of Skin Color

by

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To my parents and my husband for their endless support and encouragement

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be a possibility. As would happen again countless times in the ensuing decade, Vince patiently explained about PhD programs, academic jobs, and suggested I write a senior honors thesis to try my hand at research to see if it was something I would truly like. I was lucky enough to write an honors thesis with both Hanes and Vince serving on my thesis committee, and I enjoyed the entire process.

Fast forward several years and I am now finishing my PhD. It is no understatement to say that the opportunities to work with Hanes and Vince changed my life course. I wish that Hanes were still here for me to share this grand reflection and thank him once again for everything he contributed to me, as well as to the discipline at large through his research, teaching, and tireless service. I would love to hear his distinctive laugh and get one final fist bump. I am also forever indebted to Vince for the countless hours he allowed me to spend in his office navigating every phase of graduate study and professionalization in the discipline. I will never forget his patience, care, dedication, critical eye, and unending support. I have grown to cherish our weekly meetings—a time to discuss research progress, recent happenings in the department, and a space to talk honestly about how things are going. There is no way I could ever repay Vince for his investment in me as a person and as a scholar through many formative years in academia. The best I can do is continue to try to pay forward his investment in me by supporting the next generation of young scholars.

I have also been incredibly lucky to meet a number of other faculty members who have been very influential to my thinking and development as a graduate student. As fate would have it, I was able to take one of my first substantive classes as a graduate student with Ted Brader. As a more reserved student, I expected that Ted would likely not take much notice of me. To my surprise, he invited me to his office to discuss the class and my work, and ultimately asked me to work with him on a project related to immigration news coverage. From that point forward, our relationship has evolved quite easily given Ted and my shared passion for sarcasm, biting wit, and enjoying a good story. As my dissertation co-chair, his ability to pay both very close attention to detail and

simultaneously think about big picture implications has been of tremendous benefit. I am very grateful that Ted allowed me to join his inner circle because I have learned much from him and enjoyed all of our precious time together.

I was similarly fortunate to have the opportunity to get to know and work with Don Kinder. Having read Don's seminal work on racial resentment as an undergraduate, I had an image in my mind of Don as a very stoic academic. This image was quickly updated after taking Public Opinion with Don early in my graduate career. I immediately enjoyed Don's quirky personality and impressively dry sense of humor. I admire his ability to joke lightheartedly in one breath while giving sharp substantive critiques of my work in the next. My work has been pushed forward a great deal thanks to Don's critical eye and investment in me. I have learned much from him about the process of writing as well as conducting careful research. I feel very fortunate to have gotten to know and work with Don throughout my graduate career.

At some point after my prospectus began taking shape, I met a post-doc at the Ford School named Mara Ostfeld. I recall hearing about her work from Vince and decided to cold email her to discuss some potentially shared interests in studying skin tone measurement. To my surprise, she wanted to meet. To my even greater surprise, that conversation blossomed into a huge face-to-face data collection effort and a close personal connection. Mara is a delightful advisor, mentor, friend, and even "academic spouse" (as she calls me). I am so grateful be tied together with her on this academic journey because she is one of the best people I know. She has been a constant cheerleader, constructive critic, and excellent springboard for ideas. I would not have made it to this finish line without her.

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research. Although it remains far from perfect, I am incredibly grateful for his time and energy over the past several years.

Apart from my committee members, I have been lucky enough to build a broader support system within the department and the discipline. Although she is not on my committee, I am indebted to Nancy Burns. She took me under her wing as a research assistant early on in my graduate career and provided me with a number of exciting opportunities. Nancy's brilliance, creativity, thoughtfulness, grace, and strength continue to inspire me. I also am incredibly thankful to Nick Valentino for his feedback on the project at various points through the years despite the fact that we never formally had an opportunity to be in a classroom together. Rob Mickey and Lisa Disch have also both been excellent sources of feedback and support in their respective capacity as DGS. Andy Markovits has also been a wonderful cheerleader and source of support dating back to my college years. Similarly, I am greatly appreciative of the support I received and networks I built during my year as a graduate student at Ohio State. I will be forever grateful for having the chance to get to know and work with Corrine McConnaughy, Irfan Nooruddin, Ismail White, Alison Craig, Nyron Crawford, Chryl Laird, Nicky Mack, Will Massengill, Yalidy Matos, Lauren Ratliff, and Julian Wamble.

More broadly, I am grateful to stand on the shoulders of giants. Some of these giants came out of the University of Michigan, including the founders of survey research and the American National Election Study. Others did the difficult but vital work of attempting to more centrally position the study of race and politics in the discipline. I am especially indebted to those who gave voice to groups that were often voiceless. Scholars like Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, and countless others did the hard but important work of putting a spotlight on racial injustices. Within political science, so too did scholars like Hanes Walton, Jewel Prestage, and the founders of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS). I attempt to build from their legacies

and efforts to highlight ongoing inequities in society while lifting up the voices of those who are often unfairly and unjustly silenced.

me. It is thanks to him and our adorable dog Ned that I have stayed sane through the academic job market process and in the final phases of graduate school. I am excited to see what the next chapter of our lives has in store for us and grateful to have them both by my side.

In addition to the various ups and downs that graduate school naturally brings, I have also had the difficult task of saying goodbye to a number of family members during this period of my life— grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. While this was never easy, their legacy inspires me to keep pushing forward and attempting to make positive change in the world. I can only hope that they know how thankful I am for the time we shared together and the impression that each of them left on me. To my maternal grandmother in particular, I am deeply indebted for her seemingly endless love and encouragement. I hope you would be proud.

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ABSTRACT

Race is an undeniable force in politics. This dissertation examines heterogeneity centered on one important yet understudied facet of race: skin tone. Given the historical importance of skin tone for African Americans and its significance for socioeconomic outcomes, health, criminal justice, and more, one might expect skin tone to be meaningful for politics in various ways. Drawing evidence from multiple national surveys, in-depth interviews, and an original survey experiment, I find that the skin tone of Black people is politically meaningful in three broad ways. First, I demonstrate a number of domains in which African Americans' skin color is associated with their social and political views. This is evident in both the qualitative interview and mass survey data, and with both traditional race-based items as well as with a set of novel items that focus on experiences and policies based centrally on skin color. Darker-skinned Black people are more likely to recognize color-based disparities in society *and* consistently support more liberal policy positions than those with lighter skin, even after accounting for standard demographic indicators. Second, I develop a set of measures to examine the prospect that skin tone identity serves as a social identity distinct from (though undeniably related to) race. Using these measures across multiple surveys, I find that skin tone is a meaningful identity to a sizable portion of the racial group. As with other group-based identities, skin color is more important to more stigmatized group members—i.e., those with darker skin. Third, I use a survey experiment to test whether skin tone is an identity that can be activated in socially and politically consequential ways. I further explore how the combination of skin color and skin color identity is associated with political views, finding that identification is especially potent for influencing the views of dark-skinned high identifiers. Together, this evidence signals the importance of examining race in not only categorical but also continuous fashions to more fully understand the political contours of the American racial landscape. This project has important implications for our understanding of two domains of political science: (1) political behavior—e.g., with respect to political preferences, racial stereotypes, political coalitions, and media depictions of racial groups; and, (2) political institutions as it relates to thinking about political representation, policy-making, and legislative agendas.

CHAPTER 1
Introduction

"The closer you are to White, you're perceived as 'better than.' And you're also not just perceived as 'better than,' but that you have more 'opportunities than.' And you're not looked down upon by Caucasians."
—58 year old, light-skinned Black woman interview participant

In February 2007, Barack Obama announced his candidacy for the presidency. This was a historic moment in American politics. Political pundits, commentators, and the public speculated about Obama's chances to secure the Democratic Party's nomination. A large part of this conversation centered around Obama's race and upbringing. There was a subtext regarding not only Obama's race, but also his skin tone. Harry Reid was quoted as describing Barack Obama as a "light-skinned" African American "with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one."[1] Future running-mate and Vice President Joe Biden described Obama as follows: "I mean, you got the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy."[2] Thus, throughout the lead-up to the 2008 election, Obama's desirability as a candidate was in part rooted in his light complexion.

These conversations about appearance also extended to discussions about what Michelle Obama signaled and reflected about Barack Obama. She stood out in the media and political realm specifically as a darker-skinned Black woman. Her appearance was noted as being an asset by some; for example, with one journalist writing, "A lot of black women fell for Barack Obama the moment

[1] New York Times
[2] CNN

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they saw his wife."[3] For others, there was concern that she was a potential liability, specifically with respect to Whites' perceptions: "with her deep brown skin and obviously straightened hair, attracts attention and maybe a little apprehension."[4]

These comments illustrate that, in addition to the importance of race for politics, studying facets of race such as skin tone provide an even clearer picture for understanding the nuances of the American political landscape. It is worth emphasizing that it was White people in both instances making color-based comments about Barack Obama. These comments are consistent with historical evidence that White people valued and treated Black people differently based on their skin tone. Historically, lighter-skinned individuals had access to opportunities not available to their darker-skinned counterparts, both within and outside the system of slavery (Bodenhorn 2011; Myrdal 1996; Reuter 1918). These comments surrounding skin tone suggest the continued relevance of color distinct from race in American society and politics specifically. Moreover, such comments about a Black political candidate's skin tone, racial authenticity, and/or partner are not unique to Barack Obama. They arise frequently, such as when Sharpe James ran against Cory Booker for mayor of Newark (Gillespie 2012), when Marion Barry ran against Sharon Pratt Kelly for mayor of Washington DC,[5] and are surfacing in the ongoing process of finalizing the 2020 Democratic nomination for Kamala Harris and Cory Booker.[6] Indeed, it is clear that both everyday people and elected officials—including Whites—focus on not just racial categorization, but also one's complexion.

Social science research has spent a great deal of time examining and uncovering substantial racial differences in policy preferences, partisanship, candidate preferences, and more between Black and White people. Of course, race is a tremendous force in American politics and it is well-

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[3] The Root
[4] NPR
[5] Washington Post
[6] Los Angeles Times

documented that the Black-White divide runs far and deep through American society (Jackman 1994; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Schuman et al. 1997; Sigelman and Welch 1991; Tate 1994). As a result, a great deal of attention is paid to the study of race and politics, which remains essential to our understanding of the American political landscape.

Research across the social sciences also highlights the importance of skin color within racial categories, both historically and in the present day. Dating back to the institution of slavery, divisions and differential treatment based on skin color are well-documented. Lighter-skinned Black people were more likely to have greater wealth, health, larger families, and even being more likely to be freed (Bodenhorn 2011; Bodenhorn and Ruebeck 2007; Davis 1991; Frazier 1932; Green and Hamilton 2013; Hughes and Hertel 1990; Menke 1979; Myrdal 1996; Reece 2018; Russell et al. 2013). Indeed, despite a solidification of the one-drop rule following the Civil War, measurement of distinct "mulatto" or mixed-race categories remained on the Census alongside the category "Black" from the 1830s through 1920 (Allen et al. 2000; Menke 1979; Reece 2018).

Even following the Civil War and solidification of the one-drop rule, the importance of skin tone did not fade away relative to race. Evidence across the social sciences illustrates emphatically the continued importance of skin tone. In contemporary research, dark-skinned Black people have less wealth (Bowman et al. 2004; Monk 2013, 2014; Seltzer and Smith 1991), lower wages (Goldsmith et al. 2007; Keith and Herring 1991; Monk 2014; Ransford 1970), higher levels of unemployment (Johnson et al. 1998), lower levels of education (Hughes and Hertel 1990; Keith and Herring 1991; Monk 2014), lower occupational prestige (Keith and Herring 1991; Ransford 1970), face higher levels of social rejection (Hebl et al. 2012), worse health outcomes (Harburg et al. 1978; Hargrove 2018; Krieger, Sidney, and Coakley 1998; Laidley et al. 2019; Monk 2015a), are perceived as more criminal (Eberhardt et al. 2004), are more likely to be arrested or incarcerated (Monk 2018), receive harsher criminal sentences (Burch 2015), and are even more likely to receive the death penalty for comparable

crimes, relative to light-skinned Black or White people (Eberhardt et al. 2006). In many cases, these findings demonstrating skin tone disparities are equal to or larger than the magnitude of racial disparities (e.g., Monk 2015, 2018). Of course, this does not mean that lighter-skinned Black people do not face discrimination based on race. Rather, it highlights that darker-skinned people face an additional layer of discrimination based on skin tone in addition to race.

How do these well-documented skin tone disparities manifest in the political realm? In contrast to popular portrayals of Black politics as monolithic, a growing literature illuminates the important heterogeneity within the Black community with respect to political views and behavior (Cohen 1999; Davenport 2016a, 2018; Philpot 2017; Smith 2014; Tate 1994; Walton 1985). With a handful of exceptions, however, little scholarly attention has been paid to studying skin tone from a political perspective (see Hochschild and Weaver 2007; Iyengar et al. 2010; Lerman et al. 2015; Terkildsen 1993; Weaver 2012 for important exceptions). Skin tone as a facet of race, then, is a distinct issue worthy of study. Of course, studying skin tone does not diminish the importance of studying race; rather, it emphasizes the importance of investigating heterogeneity in experiences and views associated with any group.

Consequently, this project builds on an interdisciplinary literature demonstrating the importance of skin tone for socioeconomic outcomes to theorize and measure the ways in which it is also relevant for politics. A rich literature across the social sciences signals that skin tone may manifest with respect to politics in several possible ways—e.g., political preferences, the activation of racialized stereotypes relevant to policies or political candidates, and even one's identity. Do differing lived experiences based on skin color map onto different political views based on skin color as well? If skin color is an organizing feature of American racial politics, could it be taken up as a distinct social identity? I bring data to bear on these topics using a mixed methods approach—with 67 in-depth interviews, a number of surveys, and survey experiments.

As with any research agenda, it is important for the researchers to engage with questions regarding their positionality to the subject. I have benefitted from White privilege throughout my life as a White woman with fair skin. I have not faced stigmatization based on either my race or my skin tone. As a result, my ability to understand the ways in which skin tone and colorism operate are not informed by personal lived experiences of being dark-skinned in a majority White country. This means that I will always be an observer or outsider looking in on this phenomenon. At the same time, my privileged status has permitted insight into how White people think (implicitly or explicitly) about skin tone and the subsequent institutionalization of color-based biases. Of course, White people are largely responsible for the divisions and stereotypes based on skin tone throughout U.S. history. As a result, I believe it is worth emphasizing that colorism be viewed not simply as an *intra-group* issue within communities of color, but to acknowledge and give voice to the origins and continuing inter-group dynamics surrounding colorism. Thus, while this project contributes to a literature that predominantly centers White voices and perspectives, it should be viewed as building on—and certainly not replacing—the work of those with more direct experiences with colorism. My hope is that by dissecting not only race-based but also color-based inequities—and, specifically, the ways in which colorism manifests in the political sphere—this dissertation makes a modest contribution towards reducing the power unjustly associated with lighter skin in our society.

In what follows, I begin by elaborating upon the distinct importance of skin tone for Black people in the United States, historically and contemporarily. Next, I outline my theoretical expectations for why we should expect skin tone to be central to the formation of political judgments. Drawing from the handful of existing studies, I review the literature that has examined the impact of skin color on policy preferences and candidate assessments. I then turn to an overview of my findings from nationally representative data showing that racial divides in public opinion between Black and White people are driven, in part, by the differing views of Whites and *darker-skinned* Black people.

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Additionally, I highlight a consistent set of findings in my in-depth interviews, which show that perceptions of who benefits from racialized policies turns on more fine-grained perceptions of race, with dark-skinned Black people perceived as the stereotypical beneficiaries of these policies.

In my efforts to push forward our understanding of skin color as politically meaningful, I also develop original measures of skin tone identity. These items build from existing validated items asked with respect to other social identity groups, such as race or gender. I use these original measures to demonstrate the importance of skin tone as a distinct social identity to a majority of African Americans, especially those who are part of the more stigmatized color group. Additionally, I bring to bear experimental evidence that skin color identity can be activated following exposure to information about color-based disparities in society. My evidence reveals skin tone as both (1) an important dimension with which Black people in the United States identify—an identity group that has largely gone unmeasured—and (2) an important facet through which one views the political landscape.

Finally, I conclude by discussing the big picture implications for political behavior, the American racial hierarchy, and understanding inequality in society, as well as future directions to continue expanding our understanding of skin tone as an important political force. My research demonstrates that skin tone unequivocally remains a consequential force in society and politics.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SKIN COLOR IMPORTANCE

As W.E.B. Du Bois noted in *The Souls of Black Folks*, "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line" (DuBois 1904). While Du Bois was referring to the color line as the racial divide between Blacks and Whites, I will discuss the ways in which a more continuum-based understanding of the color line has been important throughout our nation's history. Black people brought without their consent to the United States have consistently faced worse treatment and more

discrimination than Whites. Still, within the Black racial group, there is variation in treatment and opportunities in part based on one's appearance. Understanding these historical legacies of slavery, skin tone, and discrimination are central to contextualizing and understanding the contemporary influence of skin color.

As coined by Alice Walker (1983), colorism—the preference for light skin over dark skin—developed from a perceived supremacy of White Northern European features as the "ideal" (Berry 2009). The transatlantic slave trade, and subsequent rape of enslaved Black women by White men, contributed significantly to the diversity in skin color among Black people in the United States and globally (e.g., Jablonski 2012; Russell, Wilson, and Hall 2013). Despite a clear definition of what "Whiteness" is—apart from the idea that being White is simply anyone "not non-White" (Davenport 2018, p. 28)—Whiteness provided opportunities to act as gatekeepers of power and property (Harris 1993). As a result, preferences for lighter skin became commonplace and were reinforced over time.[7] Even in Myrdal's seminal work on American race relations, he noted light-skinned African Americans were viewed more positively by White people relative to those with darker skin (Myrdal 1996[1944], p. 696-699). In short, lighter skinned African Americans have a long history of access to privileges that were not available to their darker skinned counterparts (Reuter 1918). Below, I review the ways in which skin tone has been meaningful throughout the history of the United States. This serves to lay a foundation for the central claim of this project: Examining race in a more fine-grained fashion allows for clearer understanding of its links to politics and group identity.

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[7] The association of Whiteness with power and privilege is rooted deep in global history. As Harris (1993) details in "Whiteness as Property," dating back to the era of slavery, Whiteness determined whether someone had basic human rights or not. That is, to live freely or to be a slave. Similarly, Native American land was taken by Whites upon coming to the United States because the land was seen as being in its natural state and therefore not truly possessed (ibid, p. 1722). Harris argues that through the establishment of laws by Whites, property interests in Whiteness were further entrenched—Whiteness moved from being a racial identity to a form of property.

THE PRE-CIVIL WAR ERA: 1700s – 1850s

Divisions based on skin tone date back to the founding of our country. The first extensive inter-racial mixing occurred in the 17th Century between white indentured servants and both enslaved and free Black people (Menke 1979; Williamson 1980). These relationships were discouraged, with people found to be involved in inter-racial sexual contact were punished by whipping or public humiliation (Davis 1991). Although many of these mixed-race offspring were free, especially when born to White mothers, they were "generally despised and treated as blacks" (Davis 1991, p. 33). As a result, multiple states passed anti-miscegenation laws by the turn of the 17th Century to try to limit the rights of mixed-race individuals (Davis 1991, p. 34).[8] But, these mixed-race individuals were not universally categorized as Black. For example, Virginia amended its definition of "mulatto" individuals to include anyone with one to three Black grandparents as mixed-race (Bodenhorn 2011). This meant anyone with one-eighth Black ancestry or less was legally White rather than mixed-race (Bodenhorn 2011, p. 23). This change was an attempt to dispel concerns that light-skinned, higher status individuals would align themselves with other Black people to work against the White ruling class (Bodenhorn 2011). Overall, despite general disapproval of interracial relationships, both lower- and upper-class Whites still engaged in interracial relationships (Berlin 1975).[9]

Around the time of the Revolutionary War, the number of free Black people increased because Black people in some areas were recruited to participate in the War in exchange for being granted freedom upon return (Berlin 1975; Davis 1991; Williamson 1980). These communities were typically composed of light-skinned, mixed-race individuals who served "as a buffer class between Whites and

[8] These states include Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and colonies from New Hampshire to the Carolinas.

[9] This included Thomas Jefferson's father-in-law, John Wayles, who as a widower took one of his mixed-race slaves, Betty Hemmings, as his *de facto* wife and had six children together (Bodenhorn 2011; Williamson 1980). Wayles and Hemmings six children included their youngest, Sally Hemmings, who appeared "mighty near White" (Williamson 1980, p. 43-44). Of course, Jefferson himself went on to have at least six children by Sally Hemmings in the late 1700s and early 1800s, with four surviving to adulthood. <https://www.monticello.org/sallyhemings/>

Blacks" (Russell et al. 2013, p. 19). Indeed, because of the strong tie between being a "free Black" person and "mixed-race" during the antebellum period, the two terms were nearly synonymous (Berlin 1975).

The status of mixed-race people as a separate group from both Whites and Blacks was clear. Free Black people were thought to most frequently associate with and marry other free Black people, and "actively discriminated against those who were darker" (Russell et al. 2013, p. 20). Indeed, data from the antebellum period through Reconstruction reveal that many marriage partners shared a similar skin tone.[10] Further, free Black people had few limitations on their ability to acquire property during this period, which led to modest economic advances and wealth (Bodenhorn 2011). Moreover, given their elevated status, the free Black community worried after the Revolutionary War that they may be clumped into the same group as newly freed or escaped Black people.

Even within the system of slavery, mixed-race individuals were given different types of tasks than their darker counterparts. Enslaved people with lighter skin were seen as more intelligent and better skilled, resulting in higher valuations on the slave market (Hughes and Hertel 1990; Myrdal 1996; Russell, Wilson, and Hall 2013)[11] and were often given indoor assignments that involved skills and special training. This included serving as artisans, drivers, seamstresses, cooks, and housekeepers (Berlin 1975; Davis 1991; Reuter 1918; Russell et al. 2013). For better or worse, this granted them greater access to the master's daily life, language, and decorum.[12] In contrast, dark-skinned Black people were forced to work in physically demanding positions because they were thought to be physically stronger and better able to tolerate the hot sun (Keith and Herring 1991; Russell et al. 2013).

[10] This assortative mating occurred not just in places that were known as especially color conscious, like New Orleans, but also in other cities such as Baltimore and Norfolk (Bodenhorn 2011, p.105-112).

[11] For example, in the first decades of the 1800s, there was a double-digit premium on light-skinned slaves relative to their darker-skinned counterparts (Bodenhorn 2011; Kotlikoff 1979).

[12] The increased proximity to the master certainly had negative aspects as well—including potential verbal and sexual abuse, as well as separation from other Black people. However, this proximity and access also provided a higher status, a potential for freedom, and potentially easier integration into society after being freed.

Even the church system was divided by color: house servants and skilled artisans attended the White church, sitting in the segregated section, whereas field slaves had their own churches where the Black spiritual tradition developed (Davis 1991; Frazier 1965).[13]

Individuals who were light-skinned and enslaved were also significantly more likely to be freed by their owner, who was also frequently their father (Bodenhorn 2011; Frazier 1965; Menke 1979; Myrdal 1996). Moreover, these individuals were more likely to be freed at a younger age, leaving them more likely to have children of their own who were born into freedom (Bodenhorn 2011, p. 121). Enslaved Black women were freed at higher rates relative to their male counterparts and faced stiff competition for lucrative jobs in Southern cities (Berlin 1975). As a result, many free mixed-race women worked as cooks, laundresses, and housekeepers just as poor White women did. In contrast, freed men worked as factory hands, teamsters, or laborers (Berlin 1975, p. 219-221).

During this period, the one-drop rule was not codified into the racial hierarchy in the United States. Free Black people remained a third class—between Blacks and Whites in status—in the lower South (i.e., South Carolina southward and westward), especially in places like South Carolina and Louisiana (Davis 1991; Degler 1971; Sharfstein 2006). Mixed-race, free individuals were often given a privileged and more respected status in society. Until the 1840s, mixed-race individuals could become racially White by behavior, reputation, and could even marry into White families (Davis 1991; Menke 1979). A legislative report from the 1820s investigating a planned slave revolt further supports this notion of light skinned Blacks as an in-between class:

> "Free mulattos are a barrier between our own color and that of the black and in cases
> of insurrection are more likely to enlist themselves under the banners of the whites…
> Most of them are industrious, sober, hardworking mechanics, who have large families
> and considerable property; and so far as we are acquainted with their temper and

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[13] There were also unique gender dynamics of these issues as well. Unlike the mixed-race offspring of enslaved women, who became slave property and thus an economic asset to the slave-master who had raped his female slave, the inverse was not true. That is, mixed-race offspring of White women with enslaved Black men were a source of shame. While the child was still considered Black, they were also free because Southern law defined freedom based on the status of the child's mother (Bodenhorn 2011; Davis 1991; Sharfstein 2006). As Russell et al. (2013, p. 24) summarize: "White women's racially mixed children disrupted the patriarchy."

dispositions of their feelings, abhor the idea of association with the blacks in any enterprise…" (cited in Reece 2018, p. 5).

The judiciary in South Carolina even refused to apply the one-drop rule to free mulattoes until the 1850s: "In the case of a mulatto with an invisible but known one-sixteenth black ancestry, a Judge Harper declared the person to be white on the basis that acceptance by whites is more relevant than the proportions of white and black 'blood'" (Davis 1991, p. 35).

This also spilled over into other states in the antebellum South where court cases declared people with one-fourth or less "Negro blood" as legally White (Davis 1991, p. 36). For example, when the distinction between free vs. enslaved Black people came under legal attack in Louisiana during the mid-1800s, the judge noted:

> "free persons of color constituted a numerous class. In some districts they are respectable from their intelligence, industry, and habits of good order. Many… are enlightened by education and the instances are by no means rare in which they are larger property holders… such persons as courts and juries would not hesitate to believe under oath" (Degler 1971, p. 244).

Overall, White elites had greater respect and appreciation of free mixed-race individuals, who were viewed as more affluent and more cultivated than their Black counterparts (Williamson 1980, p. 15).[14]

Thus, Whites developed a tenuous alliance in some areas with free Blacks, who were seen as a buffer between Whites and Blacks (Allen, Telles, and Hunter 2000; Davis 1991; Menke 1979). Prior to the Civil War, these mixed-race individuals in the lower South were frequently sponsored by their White fathers (as slaves or as free men), and when freed had much more power and influence than

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[14] There were differences in perceptions of mixed-race individuals and even the system of slavery itself in the upper vs. lower South. Whites in the upper South (i.e., from North Carolina north and westward) had reservations about the appropriateness of the system of slavery itself (Berlin 1974, p.86). Simultaneously, Whites in the upper South had more negative affect towards both Black and mixed-race individuals given their higher frequency as free. There was less distinguishing between mixed-race and Black people in the upper South compared to the lower South, where color served as a more meaningful marker (Berlin 1974, p.162). Mixed-race people in the upper South were also frequently the offspring of lower-class Whites and lived freely, frequently in rural areas (Menke 1979). Around this same time in the upper South, there was a growing perception of mixed-race individuals—especially those with the lightest skin—as "dissolute and difficult people" (Williamson 1980, p.15). It was not until the 1860s that the upper and lower South's views of Blacks and mixed-race people aligned, with an agreement on the one-drop rule (Menke 1979, p.18-21).

their free Black counterparts (Williamson 1980, p. 14).[15] Moreover, they were seen as a vital part of the labor force. For example, when the supply of White artisans or craftsmen ran short, free Black individuals were hired by Whites to fill these positions (Berlin 1975, p. 63). Given the relatively small population of free Blacks in the lower South and their alignment with Whites—through blood, friendship, or legally required guardianship—there was not much concern from Whites regarding this middle-tier group of frequently light-skinned, free Black people (Berlin 1975, p. 212-215).

The distinction between Black and mixed-race individuals is further evidenced by the Census' inclusion of three racial categories beginning in the 1830s and 1840s: "free Whites," "free coloreds," and "slaves" (Davenport 2018, p. 13). Indeed, from 1850 through 1920, the "mulatto" category remained on the Census alongside the racial category "Black" (Allen, Telles, and Hunter 2000; Hickman 1997; Menke 1979; Reece 2018). The Census enumerators received specific instructions regarding how to distinguish between Blacks, mulattos, quadroons, and octoroons. Thus, the separate tier of mixed-race individuals in the American racial hierarchy persisted.

Of course, differential treatment and perceptions of mixed-race and Black individuals did not go unnoticed within the Black community. Indeed, free Black people "began to distinguish themselves from those who remained in bonds… free Negroes now had an interest of their own to defend" (Berlin 1974, p. 56). In 1822, a New Orleans newspaper summarized that "Those who are free and in good circumstances regard the slave with more disdain and antagonism than the white man" (Berlin 1975, p. 198). Distinctions based on skin tone and free status led to the creation of organizations like the Brown Fellowship Society, a symbol of mulatto exclusiveness (Berlin 1975, p. 58). Some free people reasoned the best chance at social mobility depended on being distinguished from the enslaved:

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[15] Although manumission was less frequent in the lower South than the upper South, in the 1790s an influx of light skinned immigrants from Saint Domingue led to a sudden shift in the large free Black population in the lower South (Berlin 1974, p.36). By the mid-1830s, however, most Southern states had made the requirements for manumission much more difficult—including requiring judicial or legislative permission, and requirements that newly freed slaves leave the state upon receiving freedom (Berlin 1974, p.138-139).

"Thus the central paradox of free Negro life was that while full equality depended on the unity of all blacks, free and slave, and the abolition of slavery, substantial gains could more realistically be obtained within the existing society by standing apart from the slaves. Consciously or unconsciously, upward-striving free Negroes understood this and acted on it" (Berlin 1975, p. 271).

Some free Black people owned slaves during this period as well, frequently aiming to protect their own families or friends from enslavement or forcible deportation. In some cases, though, the wealthiest and best-connected free Black people also exploited their slaves for commercial purposes similar to White slave owners (Berlin 1975, p. 273).

Elite, free Black people were left in an uncomfortable middle-ground in the racial hierarchy. They had physical characteristics that blended the two races, as well as the social characteristics of Whites in many cases: being wealthier, frequently literate, and a lifestyle more similar to Whites than enslaved individuals (Berlin 1975, p. 280). They were not fully accepted in White society and were also viewed suspiciously by Black people. This had psychological impacts on self-esteem and self-worth that led to two different reactions: some free individuals vested their fate and interests to Whites, while others committed to pushing forward for Black equality.

During this period leading up to the Civil War, distinctions based on skin tone were made of Black people, whether free or enslaved, that had implications for treatment, opportunities, and status. Light-skinned individuals faced a number of advantages in society relative to Black people as a whole: they had greater levels of wealth (Bodenhorn and Ruebeck 2007), better health outcomes (Bodenhorn 2011), lived longer (Green and Hamilton 2013), had larger families (Bodenhorn 2011; Frazier 1932), and were more likely to be freed (Bodenhorn 2011). Mixed-race families lived in closer proximity to Whites and took advantage of their higher status to achieve some financial gains and social prominence (Degler 1971; Korgen 1998; Menke 1979). In a direct comparison of free mixed-race vs. free Black individuals' levels of wealth, mixed-race people held approximately three times the average wealth of

Blacks (Reece 2018). Thus, various systems in society—including slavery and the judiciary—supported the development of a tri-racial hierarchy in the United States in the antebellum period.

THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ERAS: 1850s – 1870s

Beginning in the mid-1800s, White hostility toward free Black people grew. There was a push towards having only two classes of people—combining all mixed-race and Black individuals into one underclass—rather than three (Davis 1991, p. 41). Concerns about the privileged status of mixed-race people caused Whites to rescind former goodwill between the groups (Davis 1991). Whites were especially fearful of free Blacks given job competition in the skilled trades during Reconstruction (Davis 1991; Davenport 2018). National precedents for discrimination against free Black people around this time—including the infamous 1857 *Dred Scott* decision—and greater adherence to the one-drop rule in many areas laid the groundwork for combining all African Americans into one underclass.

Throughout the Civil War and Reconstruction, the tepid alliance between free Blacks and poor Whites that allowed them to be viewed on equal societal footing had decayed (Russell et al. 2013; Korgen 1998, p.15; Washington 2011). Even in places where mixed-race individuals had previously been respected, like South Carolina and Louisiana, a sharp change occurred (Williamson 1980, p.66). Whites heaped condemnation on the whole Black race with less concern about color variation (Williamson 1980, p. 92). Still, distinct stereotypes about mixed-race people were perpetuated by Whites, including many that are familiar today—e.g., that mixed-race people feel superior to Blacks, they are smarter but weaker, and that they "always marry light and never dark" (Williamson 1980, p. 94; Myrdal 1996). Ultimately, during this period, Whites' fears led to the birth of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1860s (Davis 1991, p. 41). The movement towards a two-tier racial hierarchy was gaining speed.

Still, there was a much larger number of enslaved Black people than free people. In 1860, "there were eight times as many slaves as free Negroes in the whole of the United States and sixteen times as many slaves as free Blacks if the comparison is made in the slave states alone" (Degler 1971, p. 43). Still, 77 percent of free Blacks were mixed-race, while only eight percent of slaves were mixed-race (Degler 1971, p. 231).[16] Thus, the free Black community—which tended to be lighter skinned given their mixed-race heritage—was a small but elite portion of the larger Black population.[17]

During this period, the free Black community attempted to hold onto its former status and power as a group by developing two distinct categories of free Black people following the Civil War— those who were "bona fide free" vs. the less-respected "sot-free," who were free by proclamation (Russell et al. 2013, p. 57). Evidence from 1860, for example, revealed as much residential separation between dark-skinned Black and mixed-race individuals in Cincinnati as there was between Blacks and Whites in Brooklyn and San Francisco (Lubin and Lubin 1994). Around the same time in Cincinnati, an 1859 court decision in *State v. Kimber* ruled that the light-skinned defendant had been improperly ejected from a railway car, ruling that the defendant Sarah Fawcett had the right to ride in the same street car as Whites given her being "about as much white as African race" (Bodenhorn 2011, p. 33).

Many free Black people felt that they still had more in common with White southerners who had lost property, wealth, or jobs at the end of the war than they did with formerly enslaved people (Russell et al. 2013, p. 57; Korgen 1998). After being rejected by and distanced from Whites during the Civil War, these mixed-race individuals sought out new alliances. Free Black people came to trust and ally themselves with Black people more broadly (Davis 1991; Menke 1979). This served as the

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[16] Reece (2017) offers slightly different, but similar numbers: "By 1860, 41% of free southern Blacks were mulatto. In contrast, only about 10% of slaves were mulatto. In the Deep South, over 75% of free Blacks were mulatto and only 9% of slaves were mulatto. Many places had no mulatto slaves at all" (cited in Reece 2018, p. 6).

[17] While there was some variation across the lower South, in every state—South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas—a majority of free individuals were mixed-race (Menke 1979, p. 15). Looking across free mixed-race and free Black people in 1860, the state with the most even split between the two groups was Georgia where only 57 percent of free people were mixed-race, with Louisiana being the most extreme: over 81 percent of free people were mixed-race (Menke 1979, p. 15).

beginnings of an alliance among mixed-race and Black people in pursuit of common causes (Davis 1991; Williamson 1980). Consequently, mixed-race individuals shifted their identity from a marginal group of "almost Whites" to seeing themselves as Black (Davis 1991). Thus, the one-drop rule was taking effect, even with respect to self-identification among mixed-race individuals.

Thus, while all African Americans were lumped into a shared racial underclass during this period, differences in opportunities, treatment, and status remained based on appearance. As E. Franklin Frazier noted in his book *The Free Negro Family*,

> "Economic competency, culture, and achievement gave these families a special status and became the source of a tradition which has been transmitted to succeeding generations. These families have been the chief bearers of the first economic and cultural gains of the race." (Frazier 1932, p. 72)

For example, while Black leadership was focused on securing economic opportunity, mixed-race leaders were often more interested in gaining full access to opportunities and integration into broader society (Williamson 1980, p. 81).[18] These elites from each group, now under one shared racial umbrella, had to determine how best to move forward while trying to keep both group's interests in mind.

Mixed-race people were also vastly over-represented in high-level positions relative to their share of the population. While only about 15 percent of the Black population was visibly mixed-race, close to 75 percent of high-level Black leaders were mixed race (Williamson 1980, p. 56). These individuals emerged in a number of crucial leadership roles in the Reconstruction era, including as teachers, relief administrators, missionaries, and legislators (Davis 1991, p. 49; Menke 1979). Continuing divisions based on skin tone appeared in September 1868 when the Georgia House of Representatives voted to remove Black legislators from office. The Republican majority argued this removal was appropriate given that the Georgia state constitution did not allow Black citizens to hold

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[18] Berlin (1974) argues that many free Blacks and free Black leaders had taken up the mantle of White society—centered around ideals of hard work and property accumulation—and following emancipation, some were reluctant to support a reordering of society around equality for all and redistribution of land (Berlin 1974, p.394).

public office. Interestingly, while 25 Black legislators were removed, the four mixed-race legislators were not removed given that they were "so nearly white that their race was indeterminate" (Thompson 1915).[19] Thus, fuzziness around racial categorization based on skin tone spilled over into the political realm even into the latter half of the 19th Century.

A crystallization of the one-drop rule took hold in the United States following the Civil War and persisted ever since (Korgen 1998; Williamson 1980). Despite a lumping together of mixed-race and Black individuals on the basis of racial identification during this period, differentiation based on skin tone far from disappeared. Mixed-race and Black individuals faced many of the same civic disadvantages during this period—including exclusion from voting, being subjected to discriminatory taxation, and growing Black Codes which sought to control African Americans' conduct—though they did not face the same *social* disadvantages (Bodenhorn 2011). Although the higher social status of light-skinned people had diminished in the postbellum period, they remained in more privileged positions than their darker-skinned counterparts.

THE JIM CROW ERA: 1870s – 1950s

The one-drop rule was quickly solidifying across the nation. Still, former distinctions based on appearance had not suddenly vanished. Census enumerators were still given detailed instructions on differentiating between Black and mixed-race people, including distinctions of quadroons and octoroons, through early 1900s (Davenport 2018; Reece 2018). Thus, Whites retained an interest in noting distinctions based on degree of racial admixture at the turn of the 20th Century.

Knowledge of more positive perceptions of light-skinned Black people by Whites was deployed strategically. Indeed, civil rights activists aware of differences in Whites' perceptions of Black

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[19] Ultimately, as described here, the Black legislators successfully appealed to the federal government to reinstate them.

people based on skin tone used this strategically in legal cases (King and Johnson 2016, p. 93). For example, attorney Albion Tourgée felt that a light-skinned man who could nearly pass for White was the ideal defendant in a case aimed at abolishing Louisiana's segregation laws, given the association between light skin and respectability among Whites (Hoffer 2012, p. 68; King and Johnson 2016). Tourgée thought Homer Plessy—a very light-skinned man who was seven-eighths White—would be the defendant with the best chance of success after Plessy's ejection from a White-only railway car in Louisiana (Reece 2018; Washington 2011). Despite this strategizing, in the 1896 Supreme Court case *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, Homer Plessy was not found to be exempt from segregation laws. In addition to the *Dred Scott* case decided 40 years earlier, *Plessy* further codified the one-drop rule into law, pushing mixed-race individuals down the social ladder.

In the decades following the *Plessy* decision, a number of states enshrined the one-drop rule with legislation stating a person is Black if they have any Black racial ancestry. Interest in degrees of Blackness remained into the early 20th Century, but the death knell of the tri-racial hierarchy was the decision to remove the "mulatto" category on the Census by 1930 (Reece 2018). The mixed-race and Black racial categories were now merged into just one group: Black.

This period where the one-drop rule crystallized is also thought to be the peak in which racial "passing"—an opportunity for light-skinned individuals to insert and present themselves as White in society—occurred (Williamson 1980).[20] Light-skinned Black people could pass in a number of ways. Some people were fully committed to cutting off contact with Black friends and family, moving cities, and starting over as a White person in a new town in hopes of securing more gainful employment and access to opportunities.[21] In other cases, passing occurred on a smaller scale—e.g., to attend the

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[20] Of course, passing had also occurred during earlier periods in American history, but was thought to have escalated from the late 1800s through early 1900s given more opportunities for passing to occur following emancipation and Reconstruction (Berlin 1975, p. 161). Passing is thought to have peaked between the 1880s and 1920s.

[21] Data from this time period also speaks to the frequency with which passing was occurring. For example, in 1910, there were far fewer mixed-race men than either Black or White men—an imbalance of 810 mixed-race men relative to 1,000

theatre, a musical performance, or to gain access to more comfortable accommodations while traveling. Some individuals inadvertently passed by failing to claim their Blackness but also failing to claim any Whiteness, leaving Whites to assume light-skinned Black people were White (Williamson 1980). Some accounts note a satisfaction for those passing, or for other Black people who knew someone to be passing, in deceiving Whites (Myrdal 1996, p. 687).

Although mixed-race and Black individuals were not lumped into one broad racial category, there was a push among some lighter-skinned people to distinguish themselves to maintain their higher position on the social ladder (Menke 1979). This resulted in lighter-skinned elites creating private social organizations, religious organizations, educational institutions, and more to maintain a higher status from D.C. to Savannah to New Orleans and Charleston (Frazier 1932; Menke 1979; Russell et al. 2013). For example, in the mid-1800s in Washington D.C., light-skinned elites created the Lotus Club to differentiate themselves from lower-class, darker-skinned Black people who were moving into the city after emancipation (Menke 1979, p. 25). This proclivity for more exclusive organizations did not diminish well into the 1900s. The elite social organization the Jack and Jill of America was founded in 1938 by upper-middle-class Black mothers who wanted their children to experience the same things upper-middle-class White children experienced (Lacy 2007). This organization recruits members via invitation only, and frequently focuses on lighter-skinned individuals (Graham 1999; Lacy 2007).

Of course, Whites continued to provide certain Black people with more opportunities. For example, light-skinned Black people were among the first to be given access to White colleges. The first Black people to be admitted to the predominantly White Seven Sisters colleges were light-skinned (Gatewood 1990; Perkins 1997). One Black student described her fellow African American students at the Seven Sisters colleges based on their appearance and corresponding status:

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mixed-race women in urban areas (Menke 1979). Given their greater residential and occupational mobility, as well as potential associations with higher status individuals and opportunities to marry White women, this suggests that mixed-race men were more likely to have passed as White (Menke 1979, p.27-28).

"The hue of their skin barely distinguished them from other students. Like other young women in the Sister Colleges and men in the Ivy League schools, the Negroes generally came from life styles similar to that of the majority of the student body. More often than not, their parents were professionals, conservative in their politics, and moderate in their racial practices… Although in each successful Black family there were always some close familiar links with poverty and the peculiar degradation of being Black, strong attempts were made to ignore or avoid any contamination by association" (Perkins 1997, p. 747).

Light-skinned people also continued to be prioritized in leadership positions. In 1918, "the chances of the mulatto child developing into a leader of the [Black] race are 34 times as great as are the chances of a Black child" (Korgen 1998, p. 18; Reuter 1918). Recalling examples of famous Black leaders, a bias towards those with lighter skin is clear: from Frederick Douglass to W.E.B. Du Bois to Booker T. Washington to Ida B. Wells and Walter White. This pattern remains true in the present day: Black elected officials at the state and national level are disproportionately light-skinned (Hochschild and Weaver 2007). As one might expect, conversations around skin tone also emerged with respect to organizations working on behalf of Black people. In the early 1900s, W.E.B. Du Bois and the NAACP were criticized for being exclusive, highbrow, and color-focused. The organization was slurred as the "National Association for the Advancement of *Certain* People" and disparaged as "the progeny of black snobbery and white pride" (cited in Fabre and Feith 2001, p. 9). In a 1917 editorial, William Calvin Chase argued that light-skinned Black people were only concerned with their own personal advancement and comfort—such as fighting discrimination related to travel and government employment—with little concern for issues that would benefit the broader Black population, such as housing and quality health facilities (Chase 1917).

Some social organizations relied on various "tests" for membership in this period, often instituted by light-skinned people (Korgen 1998). These included blue vein societies requiring that your skin was light enough to see veins underneath, brown paper bag tests requiring your skin to be lighter than the color of a brown paper bag, and comb tests to examine if your hair was smooth

enough to run a comb through it (Korgen 1998; Kuryla and Jaynes 2005). Even many historically Black colleges and universities required a photo along with the application or applied a skin color test (Kerr 2006, p. 93). The applicant's color was rumored to be a key factor in evaluation of applicants and if they passed the brown paper bag test, they were likely to be accepted (Kerr 2006). Indeed, the vast majority—an estimated 80 percent—of students attending historically Black colleges and universities were light-skinned or mixed-race around the 1910s (Russell et al. 2013, p. 63). These tests and organizations based on appearance were meant to signal an elite status and be a source of enormous honor (Russell et al. 2013, p. 58). Thus, there continued to be a tension between intra-group solidarity and discrimination during this period.

In the early 1900s, there were several pushes towards increasing Black pride (e.g., Gaines 1996). W.E.B. Du Bois hoped for a collective racial solidarity that bridged across class lines within the Black community, though he was aware this solidarity would be difficult to achieve and maintain given variation in life experiences and lifestyles. This would require a racial solidarity and concern for lower-status racial group members, with whom the Black elite were often disconnected. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois expressed anxiety that "White elites fail to distinguish accomplished, hardworking, and morally upright Blacks from Blacks who are incompetent, lazy, or criminal" (DuBois 1903, p. 146-147). Du Bois felt that the positive impact and uplift provided by the Black elites known as "the Talented Tenth" would remedy Whites' negative views of Black people broadly, specifically from lower classes. Du Bois knew that "his new Black radicalism would require the deliberate cultivation of race pride, by which he meant pride in the achievements of all persons of African descent" (Shelby 2005, p. 95).

By the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance was beginning, led by mostly mixed-race poets, writers, musicians, and other artists who signaled their commitment to their Blackness rather than attempts to be connected to the White world (Davis 1991). Around this time there was a shifting of pride within

the Black community to recognize "there were Black people of whom they could be proud, people of cultural refinement and intellectual achievement and whose company they greatly enjoyed" (Shelby 2005, p. 83). Still, struggles during the Harlem Renaissance were similar to those of the Talented Tenth: pride was generally centered on the social elite, leaving lower-class people as a point of shame among the Black elite. Some argue that it was during this period that mixed-race and light-skinned people recognized their destiny was tied with that of darker-skinned Black people (Williamson 1980). Still, E. Franklin Frazier noted with respect to light-skinned Blacks' reluctance to associate themselves with Black people across enclaves in Louisiana, South Carolina, and elsewhere in the 1940s and 1950s: "Although they were not White, they could thank God that they were not Black" (1957, p. 137).

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA: 1950s – 1970s

During the Civil Rights era, the push towards strengthening racial solidarity within the Black community continued. This involved attempts at removing the stigma associated with skin tone, features, and natural hair texture of Black people. Using phrases like "Black is Beautiful," the goal of these movements was to empower Black people of all skin colors and value darkness of skin tone, which had previously been viewed negatively (Anderson and Cromwell 1977; Korgen 1998; Williamson 1980).[22] This slogan implied that things more closely associated with Black features which had previously been maligned—like natural hair and darker skin tone—should actually be a point of pride. These more Afrocentric features were revered as more authentically Black, as well as the "Black is Beautiful" mantra serving as an ideological statement of resistance to White ideals (Mercer 1987).[23]

[22] The "Black is beautiful" mantra had been around far longer than the 1960s, however. For example, Marcus Garvey used the phrase "Black is beautiful" to encourage African Americans to be proud of both their heritage and appearance in the 1920s (Francis 2014).
[23] Assessments of racial authenticity are not novel and have historically occurred through music and writing (Gilroy 1993). This includes perceptions of slave music as signaling Black authenticity (ibid, p. 91), critiques of musicians for being

Efforts towards unity among mixed-race and darker-skinned Blacks continued in a similar vein to Du Bois' Talented Tenth: with the mixed-race elite given louder voice in their efforts to raise up Black people as a whole (Korgen 1998, p. 18). Some scholars argue that growing Black pride during this period brought mixed-race and Black people into even closer alliance than the Harlem Renaissance had (Davis 1991, p. 74).

Still, others are skeptical of the alleged unity among Black people during the Civil Rights Era and beyond. Some scholars note that calls for Black unity in the 1960s did little to diminish the negative associations of darker skin, as evidenced by the fact that most Americans—both Black and White, during and after the Civil Rights era—continue to prefer light skin (Glenn 2009). Research also demonstrates that women with darker skin face more discrimination within Black communities, as well as facing more negative outcomes with respect to both socioeconomic outcomes and marriage opportunities relative to their lighter-skinned female counterparts (Hunter 2005). In one study of Black people from the late 20th Century, interviewees speak at length about personal stories involving skin tone, demonstrating the ways in which skin tone remains an issue in society (Gwaltney 1980). Taken together, the idea that racial solidarity pushed past the historical legacy of colorism seems unfounded, both with respect to intra-group *and* inter-group relations.

Additionally, stratification along class lines in the Black community during this period contributed to another layer of difficulty to the notion of racial and political solidarity:

> "A collective action problem arises for Black Power politics because some African Americans have been able to improve their socioeconomic position, sometimes quite substantially, despite continuing racial barriers…. Although anti-Black racism negatively affects all Blacks, its specific impact on Blacks' life prospects can vary considerably—in scope, degree, and kind—across different sectors of the population. One consequence of this intraracial socioeconomic differentiation is that it is generally at odds with the basic interests of affluent Blacks to live in predominantly Black communities, because many of these communities have high concentrations of poverty" (Shelby 2005, p. 113).

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authentically Black or not (e.g., the Fisk Jubilee singers during the Harlem Renaissance, p. 92; or the "minstrel antics" of Jimi Hendrix, p. 93).

As in the Jim Crow Era, there continued to be a sense of divergent needs: with poor Black people being concerned with jobs, wages, and housing, while elite Black people already had these things. In contrast, they were more focused on improving the group's public image and removing barriers to career advancement (Shelby 2005; see also Tate 1998 ch. 2).[24] Part of the struggle for solidarity also has to do with skepticism of Black elites. Indeed, lower- and middle-class Black people may be suspicious of the motivations of the more affluent, given stereotypes of this group pretending to promote the interests of everyone while advancing only their own interests (Shelby 2005, p. 99).

During this period, African American support for the Democratic Party also increased. In part, this was thanks to Democratic politicians passing the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act. It was not lost on many political figures, however, that even though Black voters overwhelmingly supported Democrats, political elites had done little to remedy inequalities and truly help Black people, especially the most disadvantaged (e.g., X 1964). While skin tone may not be invoked explicitly, the association between skin tone and socioeconomic status is well-known.

Overall, during the Civil Rights era, light-skinned Black people were subjected to segregation in similar ways to darker-skinned people. Still, they maintained a number of elite social, religious, and educational organizations in attempts to preserve their higher status. Moreover, they continued to be disproportionately represented as the elite of Black society. The economic and social advantages they had amassed set light-skinned people up to take advantage of new opportunities post-segregation. Thanks to the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, many light-skinned individuals were prepared to "seize opportunities and rapidly elevate their status" (Reece 2018, p. 8).

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[24] Indeed, Shelby (2005) argues that racial solidarity, premised on the idea that any Black person will have more needs in common with other Black people than any other group, no longer holds in the post-Civil Rights era (p. 129-130).

POST-CIVIL RIGHTS ERA: 1980s AND BEYOND

While the use of the brown paper bag test has fallen out of favor, the legacies of favoring light skin in the United States and globally remain. Quick glances at television, music, or pop culture signal a continued bias towards Whiteness and light skin. The skin-bleaching market remains a billion-dollar industry globally.[25] Further, the development and growth of easily accessible media sources and social media allowed for new ways in which skin tone can be acknowledged, stereotyped, and discussed.

In the last several decades, a number of changes have started that may have implications for thinking about the racial hierarchy and racial identity in the United States. There has been rapid growth in interracial marriage has led to a growing multiracial population (Davenport 2018). Additionally, the Census began allowing people to identify with multiple racial categories in 2000. Organizations like the NAACP, the Urban League, and the National Council of La Raza opposed this decision given a concern about decreasing numbers and power (Korgen 1998, p. 86). Being able to select both "Black" and "White" leads to a politicization of multiracial identities and leading those who identify as multiracial to view the world in distinct ways from their monoracial counterparts (e.g., Daniel 2001; Davenport 2016, 2018; Lee and Bean 2004; Masuoka 2017).

Moreover, research across the social sciences demonstrates there are still vast differences in opportunities and lived experiences based on skin tone in society. For example, darker-skinned Black people have less wealth (Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji 2004; Monk 2013, 2014; Seltzer and Smith 1991), lower wages (Goldsmith, Hamilton, and Darity 2007; Monk 2014), higher levels of unemployment (Johnson, Farrell, and Stoloff 1998), lower levels of education (Hughes and Hertel 1990; Monk 2014), higher levels of social rejection (Hebl et al. 2012), worse health outcomes (Harburg et al. 1978; Hargrove 2018; Krieger, Sidney, and Coakley 1998; Laidley et al. 2019), perceived as more criminal (Eberhardt et al. 2004), receive harsher criminal sentencing (Burch 2015), and are even more

[25] Boston Globe

likely to be sentenced to death (Eberhardt et al. 2006) relative to light-skinned Black and White people. This suggests that the legacy of more fine-grained differentiation within racial groups and into the realm of skin tone lives on into the present day.

CHAPTER 2
Skin Color Politics: A Theoretical Framework

"I am dark, physically and culturally. My complexion is not close to whiteness and my family roots reflect the economic realities of generations of dark-complexioned black people. We are rural, even when we move to cities. Our mobility is modest. Our out-marriage rates to nonblack men are negligible. Our social networks do not connect to elite black social institutions. When we move around in the world, we brush up against the criminal justice system." –McMillan Cottom (2019), p. 51

Politics is a struggle for power, influence, and resources. A rich literature has examined this struggle at the group level across numerous populations—based on race, gender, religion, class, and more (e.g., Blumer 1958; Bobo 1983; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Campbell et al. 1960; Davenport 2018; DuBois 1903; Gilens 1996, 1999; Jackman 1994; Kinder and Kam 2010; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Margolis 2018). While skin color has received attention across the social sciences as it relates to inequities in wages, wealth, marriage, and health status, exploring the power and resource imbalances associated with color from a political perspective—either within *or* across racial groups—has received much less attention. Given the importance of skin tone across these numerous domains, one could also imagine that skin color—distinct from race—could be taken up as its own distinct social identity. One could imagine this identity would be more meaningful to those with darker skin given this color group faces the worst outcomes across these domains. Indeed, my work builds on a body of work interested in expanding understandings of the importance of subgroup identities and corresponding political implications (de la Garza et al. 1991; Greer 2013; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996; Okamoto 2003; Segura and Rodrigues 2006).

As discussed in the previous chapter, social scientific inquiries dating back to the 1800s and continuing through the present day note powerful divisions and differential life outcomes based on

skin tone within the Black community. Color serves to signal status both within the Black community as well as to Whites (Drake and Cayton 1945; Frazier 1965; Graham 1999). Indeed, Pettigrew (1964) argued that the "poorest and darkest of Negroes have the least to lose, have suffered the most severe physical deprivations, and have the fewest opportunities to gain acceptance" (p. 11-12; cited in Ransford 1970). As Banton (2012) notes, when scholars "use *race* as a synonym for *colour…* they make it more difficult to identify what has to be explained" (p. 1113).

Within political science, however, little attention has been paid to skin color distinct from race. Seltzer and Smith (1991) represent an exception to this rule as they provide one of the first scholarly efforts to assess whether skin color stratification in the Black community was related to political preferences. This research relied on the 1982 General Social Survey (GSS), which contained an oversample of African Americans. Skin tone assessments were determined by interviewer observation, placing respondents into five categories from very dark to very light. They examined the possible influence of skin color on a number of topics from political ideology to government spending to support for civil liberties and confidence in American institutions. They concluded that, "…while color stratification and differences persist in the Afro-American community, they make little difference in terms of the attitudinal configuration of Afro-American society and politics" (Seltzer and Smith 1991, p. 285).

Over a decade later, the association between skin color stratification and political views was examined again by Hochschild and Weaver (2007). They relied on two separate data sources for their analyses: the 1979-1980 National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) and the 1992-1994 Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI)[26], which surveyed individuals living in Detroit, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Boston (Bobo et al. 1998; Jackson and Gurin 1987). Examining how skin color related

[26] Like the 1982 GSS, skin color in the NSBA was determined by interviewer observations using the same five-point scale from very dark to very light. Similarly, in the MCSUI survey, skin color was measured by interviewer observation, but the categories were reduced to only three: light, medium, and dark.

to opinion on racial issues—e.g., discrimination, linked fate, and group identity—Hochschild and Weaver (2007) concluded that, "…despite plausible expectations, African Americans' skin color has almost no relationship to any of these political beliefs or values" (p. 653).[27]

Across two studies and three separate datasets spanning from the late 1970s through mid 1990s, then, scholars report that there is no relationship between skin color and the political views of African Americans. Given a body of research demonstrating the influence of skin color across domains like income, education, and health, why is there no relationship to political perspectives? Perhaps in terms of the lived experience of Black people, race has trumped skin color throughout American history. According to Hochschild and Weaver (2007), this reality helped build a strong sense of racial group identity among African Americans, which in turn helps the group unite in its commitment against segregation and racial injustices. Thus, they argue issues related to skin color stratification take a backseat to issues of race because it would divide rather than unite the Black community. Even if this argument is accurate, it suggests that race should *overwhelm* skin color with respect to political judgments rather than explaining a lack of any relationship between skin color and political views.

Still, we know that the racial hierarchy functions to differentiate racial groups both categorically and more continuously, based on things such as one's appearance. Indeed, Bonilla-Silva (2004a, 2004b) argues for the possibility of tri-racial divide in the United States. That is, rather than a hierarchy sorting Whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom, there is a middle tier referred to as "honorary Whites." This middle category includes light-skinned Latinos, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Asian Indians, Middle Eastern Americans, and multiracial individuals. This is important as scholars like Davenport (2016a, 2016b, 2018) and Lee and Bean (2004) note the growing numbers of multiracial individuals, as well as immigrants, in the United States. Meanwhile, dark-skinned Latinos, Blacks,

27 Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji (2004) also arrive at similar conclusions in their analyses of the NSBA.

Filipinos, Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotians, and West Indian and African immigrants are relinquished to the collective Black category. Note that while Bonilla-Silva distinguishes between light- and dark-skinned Latinos, there is no differentiation between light- and dark-skinned African Americans. My work builds on Bonilla-Silva's premise of a divide in the United States based on pigmentocracy, but—in contrast to his argument—differentiates between African Americans based on the color of their skin as well.

A broad literature speaks to the importance of race in American society by demonstrating heterogeneity in public opinion based on one's racial identification, especially with respect to racialized policies (e.g., Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Winter 2001). But we also know from research across the social sciences that skin tone, in addition to race, is associated with different lived experiences and opportunities. Skin tone diversity has been present and meaningful in the lives of Black people in the United States for hundreds of years. Still, it is possible that the significance of skin color became even more pronounced after the 1980s (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Monk 2014). According to this line of thinking, skin color may be even more salient given the decline in overt racial discrimination (Bobo et al. 2012) coupled with increasing immigration, multiracialism, and emphasis on being a "color-blind" society (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Monk 2014).[28] Subsequently, a focus on not just one's race but also their appearance may take stronger hold. Indeed, experimental evidence demonstrates that while people can suppress race-based stereotypes and discrimination, they are frequently incapable of doing so with respect to skin color (Blair et al. 2002; Blair et al. 2004). This suggests, then, that because people are well aware of race-based biases, they can make attempts to control or diminish such biases. In contrast, given a less explicit emphasis on the deleterious effects of colorism, it is more difficult to suppress biases based on one's features even when race is held constant.

[28] This move towards color-blind language is also captured in the rhetoric of politicians (Gillion 2016).

The well-known nature of colorism and corresponding different lived experiences might lead us to wonder whether skin tone is important for explaining heterogeneity in Black public opinion. Accordingly, observed differences in life experiences and opportunities based on skin tone may manifest in different social and political views in relevant domains. While the proposed skin color paradox explanation may hold true with respect to certain issues, one might expect race and skin color to each be relevant in specific contexts or with respect to certain issues. This may be especially true in domains where the skin tone divide is prominent—e.g., issues related to income, wealth, employment, or education. Indeed, some evidence suggests a relationship between skin tone and perceptions of economic competition (Wilkinson et al. 2015). Since we know that disparities in these domains persist not just for Black people relative to White people, but are also especially strong for those with darker skin relative to those with lighter skin, we might expect different preferences to emerge based on skin tone, too.

Given the limited interrogation of a potential link between skin color and political views for African Americans, I argue it is worth reexamining for several reasons. First, there is limited survey evidence used to conclude a lack of relationship between skin color and politics. Even on surveys that had measures of both skin tone and politics, question wording as it relates to skin color discrimination is somewhat vague. For example, a question about being treated differently based on one's own skin tone is worded such that it's unclear whether the differential treatment received is positive or negative. Thus, better question wording might allow for more precise understandings of skin color and outcomes. Second, in addition to a limited number of political dependent variables that have been examined, there are simply not many color-specific questions included on surveys. Even if skin color is not associated with views on traditional race-based policies, perhaps differences would emerge with respect to color-based issues. For example, with respect to recognition of differential treatment by police or employers based on skin color, or even color-based affirmative action policies.

Third, inconsistent measures of color have been used across surveys. This makes it difficult to know if there is no relationship between skin color and political views, or if there is no relationship between that *measure* of skin color and a given outcome.[29] As noted by Hannon and DeFina (2020), "Published correlations between respondent skin tone and social outcomes could be considerably underestimated as low measurement reliability biases coefficients toward zero and decreases the likelihood of obtaining statistical significance." Fourth, it's possible that social or economic changes— such as growing income inequality or an increased emphasis on appearance rather than explicit discussions of race (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2006; Monk 2014)—could have widened the skin color divide and made opinion differences between skin color and politics more evident.[30] Recall that the most recent research published that examines skin color and politics was using survey data from the 1992-1994 MCSUI. Finally, contemporary use of social media may allow for more explicit discussion about issues related to skin color. This provides a new forum in which there may be more discussion, heightened awareness, or groupness around skin color issues that previously were only discussed behind closed doors. In combination, better quality survey data, more comprehensive survey items, and a more evident divide based on skin color warrants further examination for a relationship between color and politics.

Drawing on literatures in group identity, intergroup relations, and intersectionality, I explore how skin tone may be uniquely important for our understanding of politics. I combine these literatures to explore multiple ways in which skin tone might be politically meaningful. First, given the relevance

[29] Recent work by Ostfeld and Yadon (2020) examines skin color measurement in a more comprehensive fashion. In part, this work draws from the unreliable nature of skin color measurement (Hannon and DeFina 2016, 2020; Hill 2002).
[30] Evaluating this claim more rigorously is challenging because the majority of national surveys do not collect information on respondent skin tone, and those that do are inconsistent in measurement. To examine this idea of increasing inequality, I compare the mean family income from the 1992-1994 MCSUI and the 2012 ANES. Hochschild (2006) reports that in the 1992-1994 MCSUI the mean family income for dark-skinned Black people was $3,000 lower than for lighter-skinned Blacks—equivalent to about $4,800 in 2016 (adjusting for inflation). In the 2012 ANES, the mean household income for darker-skinned Black people was between $13,000 and $15,000 lower than lighter skinned African Americans—about $13,600-15,700 in 2016 (adjusting for inflation). This three-fold increase suggests that income differences based on skin color have not only persisted over time, but have also grown.

of skin tone to one's lived experiences, might skin tone be meaningfully associated with Black people's political views? Second, could skin tone categories be sufficiently meaningful that they give rise to social identities that are distinct from race? Third, could one's level of skin tone identity be associated with their political views or could it be activated so that it becomes linked more strongly with politics? Below, I set out the theoretical framework for this project.

GROUP IDENTITY & INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Group identifications provide a mental structure for individuals to navigate and participate in the social and political world. Tajfel defined a social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel 1972, p. 272). Two theories at the foundation of understanding group identities and intergroup relations are social identity theory and social categorization theory (Tajfel 1974, 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986). Both theories expect that in-group bias can emerge easily— e.g., even in situations in which a relatively meaningless group identity such as "under-estimators" vs. "over-estimators" is applied, the identity becomes meaningful to the participant (Tajfel et al. 1971). A need for positive self-regard or enhanced self-esteem is thought to motivate these biases, such that when an individual feels a group they belong to is distinct from and better than other out-groups, their self-image as a group member is enhanced (Abrams and Hogg 1988; Tajfel and Turner 1986). The hierarchical nature of groups and the relative security of a group's position are important elements leading to the expression of a social group identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Terry and Hogg 1996). Similarly, social categorization theory argues that we have a hard-wired tendency to draw on what we perceive as group norms when classifying ourselves. This means group prototypes attempt to minimize in-group differences while maximizing intergroup differences (Terry and Hogg 1996).

Group identity has been crucial to our understanding of politics, such that association with a given group is powerfully associated with political preferences. Perhaps the largest and most enduring social group cleavage in American politics is that of race. Indeed, building from a broad literature, one of the most consistent findings in American politics is huge gaps in public opinion between Black and White people (e.g., Kinder and Kam 2010; Kinder and Sanders 1996). Of course, we know this is in part due to different experiences and levels of discrimination faced by these groups in the United States. Work on group identity has been strongly linked to the study of Black political behavior given that race served as the predominant status marker in society (Carter 2019; Gaines 1996; Shingles 1981; White and Laird 2020). Historically, Black people with a strong racial identity have higher rates of participation in politics (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Miller et al. 1981; Olsen 1970; Verba and Nie 1972), as well as being linked to greater support for policies and government interventions linked to their group (Bobo 2004; Dawson 1994). Still, "racial and ethnic identities are not zero-sum entities; it is possible to hold several at any one time, and they are very clearly situational. In one situation a person can feel very American, at another time Irish, and at yet another time white" (Waters 1999, p. 47).

Work across the social sciences has explored nuances in the lived experiences of African Americans (e.g., Drake and Cayton 1945; Feagin 1991; Frazier 1957; Lacy 2007; Young 2006). Political scientists, however, have devoted much less attention to examining heterogeneity within racial groups (but, for important exceptions, see Brown 2014; Bunyasi and Smith 2019; Cohen 1999; Laird 2017; Lemi and Brown 2019; Philpot 2017; Price 2009; Smith 2014; White, Laird, and Allen 2014). Given the broad literature demonstrating that darker-skinned Black people face more and greater obstacles in society than those with lighter skin, I argue that we might expect different political preferences to emerge not just been Black and White people, but also *within* racial groups between lighter- and darker-skinned group members.

Similar to other social identities like race, gender, or class, a distinct color-based identity may grow through similar processes for identity development. An emphasis on skin color in society may inform how one thinks about oneself, just as is the case with respect to race. Given that there are a number of important intersecting identities with race, it is worth examining if skin tone may be a meaningful identity. A broad understanding exists that identities are multidimensional and are heavily influenced by interpersonal experiences (Burke 1980; Davenport 2016b; Foote 1951; Stryker 1968, 1980; Stryker and Serpe 1982). Identities have two primary components: one cognitive and the other affective (Cameron 2004; Citrin and Sears 2009; Klandermans et al. 2002; Tajfel 1981).

The cognitive component of a social identity requires self-categorization into the group: recognition that Groups X and Y exist, and that one fits into a given group (Klandermans et al. 2002). Evidence from the mid-1900s through the present day strongly signal that this is the case given sorting and stereotypes based on skin tone (e.g., Myrdal 1996; Parrish 1946; Wilder 2010).[31] Moreover, the long and well-known history surrounding colorism in the United States discussed at length in the previous chapter suggests that a recognition of skin color categorization and divisions are well-known in the Black community (e.g., Drake and Cayton 1945; Frazier 1965; Hochschild 2006; Reuter 1918).

The second component—the affective component—is typically regarded as the most meaningful indicator of group attachment (Citrin and Sears 2009; Klandermans et al. 2002). It defines the psychological impact of group membership, concern about the well-being of the group, and even the ways in which perceptions of the group impact perceptions of the self. Research across identities reveals that stronger levels of group identification are frequently associated with greater political cohesion. This includes a greater likelihood of internalizing normative group beliefs (Conover and

[31] While the first study of skin color-based stereotypes occurred in the 1940s (Parrish 1946), these stereotypes likely predate this time period.

Feldman 1984), adopting policy positions that benefit the group (Tate 1994), and even protest behavior (Klandermans et al. 2002; Sears et al. 2003; Simon et al. 1998).

In the case of skin color, this affective precondition for a social identity is also likely met. Stereotypes are attributed to skin color groups, which may in turn cause group members to take up feelings towards these groups—either in taking pride in positive assessments, or twisting negative stereotypes to be more positive. For example, on the flip side of the negative stereotypes associated with darker skin color, there is a sense that darker skinned African Americans may be more authentically Black (e.g., Greer 2013; Harvey et al. 2005). This may be in part because lighter-skinned people may have a more racially ambiguous appearance, but also due to stereotypes that lighter-skinned Black people are less likely to work on behalf of the racial group (Watson-Moore 2012). Some skepticism of lighter-skinned Black people as being less committed to the racial group draws from the legacy of colorism whereby light-skinned people held more advantaged positions in society and, especially until the one-drop rule was codified, made attempts to signal themselves as distinct from the racial group (Berlin 1975; Frazier 1932; Russell et al. 2013; Williamson 1980).

Within the Black community, people of all skin colors face racial discrimination. Those with dark skin bear the double burden of race- and color-based discrimination. Correspondingly, I expect one's skin color to be more important to those with dark skin, given their more stigmatized status and their higher propensity to be consistently ascribed a given group's label. Indeed, the combination of less permeable group boundaries and higher incidences of external labeling should increase the likelihood that these dark-skinned group members internalize a group identity (Ellemers et al. 1988; Huddy 2001; Jackson et al. 1996).

People with light skin will likely have a different relationship between skin tone and identity than those with darker skin, one with a more complicated nature. There are two potential ways in which color identity might work for those with light skin. When receiving information about color-

based disparities, light-skinned folks could either move to being more protective of their (color-based) status *or* to promoting the well-being of the superordinate racial group. For example, if light-skinned African Americans feel that their status is threatened—e.g., by a shift in focus from the racial group to addressing discrimination or biases based on skin color—then their skin color may become more salient and meaningful. This status threat may result in more negativity towards dark-skinned African Americans and attributions of blame rooted in personal shortcomings, rather than structural explanations (Ellemers 1993; Mummendey and Schreiber 1983; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986). In turn, this may result in decreased support for policies aimed at reducing color-based inequities. Conversely, the deeply interconnected nature of race and skin color could work in ways distinct from other intersectional identities (e.g., race and gender). In this case, when made aware of the pernicious effects of colorism, light-skinned individuals may go against their own potential self-interest to advance the racial group. Although this may threaten their more privileged status in terms of potential color-based advantages in society, they may feel that it is beneficial for the racial group as a whole to make efforts towards reducing color-based inequities. This may be especially important to individuals attempting to signal their attachment to the racial group as a whole, given concerns or stereotypes about lighter-skinned people as less racially authentic (Harvey et al. 2005; Hunter 2005, 2007).

Overall, I argue the divide between light- and dark-skinned African Americans parallels the differences in identity importance for other groups. Just as racialized identities are likely to be less salient for dominant groups in society relative to minority groups (Gurin 1985; Wong and Cho 2005), we should expect skin color identity to work in a similar fashion. That is, just as White people are less likely to think about their racial identity than Black people, I expect darker-skinned Black people to be more likely to embrace their color identity than those with light skin. In part, this is because as proximity to Whiteness increases, access to systems of power increase as well.

SOCIALIZATION AND POLITICIZATION OF SKIN COLOR

If skin color is meaningfully associated with politics, it may not be due to skin color as a simple physiological characteristic but because skin color is taken up as a social identity. In the last section, I outlined theories underpinning the potential for skin color to be considered an identity (e.g., Tajfel 1974; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986; Terry and Hogg 1996). In this section, I aim to outline the ways in which skin color could become an identity informing one's social and political identities. One might expect perceptions of what it means to be light-skinned or dark-skinned to inform identification of one's skin tone or attachment to a color-based group. To this end, I argue that skin tone may be a social identity because of its historical and contemporary legacy, socialization processes, shared language, and inherent status dimensions associated with skin tone.

First, skin tone is a meaningful marker within the African American community, and communities of color more broadly. There has been a shared language within the African American community surrounding variations in skin color for centuries. The historical roots of colorism— rooted in colonialism, racism, slavery, and forced miscegenation—highlight the extended period of time that skin color has been a noticeable and important feature. Research dating back to the 1940s found that there was a common set of names to describe varying skin colors within the African American community and a shared set of stereotypes attributed to individuals based on their skin color (Parrish 1946). Even within the names themselves, there is a more negative component attributed to dark skin—e.g., *rusty black*, *burnt*, *blue-black*, or *charcoal*, as compared to *bright*, *light*, *high yellow*, *fair,* or *vanilla* as descriptors of lighter skinned Blacks (Parrish 1946; Wilder 2010, 2015; Wilder and Cain 2011). From the 1940s to the 2010s, the color names and stereotypes associated with them have remained consistent within the community—e.g., light skinned Black people are seen as more attractive, smarter, trustworthy, and capable, and darker skinned Black people as less intelligent, more militant, louder, and less friendly (Wilder 2010, 2015). Thus, the persistence within the Black

community of differentiation based on skin color and an awareness of color names highlights the influence of color in shaping both how one perceives oneself and how one perceives others.

Relatedly, there is a socialization component to skin color identity. Given the onslaught of messages linking Whiteness or light skin as the ideal, this linkage is likely to be internalized (Hall 1995). This might manifest through both familial and peer interactions, as well as engagement with various media sources beginning in childhood and continuing through adulthood. For example, evidence from the mid-20th Century suggests that young Black children identify themselves with drawings of Black or White children not based on their race, but on their skin color (Clark and Clark 1940). More recent work shows that these preferences vary based on children's age, with a preference for Black dolls increasing with age (Burnett and Sisson 1995; Spencer 1982). Moreover, other work highlights that darker-skinned Black girls may have a harder time during adolescence than their lighter-skinned counterparts, especially if they view light skin as the ideal (Townsend et al. 2010). Contemporary sources from music to movies to social media to advertisements highlight divisions based on skin color and, implicitly and explicitly, what is seen as ideal. For example, the hashtags #TeamLightSkin and #TeamDarkSkin on Twitter are commonly used. These hashtags signal identification with skin color groups, attribution of these group labels to others, and discussion of issues related to skin tone more broadly.

Skin color is also an issue in music, movies, and television shows. In the music realm, there is an over-representation of light-skinned women in music videos and positive references to light skin in the lyrics (Maxwell, Abrams, and Belgrave 2016; Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1993; Saint-Fleur 2017). Notorious BIG rapped that he was "Black and ugly as ever." Beyoncé sang that *red-bones*, *yellow-bones*, and *brown-bones* should get on the dance floor. Spike Lee's movie "School Daze" centers around issues of skin color in Black college life. In addition, many of the most famous Black actors and actresses are on the lighter end of the color spectrum—e.g., Halle Berry, Vanessa Williams, Zoe Saldana, Jada

Pinkett Smith, Will Smith, Harry Belafonte, and Lena Horne to name just a few. For example, following the release of the film *Precious* in 2009 by filmmaker Lee Daniels, there was backlash regarding the fact that all of the characters portrayed as helping the teenage main character Precious were light-skinned, while those who were portrayed as harming, abusing, or exploiting her were dark skinned (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1993).[32] A content analysis of the 17 magazines with the largest circulations aimed at women in the U.S. revealed that 62 percent of Black women pictured had light skin vs. only five percent showcasing dark-skinned women (Boepple and Thompson 2016).[33] Overall, pop culture references and reinforces divisions based on skin color and perpetuates a preference for lightness.

As with other social group identities, there are also clear status stratifications associated with color. Light-skinned Black people are the subject of considerably fewer negative stereotypes and more positive social outcomes relative to darker-skinned Black people, both historically and in the present day (Bodenhorn 2006, 2015; Burch 2015; Eberhardt et al. 2006; Foy and Ray 2019; Goldsmith, Hamilton, and Darity 2007; Harburg et al. 1978; Laidley et al. 2019; Louie 2019; Wade, Romano, and Blue 2004; Williamson 1980). Thus, there is an objective status hierarchy based on these group labels, placing light-skinned people in more privileged positions and leaving dark-skinned people at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Historically, these group divisions were also important in spurring the creation of color-based group organizations from churches to social organizations and even schools (e.g., Gatewood 1990; Graham 1999; Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1993).

[32] For an example of the discussion about the film *Precious* and colorism, see this article.
[33] Even when the magazines were restricted to only those targeting Black women (rather than women broadly), the percentages with respect to skin color's featured change only slightly: 57 percent featured light-skinned Black women, 43 percent with medium skin, and only three percent with dark skin. There was a difference with respect to hairstyles and facial features, however, such that Black women pictured in magazines targeting Black women had more Afrocentric phenotypes (Boepple and Thompson 2016, p. 6).

In combination, I argue the historical legacy of skin color, the recognition of skin color divisions at an early age, the socialization processes, the shared language surrounding color, stereotypes based on color, and pop culture references to color-based hierarchies all result in developing skin tone as a meaningful identity among African Americans. As with other identities, the salience of skin color may be context dependent. That is, if a Black person is in the presence of an entirely White group, their racial identity is likely more salient, though the intersection of race and color is likely still relevant. In a group of African Americans, skin color will be more salient while racial considerations fall away. Indeed, Harvey et al. (2005) find that in the context of a university with mostly Black students, darker skin was associated with greater perceived peer acceptance and higher self-esteem. This suggests a relationship between skin color and perceived racial authenticity, as well as the role of context in moderating this relationship.

Similarly, some argue that darker skin color may be linked to perceptions of racial authenticity and closer proximity to one's African roots (Gilroy 1993, p. 198-199). Darker skin may serve as a point of pride through which Black people can embrace not only their race, but an ideological commitment to the racial group and a distancing from Whiteness. Indeed, some evidence suggests that a stronger sense of racial identity is associated with darker skinned people (Harvey et al. 2005; Hughes and Hertel 1990). While light-skinned individuals may receive advantages in White society, they may also be more likely to be met with skepticism in the Black community about their degree of belonging (Hunter 2005, 2007). One way in which this may be combatted is by attempts to signal their "Blackness" to others in the racial group (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Hunter 2005, 2007), which may happen through expressions of their social and/or political views. Thus, context may matter significantly in determining when skin tone (or one's attachment to their skin tone) is more or less salient, and in what ways it operates.

Additionally, code-switching may intersect with understandings of racial authenticity and skin color. Evidence suggests that Black children and adults who can more easily code-switch between minoritized and mainstream culture have more positive outcomes in schools and other contexts (Carter 2005; Lacy 2007). One might expect code-switching to be easier for light-skinned people who may have easier interactions with White people through family or social networks. Others argue that because of the heterogeneity in appearance based on color and features, African Americans maintain unity based upon cultural and social indicators, with lower social classes serving as the cradle for Black popular culture and lifestyle (Patterson 1972, p. 30). Given the relationship between socioeconomic status and skin tone, we might expect this to have implications based on complexion as well.

In the seminal book *The American Voter*, Campbell et al. (1960) note that "Various individuals, groups, public problems, and current happenings are considered to be more or less political. And the relationship of such objects to politics can be seen to change in time" (p. 29). Things that affect political behavior typically move from being external and non-political to personal but non-political before shifting to being political through a process of "political translation" (ibid, p. 30-31). Applying this general framework to the specific case of colorism suggests that a recognition of inequities—whether or not they're based specifically on color or the intersection of color and race—could result in differences in political preferences and behavior between those with lighter and darker skin within the same racial group. More specifically, I expect those with darker skin or who identify with their skin tone to more strongly support policies and actions that redress the heightened discrimination and inequities they face.

In short, I have laid out the expectations from the literature for which skin color could be considered as an identity, as well as the reasons why we should expect it would become a politically meaningful identity for many African Americans.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Understanding the relationship between multiple and sometimes competing identities is critical to thinking about group identity. To this end, Kimberlé Crenshaw first developed the term "intersectionality" (1989, 1990). Crenshaw highlighted the ways in which race and sex discrimination compound upon one another: she argued focusing on *either* race or sex overlooked how Black women were vulnerable to discrimination on grounds of *both* race and sex. Examining one singular identity overlooked the experiences of those with compounding identities which lead to multi-layered experiences of oppression (Crenshaw 1989). Importantly, these interlocking oppressions further distance people from systems of power, influencing both opportunities and quality of life.

Cathy Cohen (1999) examined this idea of intersectionality in a new context: LGBT members of the Black community. In contrast to Dawson's (1994) focus on a sense of strong linked fate across the Black community, Cohen's book *The Boundaries of Blackness* highlights that not all members of the Black community are afforded equal acceptance. Specifically, she illustrates that during the height of the AIDS epidemic, the Black community distanced itself from providing attention and support to sexual minorities and intravenous drug users who were also Black. Thus, in the case of Black LGBT folks, their racial identity was not sufficient to provoke the broader racial group to fight on behalf of its LGBT members. These group members were ignored *because* of their sexual orientation and concerns with the broader image of the racial group. Building on Cohen's work, White (2007, p. 352) argues that "...when an issue is linked to a marginalized subset of the in-group, the role of Black group identification in determining support for that issue is attenuated."

Examining the intersection of race and class, there are important distinctions between upper and lower middle-class African Americans' experiences. Lacy (2007) argues that through "public identities"—e.g., strategic usage of language, mannerisms, clothing, and credentials—middle-class

Black people can "lessen or short-circuit potential discriminatory treatment" (p. 73). These public identities are outward-facing such that they are used to convince *others* that one belongs to the middle-class. In contrast, "status-based identities" use things like lifestyle decisions (e.g., education or culture) to imply wealth and distinguish themselves from other social groups, as well as justify their own attitudes towards other groups—e.g., lower-class Blacks, the White middle class, or the White upper-class (p. 73). Moreover, Brown (2014, p. 16) argues that "An anti-essentialist Black political identity disputes the necessity of hewing to a common Black identity and instead holds that there is room for additional identities to be explored within Blackness, either simultaneously or intersectionally." In her work, Brown is interested in exploring the unique race-gender identity combination for Black women state legislators in Maryland. Some more recent work examines the intersection of race, color, and phenotype as central to understanding nuanced views toward candidates (Lemi 2018; Lemi and Brown 2019; Orey and Zhang 2019).

Central to my own research is this theorizing about the nuances of Black politics and Black people's political views. Of course, this concept of intersectionality could, and I argue should, also be applied to the realm of race and skin color. Similar to the intersection of gender and race for Black women (Gay and Tate 1998), race and skin color can simultaneously be important depending on the context. For example, in intra-racial contexts the importance of racial categorization falls away and divisions based on skin color become more evident. Consistent with the notion that race and skin color intersect in meaningful ways, some scholars argue that identifying with the racial label "Black" (as opposed to "African American") may encompass a combination of both race *and* darkness of one's skin, thereby reflecting a positive racial consciousness and attachment to the racial group (Greer 2013; Larkey et al. 1993; West 1990).

Finally, an additional component examining the important of race and skin color as intersectional identities is potential variation in White people's reactions to out-group members based

on appearance. That is, I do not expect White people to view all Black people equally. Group position theory argues that racial prejudice is a reflection of group competition and concerns about one's status and power in a multiracial society (Blumer 1958; Bobo and Hutchings 1996). While differences in appearance are more noticeable to members of the in-group than an out-group (Hill 2002), this does not mean that out-group members do not notice variation. Thus, this gap between the appearance of many Whites relative to dark-skinned Black people may serve as a stronger signal about threats to Whites' dominant status in society. Put differently, Whites may view dark-skinned Black people as more threatening both on a personal level as well as with respect to their groups' status. Thus, the importance of skin color in Whites' perceptions of African Americans may manifest on an interpersonal level, as well as spilling over to the electoral and political realm.

I contend that White people will differentiate between Black people based on skin color for two reasons. First, I expect that on average White people will view light-skinned Black people as more similar to them. As Bailenson et al. (2008) demonstrate for political candidates, when someone is unfamiliar with a given candidate, facial similarity serves as a significant cue above and beyond partisanship. With respect to skin color, the appearance of Whites and light-skinned Black people is more similar than for dark-skinned Black people. More fundamentally, this phenomenon speaks to the notion in neuroscience and psychology that people are wired to prefer familiarity (Bornstein 1993; Zebrowitz et al. 2008). Second, evidence exists that evaluations of Obama's race are strongly correlated with Whites' attitudes about him. Whites who perceived Obama as mixed-race rather than Black had more favorable perceptions of him and were more likely to believe that Obama did not share common interests with Black people (Sinyangwe 2012). Moreover, evidence suggests the importance of Black politicians signaling their authenticity to the Black community, perhaps especially if they are light-skinned (Gillespie 2012, 2019; Wamble 2018). This suggests, then, that being mixed race or having lighter skin can influence perceptions of similarity to a given candidate. Thus, it is important to

examine skin color not just as an intra-racial group quirk unique to communities of color, but with respect to inter-racial group judgments and interactions as well.

Overall, while both light- and dark-skinned African Americans think about their status and discrimination as Black people, those with darker skin have an additional intersecting identity to think about: skin tone. Light-skinned people likely think less about their color identity because it lands them in a more privileged position. Despite a shared racial identity, skin color subgroups are associated with stereotypes, access to education, resources, and opportunities. In combination, all of these experiences may result in those at the lighter and darker ends of the color spectrum holding distinct world-views. While Hochschild and Weaver's (2007) skin color paradox explanation may hold true with respect to certain issues, we might expect race and skin color to each be relevant in specific contexts or with respect to certain issues. This may be especially true in domains where the skin tone divide is prominent—e.g., issues related to income, employment, or education. Since we know these disparities persist not just for Black people relative to White people, but are especially strong for dark-skinned Black people relative to light-skinned Black or White people, we might also expect diverging preferences to emerge based on skin tone.

SUMMARY

In combination, I build from literature and theories in political science, sociology, psychology, and Black studies to create a theoretical structure with which one could expect not only race, but a skin color hierarchy to be meaningful for politics. Given that darker-skinned Black people face higher levels of discrimination with respect to jobs, wealth, and general treatment by White people, one might also expect them to hold more liberal political views on related issues *and* to take up a color-based identity especially strongly. In the remainder of the manuscript, I interrogate three interrelated research

questions around skin tone and politics borne out of the theoretical framework discussed in this chapter. Is skin color associated with one's social and political views? Is skin color a distinct social identity? If so, does it have ramifications for how we understand public opinion? The relatively sparse examination of skin tone and politics in the United States leaves open the possibility of mischaracterizing—or entirely missing—important aspects of how race and politics operate.

CHAPTER 3
Perceptions of Skin Tone's Importance in Society

"The way I see it over and over again, the darker you are, the more problems you're gonna have."
–30 year old, light-skinned woman interview participant

Skin tone remains important in both the social and political sphere. Evidence across the social sciences demonstrates the ways in which skin tone continues to be important—with respect to health, wages, wealth, and even sentencing disparities. While there have been a number of qualitative studies that discuss skin tone, these conversations have not focused on the potential political implications of skin tone. Even if skin tone has not been explicitly linked to politics through elite discussions, it may still be that skin tone is linked with perceptions of power and equality in society broadly with important political implications. Following in the footsteps of Robert Lane, views on broad political matters such as "fair play and due process, rights of others, sharing of power, the proper distribution of goods in society (equality), uses and abuses of authority" are equally important to study as responses to survey items (Lane 1962, p. 15).

This may be especially meaningful in the realm of understanding skin color and colorism in society. To date, the two studies that have examined a potential relationship between political preferences and skin color have not turned up any consistent associations (Hochschild and Weaver 2007; Seltzer and Smith 1991). But perhaps skin color might be related to views about politics broadly that are not captured in survey items—or, at least, the traditional items that have been asked to-date.[34]

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[34] Some evidence of this came out in my post-interview comments with participants. For example, one 50 year old, dark-skinned woman summarized as follows: "But skin color, I've never had someone ask questions specifically about that in any kind of research. We talk about it in our neighborhoods and things, so I thought that was very interesting. So no, I think it's a unique way of getting to some questions and letting people speak from their experience. ... I find that I speak

Consequently, in this chapter I discuss the 67 interviews I conducted with African Americans in southeastern Michigan regarding their perceptions of skin tone in society, both socially and politically. My goal as a political ethnographer is to provide enough context and content that readers can see how I come to the conclusions that I do. This chapter will provide insight into how skin color is viewed in society broadly, with a number of undertones that matter for politics. In subsequent chapters, I examine more explicitly how skin color is related to politics and how my interviews speak to this reality. In this chapter, I demonstrate the ways in which skin color is perceived to be important in social domains broadly as an entrée into understanding how skin color may matter for politics.

INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

To reexamine the ways in which skin color could matter for one's political views and world views broadly defined, I sought to conduct a number of in-depth interviews regarding skin color. Selecting the appropriate case for these conversations was a challenging task. In consultation with the Census brief "The Black Population: 2010" (Rastogi et al. 2011), I selected Detroit as the best metropolitan area to conduct my interviews. Detroit has the fourth largest population of African Americans in the United States with a population of over 600,000 Black residents. Conducting interviews in Detroit and surrounding areas would hold the broader political contexts constant within the state of Michigan, but provides an opportunity to compare across local contexts where some areas have more or less dense populations of Black people, as well as varying socioeconomic class.

Ultimately, all of the interviews were conducted in two neighboring counties in Michigan: Washtenaw and Wayne counties. After considering other potential locations with large Black

more with my children about it. And it's naming it. If there's an elephant in the room, it's in the room. … It's when your grandmother said 'don't bring anything home darker than the paper bag,' you don't do that. And that was a literal statement. … So it's just very interesting to speak of colorism in the way it is and not many of the people broached it."

populations—e.g., Chicago, Atlanta, and Los Angeles—there were several reasons why conducting the interviews in Michigan was ideal. First, these two counties were selected given variation in composition, including population size, racial breakdown, household income, and education differences. Washtenaw County has over 12 percent of the population as monoracial Black and 3.5 percent as two or more races, with a median household income of over $65,000 and over 54 percent of the population holding a college degree.[35] In contrast, Wayne County has a 39 percent monoracial Black population with 2.5 percent identifying as two or more races, a median household income of $43,700, and 23 percent having a college degree.[36] Second, the close proximity of these two locales holds constant other external factors such as broader state political structures and cultures. Conducting interviews in other areas would require additional analyses related to the broader political and social contexts of those areas relative to one another.

Third, there were practical considerations to take into account. I aimed to conduct 60 interviews, which requires both time and networks. Conducting these interviews in the metro-Detroit area allowed me to take advantage of my own personal and professional networks in these locations, as well as those of my contacts in the area and broader connections through the University of Michigan. Additionally, the flexibility with respect to timing and location of conducting the interviews in Michigan allowed for greater ease of adapting to participant's needs. Interviews frequently needed to be scheduled (and rescheduled), with times and locations changing depending on participant's needs. Fourth, living in the area provided me greater flexibility and say with respect to who I would agree to speak with based on responses to the pre-screening survey. That is, without being limited to being in a certain area for only a few weeks or months at a time and needing to hit a certain interview target, I was able to review the pre-screening information and decide who may be best to interview

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[35] Census Quick Facts, Washtenaw County
[36] Census Quick Facts, Wayne County

based on their profile and the other interviews conducted so far. In combination, conducting a large number of interviews in the Detroit area was superior to conducting a small number across multiple cities given financial, time, and other constraints.[37]

The interviews were advertised as a conversation about Black experiences in society via a number of outlets: email listservs at the University of Michigan (e.g., a Black Professionals listserv), flyers posted at local coffee shops and multiple libraries, advertisements in church bulletins, as well as a Craigslist posting. Prior to finishing each interview, I also asked participants for recommendations of other people who might be good for me to speak with to employ a snowball sampling method. The topics of discussion were developed to include a range of issues including perceptions about color in society, experiences with discrimination, feelings of political efficacy and power, as well as representation and political candidates. All interviews were audio recorded and participants received a gift card after completing the interview as a token of appreciation.[38]

A total of 67 semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted between October 2016 and September 2017 to investigate how African Americans think about skin color, society, and politics in their own words. These interviews lasted on average 63 minutes, ranging from 29 to 120 minutes. The average age of participants was 40 years old, with a range from 20 to 67 years. The gender breakdown was nearly equal—with 55 percent women and 45 percent men in my sample. The educational attainment was also a fairly evenly distribution, ranging from less than high school diploma through Ph.D. The skin color range of the participants also ranged from very light to dark, with a slight skew towards the lighter end of the spectrum.[39]

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[37] Of course, future studies would benefit greatly from interviews in other regions or metropolitan areas where dynamics may be distinct in style and/or strength depending on context.

[38] The first set of interview participants received a $10 Visa gift card, which was increased to $25 upon receipt of funding from the National Science Foundation's Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant (Award 1646988).

[39] Please refer to the methodological appendix for more detailed descriptive information about the interview participants.

Table 3.1: Overview of Skin Color Distribution in Sample					
Total # by skin color (interviewer-rated)	Total	*Subtotal*	Total # by skin color (self-rated)	Total	*Subtotal*
Light	20	30	Light	20	25
Light/Medium	10		Light/Medium	5	
Medium	8	8	Medium	22	22
Medium/Dark	10		Medium/Dark	7	
Dark	19	29	Dark	13	20
TOTAL	**67**	**67**	**TOTAL**	**67**	**67**

Table 3.2: Overview of Education Distribution in Sample		
Highest Education	**Total**	***Subtotal***
Less than High School	3	
GED	3	
High school diploma	12	
Some college, no degree	15	33
Associate's degree	4	
Bachelor's degree	12	16
Master's degree	16	
PhD	2	18
TOTAL	**67**	**67**

To maintain consistency across interview structure, style, and potential interviewer effects, I conducted the majority of the interviews (n=43). The remainder of the interviews were conducted by a Black female research assistant (n=24) to examine potential race of interviewer effects and explore differences in conversational style and substance across interviewers. Standard concerns about race of interviewer effects are complicated in the case of a focused discussion on skin tone. Not only is there a racial divide at play, but the literature demonstrates important intra-racial differences in perceptions and stereotyping based on the lightness or darkness of one's skin color. As a result, this complicates determining who might be an ideal interviewer; ideally, one would hope for not only race-matching of interviewer with participants, but also color-matching. From a practical perspective, this would be nearly impossible to implement since skin tone is not observed until the interview begins and would require a team of research assistants who travelled to every interview.

My position as a White researcher discussing Black experiences was surprising upon initial contact with many participants.[40] The conversations started off initially focused on discussions of race, before transitioning to a focus on skin tone specifically. Many participants inquired about my background and about my interest in the topic. At the beginning of the interview, these were questions about race given that that the interviews were advertised as being discussions of Black experiences. At the conclusion of the conversation, these were more frequently questions about my interest in skin tone. Sometimes these comments were made organically when participants were asked if they had any final comments or feedback for the interviewer:

> I think what you're doing is really cool. And I can't think of anything that I would do differently. … I mean the way that you're asking the question and your sequencing of them is good. ... I think you hit on a lot of areas of my personal life and the lives of others that I think I would have thought. –36 year old, light-skinned woman

> I thought it was like a really cool and fun experience ... I will say this one thing. I was really surprised that you were White. [laughs] … For me, it wouldn't influence the honesty level or anything. But it was surprising, and I also think I'm always interested in why people are interested in their research. And I think had it been a Black person, I would have just made assumptions about why I thought they were interested in the research. But with you I just wasn't sure. –26 year old, light-skinned woman

> You're gonna ambush those white people, aren't ya? You really are. [laughs] – 67 year old, medium-skinned man

Regardless of interviewer, these conversations were very friendly, enjoyable, and participants seemed at ease and willing to be forthcoming. As may be expected given the intra-group dynamics of skin tone and colorism, the Black interviewer reported encountering more instances of hesitation or reluctance from participants in discussing some topics related to skin tone than the White interviewer. In most cases, though, participants seemed happy that someone was interested in hearing their perspective and were willing to talk at length about their experiences.

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[40] In many cases, pre-screening of interested applicants occurred over the phone while some occurred via email. Following this screening, a specific meeting location was set and I provided specific instructions about how to spot me (e.g., "I'll be near the front entrance with a gray sweater"). Despite these specifics, it was not uncommon for interview participants to walk straight past the White interviewer (located at the front entrance in a gray sweater), looking for someone else.

PERCEPTIONS OF SKIN COLOR IN SOCIETY

These conversations highlighted a number of interesting ways in which Black people think about skin tone in society, both historically and in the present day. I begin by highlighting implicit and explicit references to skin color and its perceived importance, or lack thereof, in society. After demonstrating that an overwhelming number of African Americans believe skin tone is important in society, I turn to discussions of the historical legacies of racism and colorism by the interview participants. Then, I move to discussion of the continuing pernicious effects of skin tone in society, and perceptions of how colorism impacts opportunities, power, and treatment in society.

At the beginning of each interview, I showed participants a selection of photos, first featuring a set of Black men and a second with Black women, depicted in various contexts (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). I ask participants to note what stood out to them and what came to mind as they viewed them.

Figure 3.1: Photo Collection of Black Men Presented in Interviews
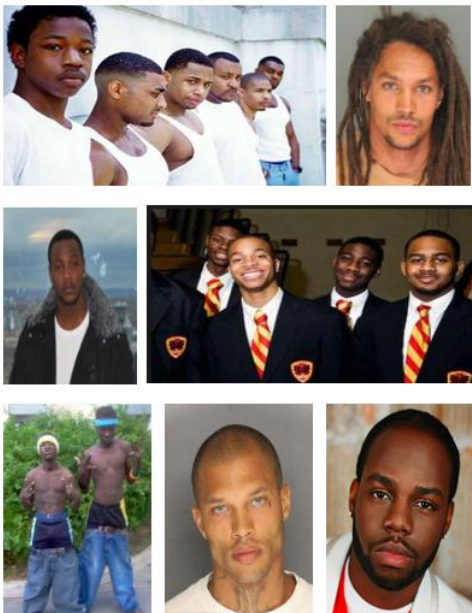
Figure 3.2: Photo Collection of Black Women Presented in Interviews
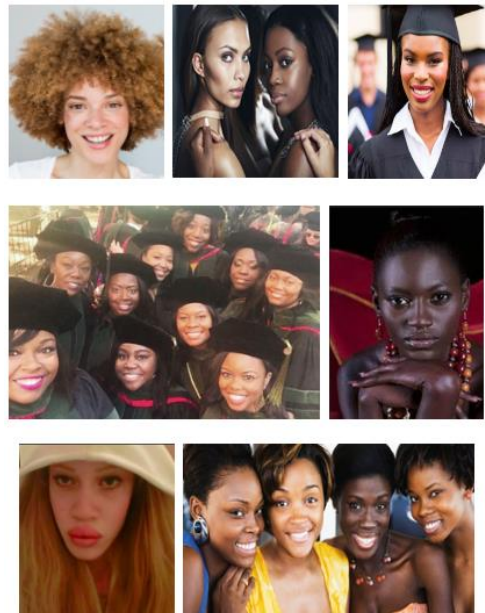
Participants referred to a number of things in their remarks—including that the photos included only African Americans, guesses about what type of job the person depicted in the photo would have, and that some people pictured adhered to stereotypic portrayals of Black people while other photos did not. Without prompting, many participants also specifically mentioned skin tone in this section while reviewing these collections of photos. Through these comments, participants signaled that skin tone is something they readily notice in assessing other people.

> It makes me think about colorism within our—the Black community. … Just being a light-skinned Black woman. And then, you know, I have darker-skinned women in the family. And others who are even lighter than me who are actually your pigment [points at White interviewer]. Just how, you know, we go into the world. My [dark-skinned] sister might get treated differently than I do. And even within our own community, there's that light-skinned vs dark-skinned shenanigans. [laughs] –30 year old, light-skinned woman

> He's got the light eyes and light skin. So, he could be mixed [race]. –36 year old, light-skinned man

> It just shows the range of African American women. None of them really look alike, but we come in all different shades and hair textures and from all different walks of life. –32 year old, medium-skinned woman

> Looks like a picture stating an African black queen. African beads and earrings and all that and she has a full-fledged dark glow. – 36 year old, dark-skinned man

In 40 of the 67 interviews, participants explicitly mentioned skin color in response to the selection of photos, while another six interviews made implicit color-based remarks. This was done through comments connecting stereotypes with either light or dark skin tones (e.g., Parrish 1946). While participants did not reference skin tone explicitly, they reference these stereotypes in association with photos that match the skin tone expected—e.g., associating darker skin with being seen as more threatening or following a less traditional path, or light skin with being more friendly or approachable: "She seems to be easy to talk to non-threatening or friendly." Several others invoke stereotypes associated with dark skin being stereotyped as more threatening:

> These [dark-skinned] guys scare me right here. They look like they're doing gang signals. They don't have respect for anybody with their pants down. They've got mean

> looking faces, making mean—like they're trying to be tough. –59 year old, medium-skinned woman

> These [dark-skinned] young men are just—[they] want to be thugs when they grow up. –67 year old medium-skinned man

In combination, these 46 interview participants—69 percent of those interviewed—referenced skin tone in the very beginning of our conversation. Recall that at this point in the conversation, participants did not realize the focus of the conversation would be on skin tone. Thus, given that these comments were offered without prompting, they provide one type of evidence that skin color is something that remains at the top of one's mind even in the present day.

When transitioning the interviews from a general discussion of race to the more focused topic of skin tone, an interesting pattern emerged. Participants commonly interjected brief comments to the interviewer in the lead-up to the section on skin color. Before beginning the set of questions focused on skin tone, the interviewer gave the following overview:

> Next, I'd like to focus the conversation on one specific topic that I've heard can be meaningful for Black people: skin color. I've heard that the lightness or darkness of one's skin can make a difference in a variety of ways, including perceptions and stereotypes about someone. I wanted to get your perspective to help better understand whether or not it's important and how skin color might be influential in people's lives. To be clear, I'm talking specifically about skin color differences within the Black community.

During this lead-up, there were 26 participants who made an agreeing noise or comment—such as "Mmhmm," "Yeah," or "Absolutely"—as the interviewer spoke. These interruptions were much more frequent with the White interviewer than the Black interviewer—happening 22 times with the White interviewer (out of 43 total interviews) and four times with the Black interviewer (out of 24 total interviews). This may suggest that participants felt it was important to signal to the White interviewer that they knew what the interviewer was talking about since skin tone may be a more unusual topic for Whites to explicitly discuss. The Black interviewer, on the other hand, may be expected to be

familiar with the subject of skin tone and the interview can continue on to get to the next questions without interjection from participants.

The first question participants were asked explicitly relating to skin tone was opinion on whether or not skin tone is important in our society. In response to this question, only five participants explicitly said "No," that they did not think skin tone was important in society. Some individuals believed color is important, but qualified this with a recognition that it should not be or that they personally do not think it is important. Overall, the vast majority of participants—93 percent of people in my sample—said that they thought skin tone was important in society.

> Oh that's always been [the case that color matters]. And that's sad, it's sick. … Yeah it's important. It shouldn't be, but it is. And people unfortunately are discriminated because of that, you know. Or they have to work harder because of that. –60 year old, light-skinned woman

> It shouldn't be [important]. But I believe it plays a big role. I know light-skinned girls get more attention than darker-skinned girls. So it definitely plays a very, very, very big role in our community, for some reason I don't know why. [laughs] I don't really know why skin color plays a big role in who talks to you and who helps you. –28 year old, medium-skinned man

> I definitely think it can [be important]. Certainly. … You hear people say, "The lighter the better. The closer to White the better." –36 year old, light-skinned woman

> Yes, it is a huge piece. It's double edged in our community. It's historical, it comes from the slave trade. … That division remains in the family. And even within my own. And it's a huge piece within how we perceive ourselves. Sometimes amongst ourselves, sometimes as better or less than. It can actually divide a family on what you will get or will not get in the family if there's any resources. It can shun people. It does divide and conquer. – 50 year old, dark-skinned woman

Through the variety of answers that came through to the question about whether skin color is important in society, one thing is clear: it is nearly unanimous that skin tone is perceived as meaningful in society.

THE ROOTS OF COLORISM

As many excerpts from the previous section highlight, there was a sense among participants that issues related to skin tone are nothing new. In fact, they have been around for generations in the United States. Consistent with work on the importance of historical memory for African Americans (e.g., Carter 2019; Harris-Lacewell 2006; Nunnally 2012), many participants made reference to the historical legacies of divisions based on not just race but skin tone specifically. In my conversations, nearly half of all people I spoke with—32 total—explicitly invoked slavery in relation to colorism during our discussions. Several others made reference to other historical events as meaningfully related to skin tone and colorism, including colonization, the post-Civil War Reconstruction period, segregation, Jim Crow, and paper bag tests. All in all, 39 people—nearly 60 percent of those interviewed—invoked at least one historical reference.

> It's very upsetting once you learn these differences. And in history that's how they separated us as slaves, you know. Light-skinned people here and dark-skinned people here—you go do the work and light-skinned people come in the house. So I feel like that's one way to separate us. And it's bogus. I don't feel like we should be fighting each other. –28 year old, medium-skinned man

> Like representations of mammies… Jim Crow era constructions of Blackness are always linked to Black people with really Black skin. –32 year old, medium-skinned woman

> I have seen the lighter skin of African Americans have been kind of put above the dark skin, even in my own family. … The lighter skin tone seems to be pampered. That goes back to those times that we don't like to discuss, and because of my age and the things that I have experienced as a child coming up. –60 year old, dark-skinned man

Of course, it should not be surprising that many African Americans are acutely aware of where skin tone differences stem from and cite the historical legacies of colorism in discussions of ongoing issues related to skin tone given the demonstrated impact of skin tone in society dating back nearly a century. However, it is interesting to note that despite the near absence of elite or mass-level conversations devoted to skin tone, many Black people are well aware of the roots of these divisions and the associated power dynamics.

As was implied in their comments regarding slavery, participants frequently referenced White people as both the source of issues related to skin color—both dating back to slavery and continuing to perpetuate these issues today. For example, participants referenced the opportunities that lighter-skinned Black people were given by Whites around the Civil Rights era, including hiring lighter-skinned people to work in the front of the store vs. only having darker-skinned people in the background. Many people believe that these types of behaviors still persist. For example, one man discussed receiving different treatment at his job in a restaurant, including not getting raises as quickly as others and being relegated to the back of the restaurant: "They keep us in the back. [laughs] Well, they got one little [Black] waiter guy. But he talk like he White, so… [trails off]." And a similar perspective was shared more broadly:

> In the employment world, yes [skin color matters differently for men and women]… Most corporations are White-owned, so if they found a chocolate-skin woman, she will be qualified, educated, all that. And I question, Would they still employ her based on what she looks like? Not based on what she's qualified for. Throughout my years, I haven't seen too many dark skin women in high-up corporate positions. … I've seen [dark skin Black men] more than Black women, the dark skin women. –47 year old, light-skinned man

> They did used to select the fairer skin slaves back when we were slaves, so I think that mentality still affects us down to this day. Where they might hire someone that's fairer skin. Have I experienced that? Yes… I don't know if it was directly related to [my color], but in the back of my mind I was like I don't know. … I think we were the token minority [candidates] and they picked the fairer skinned one, which was me. –36 year old, light-skinned man

> It depends also if they're male or female. I feel like if it was dark skin male, a Caucasian interacting with a dark skin male would be more intimidated by them. So they might be more cautious. But if it was a light skin male, they'll feel more free. – 24 year old, dark-skinned woman

> [My cousin] has a DUI, he has like 3 of them. He got pulled over with a pistol. He's very light. [The police] didn't throw him down. They was so nice to him. They just talked to him calm and they only gave him 60 days. You know, people usually get 5 years. 60 [days] and then he'll be out. But I feel like if he were my complexion… it would have been different. –34 year old, dark-skinned man

When asking folks to speculate about how White people might respond differently to Black people with varying complexions, there is sense that there is common knowledge that Whites are more

comfortable interacting with lighter-skinned Black people than those with dark skin. Specifically, greater similarity in appearance between Whites and light-skinned Black people is thought to make White people feel more comfortable during interpersonal interactions:

> The closer you are to Caucasian, the closer that rings to "acceptable" in certain circles. —55 year old, medium-skinned woman

> My aunt would say "Oh your grandmother, people felt comfortable talking to her because she had lighter skin. White people felt comfortable talking to her because she had lighter skin." So that was that. —27 year old, medium-skinned woman

> My grandma is like Dutch and Blackfoot Indian, my dad's mom. And his dad is White and Black. So he's more European than f***ing Black. And then my mom's Black. But I didn't get any of her color. I don't know if it's a curse or a gift sometimes. You know? But my other brother—we have different dads—he like, "You light-skinned, that's why the White people love you. You have the Caucasian persuasion!" [laughs] —48 year old, light-skinned man

> People identify with people they think are more closely related to them. And with that, I think mainstream America is more comfortable with lighter complected, ya know? Just in general. — 66 year old, dark-skinned man

Taken together, these comments suggest an important gap in how political scientists have explored White racial attitudes towards African Americans, as well as in-group attitudes among African Americans. That is, a focus on Whites' views towards African Americans as one homogenous group does not fit with either lived experiences or perceptions from Black people themselves. Indeed, this emphasis on studying Whites' attitudes towards Black people as a homogenous group is inconsistent with the historical legacy of colorism and the additional privileges and opportunities available to lighter-skinned Black folks throughout our country's history. Indeed, White people are the gatekeepers to these opportunities through their status as elected officials, business owners, judges, and more.

Additionally, many participants make reference to the unique positioning of light-skinned Black people in the racial hierarchy. There is frequently a perceived divide between White and Black people in American society, with Whites on top of the racial hierarchy holding the most power and African Americans at the bottom (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2004a; Kim 2000). Perhaps more consistent with discussions of pigmentocracies and skin color stratification in Latin America, my conversations

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suggest that Black people perceive the racial hierarchy as more of a continuum based on both race *and* color (Bonilla-Silva 2004b; Canache et al. 2014; Mitchell 2018; Monk 2016). Put differently, even among members of the same racial group, those with light skin will be perceived as better off than those with medium or darker skin in the United States.

Specifically, those with lighter skin—perhaps especially those who are biracial—are seen as more racially fluid or ambiguous. This affords certain access and acceptability in White society that darker-skinned individuals do not have. These lighter-skinned individuals can consequently fit into both White and Black communities, but may not feel truly welcome in either. Consistent with recent work on multiracialism and racial identification (Davenport 2018; Masuoka 2017), participants' comments suggest that this is not simply based on physical appearance, but also cultural or linguistic differences.

> I feel like with skin tone in the Black community, it's like—if you light, you not really considered "Black." So it's like you not Black, but then in the White community you not White. So, it's like, where do you stand? Where do you really fit in-between the two? And then it's like if you're dark skin, "Oh, well of course you're Black." But then it's like ok the White people look at you like "Oh, well you have no place here." –23 year old, light-skinned man

> I've been treated well before just because I'm not too dark and not too light, so the conversations are easier. You know when you're first having a conversation the person is getting past certain perceptions and biases of you? For someone with lighter skin, a darker-skinned person would really have to get past their biases about somebody to really get down and have a good conversation and connect with that person. I feel like I can connect with people better just because I don't – I'm not – I'm kind of in-between. –27 year old, medium-skinned woman

Consistent with Korgen (1998, p. 28), these comments suggesting that Whites are more comfortable around lighter-skinned Black people also mean that those light-skinned people are more likely to exposed to racist comments or jokes. Thus, being able to fit more easily into White spaces may open doors and provide access to opportunities that can move one up the social ladder—but are also likely coupled with psychological or emotional costs.

Moreover, some participants also report that there can be some disconnect or feelings of lowered levels of comfort between light- and dark-skinned Black people. Many participants believe that this stems from an implied lack of racial authenticity attributed to having lighter skin:

> But internally, you're not a real Black woman if you're not dark. … So it goes both ways. I don't know if [White] people like me and they want to socialize with me because they think I'm different because I'm lighter, or on the flipside, people don't think I'm a real black woman because look at me, "How would you know? You don't experience it because you're light or ethnic or" – both worlds [laughs] That's why I say I'm living in both worlds. [laughs] –37 year old, light-skinned woman

> We've always been multicolored; you know so it shouldn't affect us, but it does. You know, I grew up during the 80's so I grew up like, okay—We had "Black" and we had "light skin." But we always heard little stuff like "Oh you can't trust the ones with the light eyes, you can't trust 'em'." You know all these little stereotypes and stuff like that. –33 year old, medium-skinned woman

This is consistent with Hunter's (2005, 2007) research on colorism whereby "authenticity is the vehicle through which darker-skinned people take back their power from lighter-skinned people" (2007, p. 244). Moreover, as Greer (2013, p. 43) notes, "the usage of the term 'Black' urges a recognition of race as well as skin color and thus embraces a positive racial consciousness" (Larkey et al. 1993; West 1990). On the flip side of this, lighter-skinned Black people may have to make efforts to signal their Blackness, especially if they have a more ambiguous racial appearance (Korgen 1998, p. 28). This is consistent with the sentiment that some lighter-skinned participants indicated in my interviews:

> I often feel very uncomfortable in rooms full of darker-skinned African Americans who I don't know. I often feel like I have something to prove to justify why I'm here. Because yeah, I don't always feel on first glance like my skin tone says I should be in that group. –23 year old, light-skinned woman

This suggests that lighter-skinned Black people who are biracial may be more likely to take on a minority-only identity as a political statement (Korgen 1998, p. 44). That is, their identification as Black alone rather than both Black and White may be an attempt to signal their attachment to the group. Overall, there is a positioning of lighter-skinned Black people having more access to White society, but also being uncertain of how they may fit into Black spaces.

Participants also attribute blame to White voters for the largely light-skinned Black political elite in high level offices. Participants frequently cite Whites' sense of comfortability with or similarity to lighter-skinned Black people as an explanation for each of these aforementioned issues. Indeed, nearly all of the people I spoke with—60 of 67—were not surprised to hear that research shows Black elected officials at the state and national level are disproportionately light-skinned (a la Hochschild and Weaver 2010). Further, 40 of my 67 interview participants referenced White voters as the explanation for why we have not seen many dark-skinned Black politicians at high levels. Many believe this is due to lighter-skinned Black people being seen as less threatening, more competent, and generally more accepted by Whites. An additional nine people made implicit references that invoked "society" without explicitly naming Whites—noting that light-skinned Black people have always had more power or were more approachable: "Remember, the lighter you are the more easier you are on the eyes. Supposedly." While these responses do not explicitly invoke Whites, they make broad reference to the way things are in society, implicating White people. With respect to politics, 49 people referenced Whites, implicitly or explicitly, as explaining the composition of Black elites.

> [The fact that most Black politicians in high level offices are light-skinned] does concern me, but it does not concern me either. It is a known fact, so why would I be surprised about it in today's society? The lighter you are the better your chances in dealing with society. When you are involved with these different areas of politics, the lighter you are, the better your chances. –60 year old, dark-skinned man
>
> I would say [having elected officials with] light skin is good, Black is sometimes— Some people would like to see more actual Black people in office or in the political. –19 year old, light-skinned man
>
> I'm sure being lighter-skinned had something to do with [being elected] because that's what America identifies with. Because [Kamala Harris] looks like she could be White [points at photos of elected officials]. You got me. I could say he [Douglas Wilder] looks White. I'm gonna say they're all mixed. –67 year old, medium-skinned man

All in all, 84 percent of Black people I spoke with—56 of 67 people—made reference to White people as perpetuating problems related to colorism. This alone deserves more exploration in the future because much of the existing conversation around skin tone is focused on it being an *intra-racial*

problem within communities of color. Of course, this is not the case—nor has it been historically—and the influence that Whites play through gatekeeping opportunities, access to resources, and power should be emphasized explicitly. My interviews clearly demonstrate that Black people are well aware of the roots of colorism through a historical lens. Further, many have a clear sense of who continues to perpetuate these issues today, both in terms of social issues and Black elected officials—i.e., Whites.

THE LEGACY OF COLORISM: POWER, OPPORTUNITY, & PERCEIVED THREAT

Given the amount of familiarity with the historical context of skin tone, it should not be surprising that people also had very clear and well-developed perspectives on *how* skin tone continues to matter today. Indeed, much of this was relevant in the comments from the previous section through a pairing of both historical and contemporary examples, or lack of surprise that skin tone would still matter today given its historical roots. In what domains do Black people feel that skin tone remains important today?

Without prompting or the interviewer providing a specific set of categories to draw from, participants referenced multiple domains in which they felt skin tone was meaningful. These domains were raised throughout the conversations, with mentions ranging across various social and political realms. I coded these individual references into overarching categories to explore the themes most frequently mentioned (see Table 3.3). This coding scheme reveals that many people mentioned multiple domains, with an average of over two distinct domains referenced by each person. These responses highlight the varied ways the skin color is perceived to be important from top-of-the-head responses. These range from interactions related to dating, attractiveness, or personality traits, and extend to interactions with other races—in terms of opportunities, being a target of police violence, or certain people (namely Whites) feeling comfortable around you.

Table 3.3: Participant Mentions of Domains in Which Skin Tone Matters		
Domain Mentioned	**# of mentions**	**% of total mentions**
Beauty, Relationships	53	34.6%
Perceived Violence, Aggression, Threatening, Physical Strength, Targets of Police	38	24.8%
Jobs, Opportunities, Promotions	30	19.6%
Education, Intelligence, Competency	10	6.5%
Perceived "Goodness" or "Badness"	4	2.6%
Inequality, Wealth, Power	4	2.6%
Over-confidence, Confidence, Being "uppity"	4	2.6%
Being Loud, Having an Attitude	3	2.0%
Success	2	1.3%
Being Relatable to Other Racial Groups or Making Other Races "Comfortable"	2	1.3%
Trust, Trustworthiness	2	1.3%
Communication skills	1	0.7%
Total	**153**	**100.0%**

There were three primary domains of relevance mentioned most frequently by participants. The first domain with an overwhelming majority of references—53 in total—was with respect to attractiveness or romantic relationships:

> Black men, 90 percent of the time they prefer light-skinned women. They prefer red-bone. Yellow. That's what they like. –23 year old, dark-skinned woman
>
> I know men who will say "I won't date anyone unless she light-skinned." Women, they may date a variety of skin colors, but [then say] "I can't have a friend unless she's just as light-skinned and pretty as me" … I know [colorism] certainly—it happens in the workplace. Even just within upwardly mobile-type people who are, you know, the wealthier—they tend to be either mulatto or they tend to marry a certain type of look. … In religion, you tend to—even if you go to an African American church, it's like [laughs] a light-skinned section! –36 year old, light-skinned woman
>
> I have a friend who was treated very well because she was lighter-skinned. By men. Men tend to gravitate towards lighter-skinned, curly-haired, Black women. Because she is Black and Latina. So we go out and she's gonna get—If we go out together to a club, she'd get a lot more guys talking to her rather than talking to me. –27 year old, medium-skinned woman

This is not surprising given that much of the literature on colorism demonstrates a perceived link between skin tone and attractiveness in global society.

The second domain involves perceptions of violence or aggression as they relate to skin tone and day-to-day interactions. A total of 38 participants made reference to linking darker skin with perceived aggression or inducing more fear, while those with lighter skin are seen as less threatening:

> [White people] see a person that's light-skinned, they probably would think "He's probably smarter, he's probably more educated, he's probably more tamer," and everything like that. … Then they see darker-skinned people as wilder, being dumber, being more violent, more prone to anger and more emotional and everything like that. That goes back to slave times. –32 year old, dark-skinned man

> [White people] feel less threatened when they see me as opposed to if I'm with a friend who's darker complexioned. Oh sure. And they'll gear the conversation towards me. –58 year old, light-skinned woman

> A lot of people I hang around with are dark skin. … But because they come in the room with me, and they look at me and I'm light skin. And they look at them like "Oh they dark skin," they automatically feel like "Oh they're going to be more of a threat" to them than I am. –23 year old, light-skinned man

The third domain—with 30 total mentions—is with respect to job opportunities, treatment by employers, and opportunity for promotion in a given job.

> [My mom is] light-skinned and really attractive. But my [dark-skinned] auntie is attractive as well. When they would go into a room, they'd get a different amount of attention. The attention would be given differently from all of the Black people. And as far as education both of them have Master's degrees in Business. But my mom was always treated differently when it came to jobs, when it came to anything. At least from my experiences growing up. And mainly around Black circles too. –30 year old, medium-skinned man

> Black people feel as though if they apply for a job they will not get it anyway, a high paying job, because somebody White would get it. … [But among Black people] the majority of Black people that I know that are well off are light-skinned, not dark-skinned. –58 year old, dark-skinned woman

> And let's just be honest, too. Even if you're in a predominantly White situation, stereotypically I'd say that leadership would probably want to see someone they would define as more "polished." And the polish would involve skin color because you— you even fit in more. –37 year old, light-skinned woman

These latter two domains—perceived aggression and job opportunities—have very clear and broad political implications. This makes them stand out as areas ripe for study within the realm of political

science, where the focus has been only with respect to race and each of these domains. These conversations suggest that there is another meaningful layer that should be peeled back: skin tone.

Further, there were important differences in how people believe skin tone matters for Black men compared to Black women. Consistent with literature in sociology, my interviews demonstrate a relationship between skin tone and stereotypes (e.g., Blair et al. 2002; Eberhardt et al. 2006; Locke et al. 2005; Myrdal 1996 [1944]), but also indicate a gendered component worthy of further explanation. Specifically, participants reveal different perceived characteristics that lie at the intersection of sex and skin tone among African Americans. For light-skinned men, they may be viewed as more intelligent or successful, but less masculine. In contrast, dark-skinned men are stereotyped as physically powerful, threatening, more prone to violence, but also seen as the epitome of masculinity or Blackness.

> If you're a man, they'll probably pull you over regardless of what your complexion is. But if you're darker, I don't know, it's like [the police] have more fear. I've heard cops say that before. … They say we're violent. –34 year old, dark-skinned man

> I feel like for Black women, it's preferred that they are lighter. I feel like for Black men it actually takes away from their masculinity if they're light skin. So, I feel like with Black women it's more factored into their desirability. –24 year old, dark-skinned woman

> My brother is a lot darker than me… [He] just happens to be a darker African American male like my father. My brother also happens to be 6' 5". So, he's a tall guy. … Because he is a tall, bigger, Black guy, they automatically feel a threatening dominance. … You know, he could be in the grocery store and offer somebody help and they'd be like "Are you sure?" and, you know, like he's going to rob them. It's sad for him because that's his everyday life. –32 year old, medium-skinned woman

Black women have some overlapping but other distinct sets of stereotypes. Women with lighter skin are most frequently stereotyped as attractive and more polished, but also viewed as being conceited. In contrast, darker women are more typically ascribed the "angry Black woman" stereotype, as well as being perceived as less professional or more hyper-sexual.

> I think that in the race, color is more an issue with women. Because it's more an issue around beauty and acceptance. And socially and psychologically and financially leads you to a better life, if you use that term. … I would say for men it's more of a joke.

Like "Oh he's light-skinned so he's a pretty boy." … But at the same time, that pretty boy-ness moves you up in society. [laughs] –37 year old, light-skinned woman

If a light skin girl walks by she's goin' to get it before the dark skin girl. 'Cause they gon' look at her like she's prettier or she can fit in and play the role better than the dark skin girl. … She can get a job. She can get a job, she can get better assistance with things. She can get more—How can I say it? More attention than the dark skin girl would get. –23 year old, light-skinned man

I just think the focus on most of the social inequalities related to race are focused on Black men. So I think that people tend to, for example, associate really negative stereotypes about Black men as being like really angry or violent with darker-skinned Black men. I think you can even see that with like the Black Lives Matter movement. The Black men that have gotten the most traction or the ones that have sort of become the most noteworthy are darker-skinned Black men. … I think that darker-skinned Black women are associated more with like stereotypes like the angry Black woman too. It just gets ignored more. I also think that they are more sexualized, you know, or maybe more dehumanized than lighter-skinned Black women. … The cultural norm is to think that dark skin tone plays a larger role for men than it does for women. –26 year old, light-skinned woman

The intersection of gender and skin tone suggest important room for further exploration of the ways in which racialized stereotypes vary by both skin tone *and* gender. A clear theme coming through the participants' comments is that the stereotypes frequently applied to African Americans broadly—that they are aggressive, intimidating, hyper-sexual, or less intelligent—are primarily seen as attributed to darker-skinned members of the group. Indeed, none of these primary stereotypes about Black people broadly were applied to light-skinned Black participants in the course of my conversations. Further, which stereotypes are applied vary by sex, too. This complements work by McConnaughy and White (n.d.) exploring the intersection of race and gender stereotypes. These comments suggest that skin tone is an additionally meaningful dimension on which stereotyping occurs that is worthy of serious consideration in future research.

Beyond perceived stereotypes, the conversations also explored the intersection of gender and skin tone with respect to life outcomes, experiences, and perceived treatment in society. Forty percent of the interview participants reported that skin color was equally impactful for Black men and women. In many cases, however, the elaboration that participants provided highlights a different answer than

what they said explicitly. For example, some said stereotypes about color worked the same across gender groups, but then their answers focused on how women were disproportionately impacted. In other cases, participants did not explicitly say whether they felt men and women were impacted differently, but provided a number of examples of differential impacts:

> Well with Black women, we all just Black. Majority of Black men [there] is more judgment because the lighter skin color, the lighter the sentence. The darker, the heavier the sentence. –37 year old, light-skinned woman

> I feel like for Black women it's preferred that they are lighter. I feel like for Black men it actually takes away from their masculinity if they're light skin, so I feel like with Black women its more factored into their desirability. –24 year old, dark-skinned woman

> Dark-skinned men just get deemed as aggressive and unattractive or—Like if a light-skinned guy walks up, you assume if he isn't educated he may be more interested in *getting* educated than his dark-skinned brother. And for women, I think it's the same but not as intense. Because dark-skinned women will get more of a fair shot than dark-skinned men, I guess. –30 year old, medium-skinned man

In contrast, 27 percent of participants said color was more impactful for women than men, and Black women were twice as likely as Black men to believe this is the case. In a handful of cases—about nine percent—participants said that color is more impactful for Black men compared to women. Men were more likely to say that men were disproportionately impacted by color relative to women. Overall, these responses highlight the nuanced ways in which people recognize the impact of skin color in society, and how this varies by both skin tone and sex within the same racial group.

> I think it's more of a concern for women because I think there is a perception that light-skinned women are somehow more desired. And so I think then that can pit women of different skin tones against each other. And then there are terrible consequences for women or darker-skinned women and [they] don't feel valued in their community. I think for men that's less of an issue. … But I think for women it really is—It's often a defining thing. In rap music you can call it "red-bone" or "yellow-bone," right? And so it's very much something that is brought up in context of women and their beauty. –23 year old, light-skinned woman

> The differences between African American females and males are that African American females are not targeted as much as males, so they do not have to be as careful, so they can be a little bit more free in their culture. … [Men] don't do [everything they'd like] because of the fears they have of what type of complications those situations could lead too. –60 year old, dark-skinned man

A handful of participants (n=5) responded that there were no differences in society based on sex or skin tone. These participants' views can be summed up with the phrase "Black is Black." Put differently, these participants felt that different attributes within the racial group, like race or color, did not result in different treatment or stereotyping:

> If you're a Black man, you're a Black man. If you're a Black woman, you're a Black woman. Regardless of the complexion of your skin, at the bottom you're still a Black individual. –67 year old, medium-skinned man

To complement all of the domains in which participants expressed as being related to skin tone, near the end of the interviews a brief summary of research focusing on colorism as it relates to wages, wealth, health, and incarceration disparities was provided. Even though some of these specific topics were not frequently mentioned in earlier portions of the conversation (e.g., health), they fit within broader domains of the conversations. Indeed, the vast majority of people were not surprised by this information. While many acknowledged that they were not familiar with the research on the topic or the specific research conclusions, most felt that the summarized findings were consistent with the ways in which they knew colorism plays out in the United States.[41]

Subsequently, participants were asked if they thought these differences based on skin tone with respect to wages, sentencing, or health disparities were noticed or unnoticed in society. Nearly twice as many participants said these differences went *largely unnoticed* in society compared to those who felt they were well-known. A handful of participants felt that these differences were both noticed and unnoticed in society, depending on the context of a given situation.

> Yes. I know they are [aware of differences based on skin tone]. … [Black people talk about it] all the time! All the time. They'll say—My cousin, he dark-skinned, he'll say

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[41] Only one male participant rejected the premise of research demonstrating differences by skin tone with respect to sentencing disparities. He maintained that all Black people are treated the same and that the research must be mistaken: "They don't discriminate because you light or dark. If you Black, you going to jail! Simple. Same time as a dark skin person gets. … Naw, they can do any type of research. I disagree with that… I think if you Black, white, brown, whatever [color], you all gon' do the same time for the same crime. That's something they thought of. That ain't real" (38 year old, medium-skinned man). It was not clear whether he felt the other research on colorism mentioned was also not believable.

"I gotta work hard to get a woman. You a pretty [boy]. You don't gotta work hard."
I'll say "Nah I ain't pretty." [And he says] "Well, ya used to be. You fat now" [laughs]
… So yeah it's true. I know for a fact. I've done it. I've been a victim of it. And I've
inflicted it. –48 year old, light-skinned man

I think it goes unnoticed. Yeah, I think so. …The most salient thing is race to most
Black people, so you know [trails off]. So I think that's what comes up. And also, it's
what's on the news. Most people aren't reading research articles. [laughs] They're just
looking at TV and they're like "Oh another Black guy got shot by the police." And
the television is not focusing on skin tone when they get shot by the police. –40 year
old, dark-skinned man

I don't think it's unnoticed, but I don't think that it's a big worry either because I
think that—I just think there's bigger fish to fry. I think that if light-skinned Black
people are getting ahead in certain areas or being treated better in certain areas, once
again, I guess they're still Black at the end of the day. –29 year old, medium-skinned
woman

Overall, this signals that people recognize that skin color is clearly associated with access to opportunity and power. It is noteworthy that there was near unanimous belief that even when holding race constant, skin tone was strongly associated with one's outcomes across a number of important domains in American life. Indeed, only one participant rejected the conclusions drawn from the colorism research and argued that race was the critical factor with respect to disparities in criminal justice. This highlights that colorism is something that a majority of people acknowledge as a potent force, even if it is not discussed by elites. Whether it is a topic of regular discussion amongst family and friends varies from person to person, but the overwhelming majority of participants recognize that skin tone has meaningful effects in society, across a variety of domains and works differently by sex. Moreover, throughout the course of my conversations, participants elaborated on a number of areas and specific examples of skin tone being meaningful, both broadly and in their own lives. Even still, many people are surprised to hear the extent to which research shows that different aspects of life—from wages to health to sentencing outcomes—are associated with skin tone.

SUMMARY

These interviews highlight the role of skin color in both social and political perceptions of Black people. Participants are well aware of the historical roots of colorism, as well as perceptions about continuing manifestations of colorism resulting in unequal power and opportunity. These are primarily viewed as belonging to realms of dating, perceived aggression or physical strength, and job or promotion opportunities—and they result in different stereotypes varying based on both sex and color. Consistent with work in psychology and sociology, there is a clear sense among my interview participants that stereotypes generally applied to African Americans are magnified even further among those with dark skin. Still, when presented with information on colorism research in the domains of health disparities, criminal sentencing disparities, and wealth gaps in the United States, people are not surprised—but also believe the extent of these inequities are not well-known. Still, many people believe that issues related to skin tone are secondary to the "bigger" issue of racial inequities.

In addition to traditional race-based hierarchies in the United States, there is a perceived color-based hierarchy that comes through these conversations. This leaves those with lighter skin—who still face racial discrimination—with more privilege and power relative to their darker-skinned counterparts, who experience a double-dose of discrimination due to both race *and* skin tone. One participant summarizes as follows: "From conversations I've had with a lot of Black, dark-skinned friends, [there] is a lot of frustration and anger… at life in general."

Overall, the evidence from these interviews suggests that there are likely to be political ramifications of skin tone given organic links between color and various outcomes. There is a clear association between skin tone, power, and politics in the eyes of the public already—including perceptions of aggression which has implications for police violence and treatment by others, as well as job opportunities and upward mobility in society. In contrast to the skin color paradox that suggests skin tone will not be related to political attitudes because race trumps skin tone, these conversations

demonstrate that people view the world through both racial *and* color-focused lenses. Consequently, one might expect that political preferences may vary based on one's skin tone and this may be especially meaningful in domains similar to those participants mentioned in the interviews—e.g., related to job opportunities, wages, or social programs—or when questions invoke skin tone. Likewise, these links between skin color and political issues could be made more salient by reminding or informing Black people about the extent of these disparities in society. I examine these propositions in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 4
The Skin Color Paradox Revisited:
Combining Observational & Qualitative Data

"I think that people associate darker-skinned Black people with the people who are on welfare, the people who need affirmative action. You know, as jacked up as that is. I think that—But I also think that that's the image presented to them in the media all the time."
—29 year old, medium-skinned woman interview participant

Taken together, the effects of colorism in society—frequently perpetuated by White people in positions of power who decide who receives certain opportunities and access—produce material disadvantages for darker-skinned Black people relative to their lighter-skinned counterparts. Given this legacy of colorism and differential opportunities based on skin tone, we might expect to find differences in political preferences among African Americans given different lived experiences. However, across three datasets spanning from the late 1970s to mid-1990s,[42] there is no consistent relationship found between skin color and political views of African Americans.

Given a body of research across the social sciences demonstrating the influence of skin color across domains like income, education, and health, why is there no translation into politics? One potential answer is the skin color paradox (Hochschild and Weaver 2007). The authors argue that race has trumped skin color throughout American history in terms of the lived experience of Black people. They note that in the Jim Crow South, people labeled as Black were subjected to state-sponsored racial subjugation regardless of the color of their skin. This built a strong and cohesive racial group identity among African Americans, which unites the group in its commitment against segregation and racial

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[42] Seltzer and Smith (1991) use the 1982 General Social Survey, while Hochschild and Weaver (2007) use the 1979-1980 National Survey of Black Americans and the 1992-1994 Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality.

injustices. Thus, issues related to skin color stratification take a backseat to issues of race because they would divide rather than unite the Black community.[43]

Building on colorism studies across disciplines, the potential link between skin tone and politics is worthy of reexamination. First, there was limited survey evidence used to conclude a lack of relationship between skin color and politics. One of the difficulties of studying this phenomenon with respect to politics is that few surveys include measures of skin tone and politics. Thus, while the data used by Seltzer and Smith (1991) and Hochschild and Weaver (2007) did not find any differences in preferences based on skin color, we might expect this to change over time or across measurement. Additionally, it's possible that economic changes, such as growing income inequality, have widened the skin color divide and made opinion differences more evident since the 1990s. In addition to growing inequality, contemporary use of social media provides a new venue for discussion about issues related to skin color.

Finally, the in-depth interviews detailed in the last chapter provide evidence that skin tone is connected to perceptions of politics, power, and inequality outside of the survey context—e.g., with respect to assessments of political candidates, stereotypically racialized policies, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Alternatively, it may be that the ways in which skin color matters in society may not translate to differences in political opinions—or at least not as captured through surveys or relying on traditional survey questions. Together, each of these points suggests it may be worthwhile to reexamine a linkage between skin tone and political views. In combination, new and high-quality survey data, more comprehensive measurement, and the potential for more evident skin tone divides given growing inequality warrant further examination for a relationship between color and politics.

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[43] This argument echoes similar arguments made regarding gender disparities in the Black community and the prioritization of the problems faced by Black men relative to Black women.

MEASUREMENT

Before discussing the data sources and measures that I will use throughout this chapter and the remainder of the dissertation, it is worthwhile to reflect on the value of skin tone measurement. Measures of skin tone have been used in studies dating back to the mid-1900s, including some in the social sciences (e.g., the 1961 Negro Political Participation Study).[44] These early studies used a Likert scale with five response options ranging from "Very Light" to "Very Dark." As a result, this measure was easily reproducible and cost-effective across surveys. This measure was picked up and used again across a number of social science surveys in the later 1900s; e.g., in the 1979-1980 National Survey of Black Americans, the 1989-1990 Latino National Survey, and the 1982 General Social Survey.

This Likert scale measure of skin tone was foundational in providing insight into the ways in which skin tone could be associated with political views, participation, and/or group identification. Still, as with every measure, it is not without its flaws. Because the scale does not anchor the response options with any detailed or visual descriptor, many scholars have noted that what constitutes "light," "medium," or "dark" is quite subjective (Gullickson 2005; Hannon 2014; Hill 2002). Put differently, what one person considers "light" may be what another considers "medium." Moreover, evidence suggests that these perceptions also vary specifically by racial group—e.g., with White interviewers rating Black respondents significantly darker than Black interviewers, and Black interviewers rating skin tone of White respondents much lighter than White interviewers did (Hill 2002). Thus, these color labels may be associated with other factors than physiological skin tone—including not only race of the interviewer, but also the context of the interview or other factors and features associated with skin tone itself (see Ostfeld and Yadon forthcoming for a deeper discussion).

In an attempt to improve measurement reliability, many recent social surveys have included a visual depiction of skin color using measures such as the Massey-Martin skin color scale (Massey and

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[44] The data is available from ICPSR: <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/7255>

Martin 2003). These surveys include the 2003 New Immigrant Survey, the 2009 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the 2012 General Social Survey, and both the 2012 and 2016 American National Election Study. This scale was intended to be used by interviewers and depicts 10 hands with increasing darkness (see Figure 4.1). The visual element enabled users to better match an individual's skin tone to a specific color on the scale instead of relying solely on one's personal perceptions about skin color group labels. As a result, the visual scale should improve intercoder reliability relative to prior Likert scales.

Figure 4.1: Massey-Martin Skin Color Scale

Despite its improvements, questions remain regarding the effectiveness of such scales. One concern is related to the training of interviewers to use such scales. If the intention is for interview participants to never view the scale, this requires interviewers to memorize it. A lack of training leaves uncertainty regarding their familiarity and the extent to which their memory correctly maps on to the scale itself. Indeed, recent work suggests reason to be considered about low intercoder reliability when using the Massey-Martin scale (Abrajano, Elmendorf, and Quinn 2019; Hannon and DeFina 2016, 2020). In addition, recent work has also moved to have survey respondents self-identify their skin tone using the Massey-Martin scale. This work suggests that perceptions of one's own skin tone are not simply a reflection of their physical appearance, but map onto other demographic characteristics as well (Ostfeld and Yadon 2020). This creates further questions of how skin tone corresponds not just across measures, but for assessments of the self vs. others, as well as how either of these map onto some more objective physiological reality.

An additional concern is related to the development of the visual scale itself. For example, Ostfeld and Yadon (2020) use a light-reflectance spectrophotometer to determine whether there is even spacing between the hands on the Massey-Martin scale. This reveals that while the hands do move from lighter to darker overall, the spacing between individual hands can vary quite significantly, with some hands having large jumps between them while the coloring of other hands has nearly indiscernible differences (Ostfeld and Yadon 2020).

One potential option for measurement that circumvents human biases is the use of a light-reflectance spectrophotometer itself. This type of measure is often used in dermatology or public health to capture one's appearance, as opposed to other socio-cultural associations with skin tone. Moreover, this measure can provide insight into the ways in which human assessments of skin tone are associated with more than just appearance (e.g., Ostfeld and Yadon 2018, 2020). An obvious downside to a machine-rating, however, comes in terms of both its greater cost, invasiveness, and use in only face-to-face surveys. Thus, this measure may not always be practical.

Overall, then, our measures of skin color have been evolving across the social sciences. Each measure has its relative advantages and disadvantages in terms of cost, design, and required training. At a more fundamental level, the inclusion of skin tone measures on a survey is required to provide potential insight into the ways in which skin tone may operate in society. Of course, one must carefully consider which measure is appropriate for their research questions of interest based on their research goals and survey format.

Throughout this dissertation, I rely on a combination of interviewer- and self-assessed measures of skin tone. The large-scale surveys that I rely upon use the Likert or Massey-Martin scales. In the original surveys that I conduct, I primarily rely on visual scales. I use the Massey-Martin (2003) scale as well as the original Yadon-Ostfeld Skin Color Scale (2020; see Figure 4.2).

The Yadon-Ostfeld scale builds on the recent improvements to the study of skin color and creates the first validated, interval-level skin color scale. Our scale was developed using a spectrophotometer and the assistance of a graphic designer to standardize the differences in the color of the hands. To do so, we took multiple measures of the hands on our Yadon-Ostfeld Skin Color Scale using the spectrophotometer to get true values of light-reflectance for each hand's color (e.g., Hand 2 on our scale is 74.1 light-reflectance units). As a result, our scale is a much closer approximation of a truly interval scale with spacing of approximately six light-reflectance units between each hand on the 10-point scale when measured via the spectrophotometer. In contrast, the Massey-Martin scale had spacing of as little as three to four light-reflectance units between some hands while others had more than 11 units difference between them.

Figure 4.2: Yadon-Ostfeld Skin Color Scale

In sum, measurement is an important consideration in any study and examinations of skin tone are no exception. In other projects, I explore more deeply the ways in which different measures influence our understanding of how skin tone operates in society (Ostfeld and Yadon 2020). Here, I rely upon existing measures in national surveys and more novel measures in original surveys to understand the nuanced ways in which race operates in society. Across these various survey contexts, times, and measures, the cumulative evidence suggests skin tone plays an important role in the American political landscape.

REASSESSING THE SKIN COLOR PARADOX WITH NEW EVIDENCE

To reexamine the skin color paradox, I will turn to multiple data sources to explore the relationship between skin color and politics from a multi-faceted perspective. First, the opportunity for the most extensive look into the relationship between skin tone and politics is in the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES) Time Series data. The addition of the Massey-Martin (2003) skin color scale to the 2012 ANES provided an opportunity to reconsider this relationship more deeply—both with a higher quality skin color measure, as well as a broader set of political items. Interviewers assessed the skin color of every survey participant in the face-to-face portion of the ANES, regardless of race. Further, the 2012 survey had an oversample of Black participants (n=511), which provides an excellent opportunity for exploration of skin tone differences.

While the 2016 ANES Pilot included a self-assessed measure of skin tone, the 2016 ANES Time Series included two measures: an interviewer-assessed measure (as in 2012), plus a self-assessed measure. Additionally, a measure of skin tone discrimination was included. Unfortunately, there is a much smaller number of Black participants in the face-to-face sample in 2016 (n=95) than in the 2012 oversample, despite these additional items providing an opportunity to examine skin color differences more deeply. These small sample sizes, when broken down across skin tone groups and after taking into account other standard controls, are further diminished.[45] This makes it difficult to detect differences in these data, given that the 2016 Pilot and Time Series data have similar numbers of Black participants. Still, in cases where differences do appear, they may be especially powerful.

Fortunately, I was also able to acquire access to restricted data from the nationally representative 2001-2003 National Survey of American Life (NSAL). Their large sample of African Americans (n=3,438) measured skin color, items related to the racial group, and a smaller selection of

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[45] After taking into account standard controls and imputing missing interviewer skin color data, the number of cases in the models hovers around 50 participants. The online sample of Black participants includes an additional 234 cases. However, after taking into account standard controls, the number of cases in the models hover just over 100.

political questions that have not been analyzed in previous work on the skin color paradox. Further, I conducted a YouGov survey of African Americans (n=577) in 2016 that measured skin tone and policy preferences similar to those on the 2012 ANES. Additionally, I ran two other surveys of African Americans in 2018 with Lucid (n=1,824)[46] and 2019 with AmeriSpeak (n=1,041) that included several new measures related to skin tone, mixing both social views of colorism and policy prescriptions. Finally, I expand on the in-depth qualitative interviews as the conversations related more explicitly to politics: including references to specific policies, factors involved in evaluating political candidates, and support (or lack thereof) for addressing colorism.

The goal, then, is to answer the following questions: Does race trump skin tone with respect to the political preferences of African Americans, or is there room for nuance at the intersection of race and skin tone in one's political preferences? Is skin tone related to one's level of attachment to the racial group? In combination, data from the sources outlined above provide clear evidence that skin tone is meaningfully associated with politics. Indeed, skin tone is politicized in the domains where we would expect it to be the most impactful: education and jobs. Looking across these various sources—which include national and nationally representative samples of African Americans—allows for a thorough examination of skin color, political preferences, and representation broadly.

RACIAL GROUP ATTACHMENT

Building from existing work (Harvey et al. 2005; Hochschild and Weaver 2007; Hughes and Hertel 1990), I will turn to four data sources to examine if and how skin tone is related to measures of racial group cohesion—like linked fate and racial identity importance—before turning to perceptions of political candidates and elected officials. To do so, we will rely on data from the 2001-

46 See Coppock and McClellan (n.d.) for discussion of survey data from Lucid as comparable to MTurk.

2003 NSAL, 2012 ANES, 2016 YouGov survey, and the in-depth interviews. If the skin color paradox holds, we should not expect to see any differences in attachment to the racial group based on one's skin tone, nor should we see differential perceptions of candidates or representatives.

The nationally representative 2001-2003 National Survey of American Life (NSAL), had interviewers measure skin color of African American participants (n=5,189). Following a face-to-face interview, the interviewer left behind a supplemental self-administered questionnaire for respondents to complete and return via mail. The response rate for these mail-in responses was impressive: nearly 57 percent of participants completed this supplemental questionnaire (n=3,438).[47]

Analyzing the NSAL data reveals that respondents with darker skin are 11 percentage points more likely to say that, "Being a Black person is a large part of how I think of myself" ($p < .04$). Although the NSAL does not include the standard linked fate item, they include a few items that approximate the linked fate question. The first item—"What happens in my life is largely the result of what happens to other Black people in this country"—provides some suggestive evidence that those with darker skin are more likely to agree with the statement, although the effect does not reach standard levels of statistical significance ($p < .13$). The second item— "I do not feel strongly tied to other Black people"—is not significantly associated with skin tone ($p < .42$). Thus, these items suggest mixed evidence of a relationship between skin tone and feelings towards the racial group.

Next I look for differences in linked fate based on skin tone in the NSAL. There were no significant differences in linked fate based on color, however ($p > 0.30$). Similarly, there are no significant differences by skin tone with respect to racial identity importance ($p > 0.50$). In combination with the NSAL data and consistent with the skin color paradox, this suggests mixed evidence regarding the relationship between skin tone and group attachment.

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[47] While this subset of participants who mailed in the SAQ is not a random sample of participants who were originally selected by NSAL, there are no discernible differences in income or skin color of respondents who completed the SAQ relative to the full NSAL sample.

Figure 4.3: Racial Identity Importance by Skin Tone (NSAL)
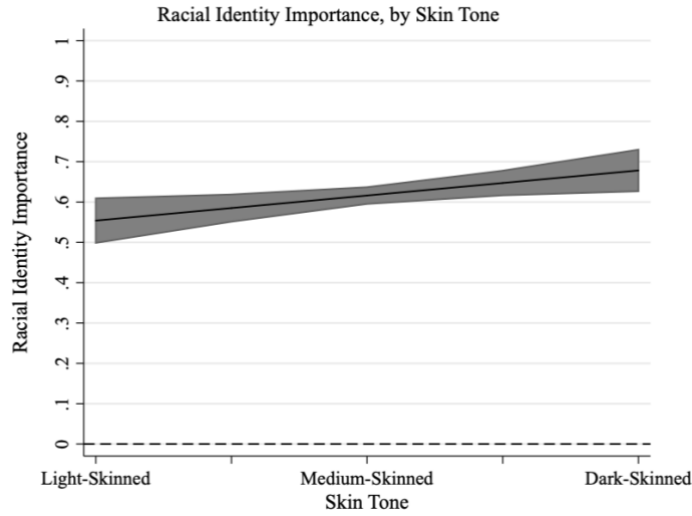
Note: This question wording is distinct from that used in the ANES. The NSAL asks ""Being a Black person is a large part of how I think of myself." This model includes 95% confidence intervals and controls for gender, age, income, education, partisanship, and (modified) linked fate.

Figure 4.4: Linked Fate & Racial Identity Importance by Skin Tone (ANES 2012)
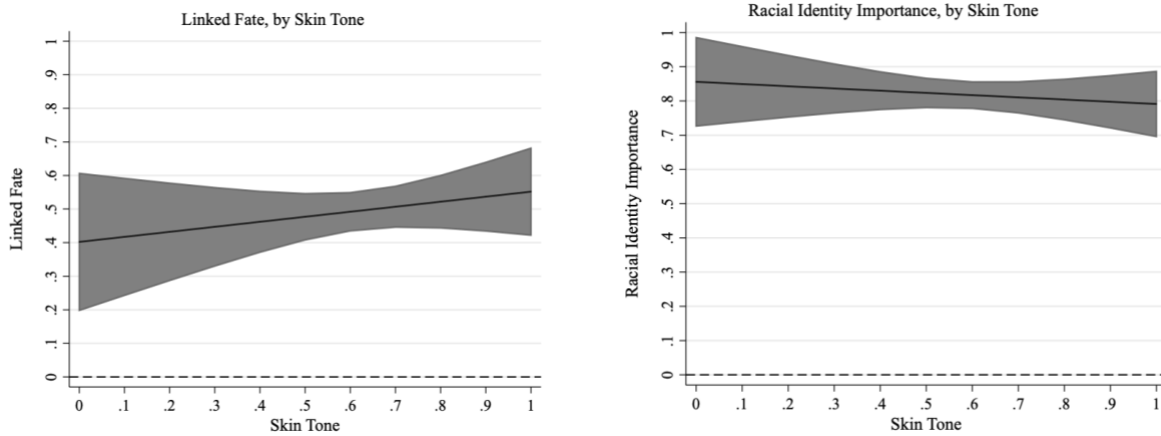
Note: These models include 95% confidence intervals and control for gender, age, income, education, partisanship, ideology, home ownership, unemployment, linked fate, egalitarianism, region, and interviewer's skin tone.

To continue examining this relationship between skin color and racial group attachment, I turn to my original 2016 YouGov survey of skin tone and politics. Here, in addition to the standard linked fate item, there were two additional variations that each participant saw: one swapping out what happens to "Black people" generally with "light skinned Black people" and "dark skinned Black people" in another version. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in either general linked fate or linked fate with lighter-skinned Black people based on participant's skin tone. However, dark-skinned participants were nine percentage points more likely than their light-skinned counterparts to say that what happens to darker-skinned Black people generally will have something to do with what happens in their personal life ($p < .10$). Again, we see some mixed evidence here with respect to the relationship between skin color and sense of linked fate.

Figure 4.5: Linked Fate Measures, by Skin Tone (YouGov)

Note: These models include 95% confidence intervals and control for gender, education, income, age, region, racial group importance, & survey design effects.
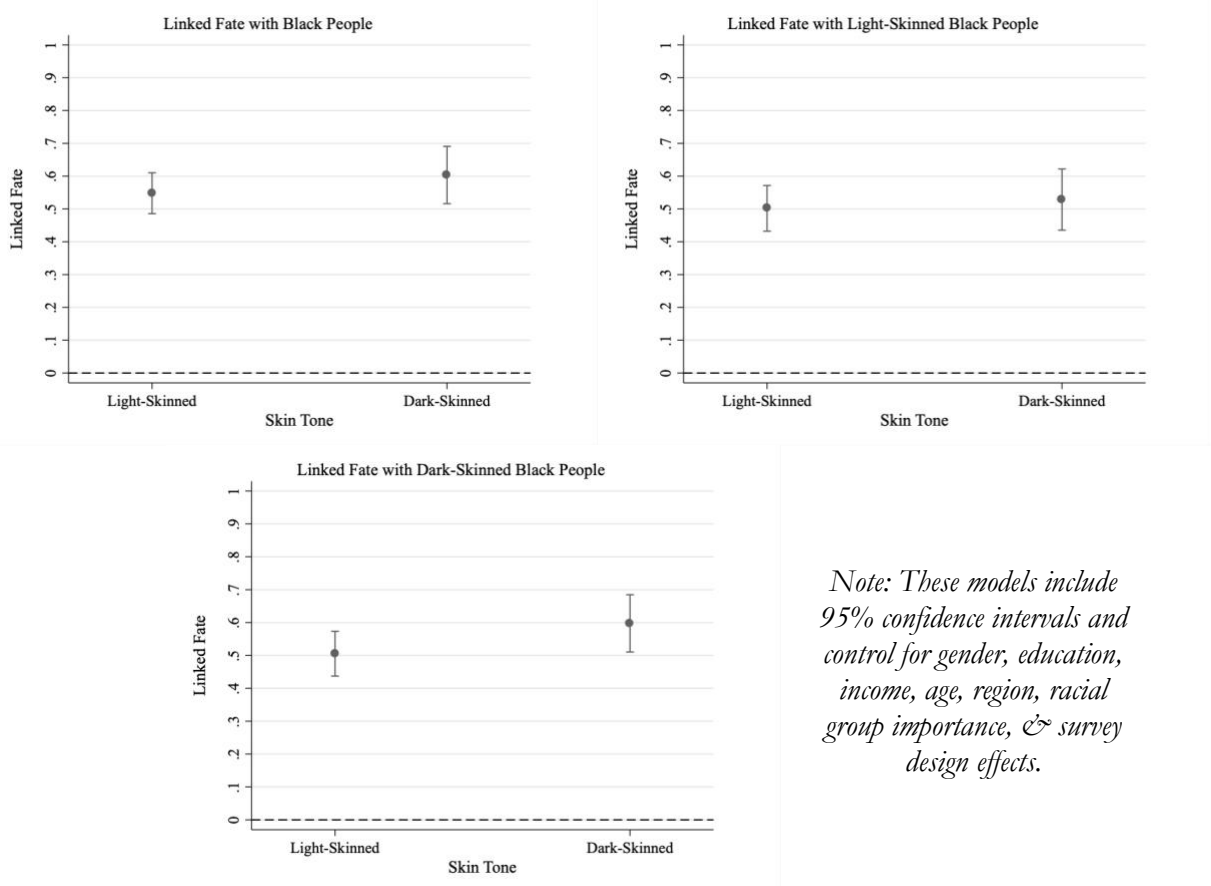
Next, I turn to the 2016 ANES to examine if there are any differences in group attachment by participant's self-reported skin tone in the face-to-face portion of the dataset. There is a significant association between skin tone and linked fate: There is a surprisingly large difference in reported linked fate—47 percentage point—when moving from the lightest- to darkest-skinned African Americans in the sample, even after taking into account standard sociodemographic features. This is equivalent to saying that what happens to Black people generally affects one's own life "not very much" or "some" for light-skinned respondents vs. "a lot" for dark-skinned respondents. In contrast, there is no relationship between interviewer-assessed skin tone and group attachment in the face-to-face sample. With respect to racial identity importance, the relationship trends in a similar direction to the linked fate effect, but there is no relationship between self-assessed skin tone and reported racial identity importance ($p > 0.20$). Again, the evidence here is somewhat mixed but suggests that how one thinks of one's own skin color may be associated with their attachment to the racial group—given that self-assessed skin tone is meaningful while interviewer-assessed skin tone is not.[48]

Figure 4.6: Linked Fate & Racial Identity Importance by Skin Tone (ANES 2016)
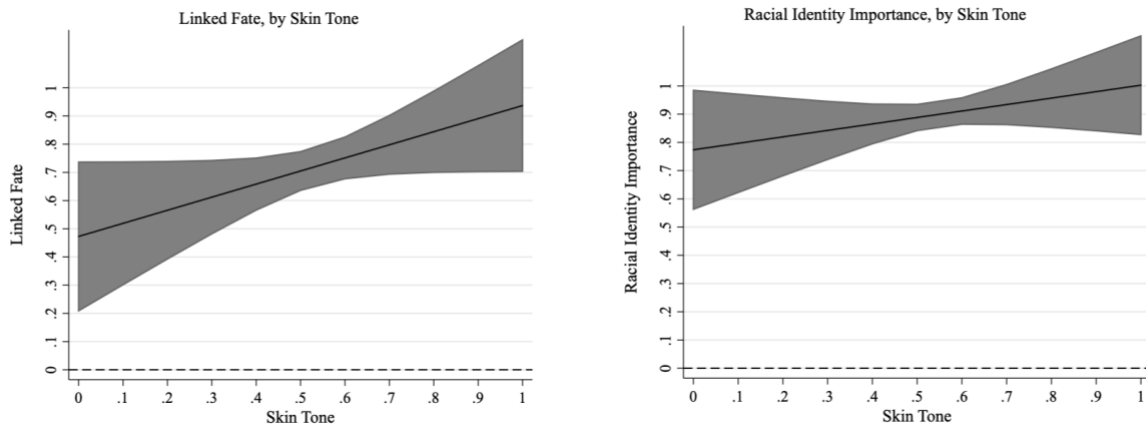
Note: These models include 95% confidence intervals and control for gender, age, income, education, partisanship, ideology, home ownership, unemployment, linked fate, egalitarianism, region, and interviewer's skin tone.

[48] The correlation between self- and interviewer-assessed skin tone in the 2016 ANES Time Series is $r = 0.36$ (n=88). In the web version of the survey, there is no relationship between self-assessed skin tone and racial group attachment.

Finally, I turn to my original 2019 AmeriSpeak survey with over 1,000 African American participants. This survey did not include a measure of linked fate, but did include one standard racial identity importance item: "How important is being Black to your identity?" As shown below, having darker skin is associated with being 18 percentage points more likely to say being Black is important to your identity.

Figure 4.7: Racial Identity Importance by Skin Tone (2019 AmeriSpeak)
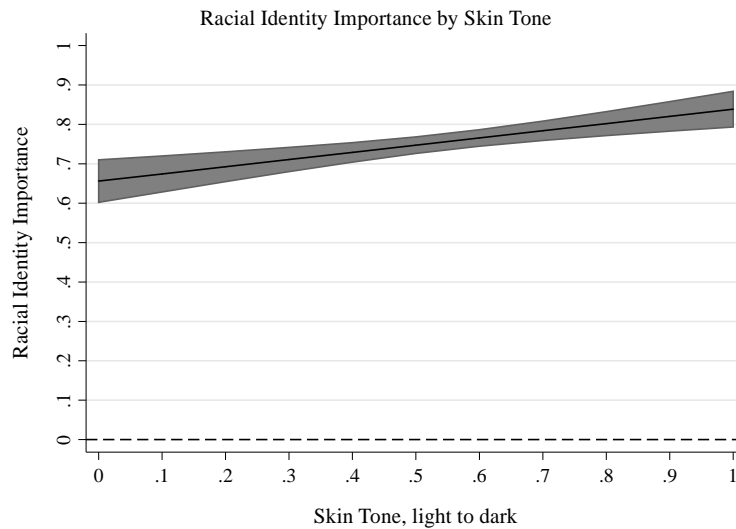
Note: These models include 95% confidence intervals and control for gender, education, region, income, age, partisanship, ideology, homeownership, unemployment, and survey design effects.

Overall, we have seen evidence that skin tone is significantly related to some measures of group attachment. In two cases (the 2001-2003 NSAL and the 2019 AmeriSpeak survey) we uncovered a significant relationship between skin tone and racial identity importance. Additionally, darker skin was associated with stronger feelings of linked fate to the Black racial group in another survey (ANES 2016). And, I find that while the standard measure of linked fate is not significantly associated with skin tone, darker-skinned Blacks are significantly more likely to say that what happens to dark-skinned Black people generally will affect their own life (2016 YouGov). This is not the case, however, on the

equivalent linked fate question asked about connection to light-skinned folks—even among light-skinned respondents. While the results are mixed across items and surveys, there is some evidence of a relationship between attachment to the racial group and skin tone. Importantly, we would not expect to find any relationship if the skin color paradox held true, given that racial cohesion is expected to supersede any color-based concerns. Accordingly, this provides some suggestive evidence against the existence of the skin color paradox in the 21st Century.

POLICY PREFERENCES

Now that we have seen there is some relationship between skin tone and racial group attachment, we turn to how skin tone may be meaningful in other domains. First, we will explore how skin tone may influence policy preferences. Given the enduring legacy of colorism in society, we might expect a divergence in political preferences between lighter- and darker-skinned people. Given the conversations with interview participants, Black people appear to view the world through both race- and color-based lenses. Participants were aware of some political ramifications of skin tone as well—e.g., with respect to jobs, policing, and racialized policies. Thus, we might expect policy preferences to diverge based on color in domains related to education or employment given research showing darker-skinned African Americans are more disadvantaged in these areas. Alternatively, if the skin color paradox holds true, we would not expect to see any differences in preferences among African Americans regardless of skin tone. To put these competing expectations to the test, I will first look to the NSAL and ANES data, then supplement with the qualitative data.

To begin, let's turn chronologically to the oldest dataset: the 2001-2003 NSAL. The NSAL included a handful of political preference items. These items include the following: affirmative action in the workplace, belief that the government should provide jobs for everyone interested, belief that

the rich should pay more taxes than the poor, support for reparations, and belief the government should make every effort to improve the position of Black people in the US.

Two of these five items are significantly associated with skin tone: affirmative action and government guaranteed jobs. Those with darker skin are seven percentage points more likely to say they support affirmative action for Blacks in hiring and job promotion ($p < .03$). Additionally, on the question about the guaranteed jobs—"The government should provide a job for everyone who wants one"—darker-skinned Black people are about eight percentage points more likely than their lighter-skinned counterparts to support this idea ($p < .07$). There was no relationship between skin tone and attitudes towards taxing the rich, support for reparations, or government making efforts to improve the position of Black people in society, however. This may be, in part, due to a ceiling effect given that support for each of these items is above 70 percent across the board.

Figure 4.8: Support for Affirmative Action & Guaranteed Jobs by Skin Color (NSAL)
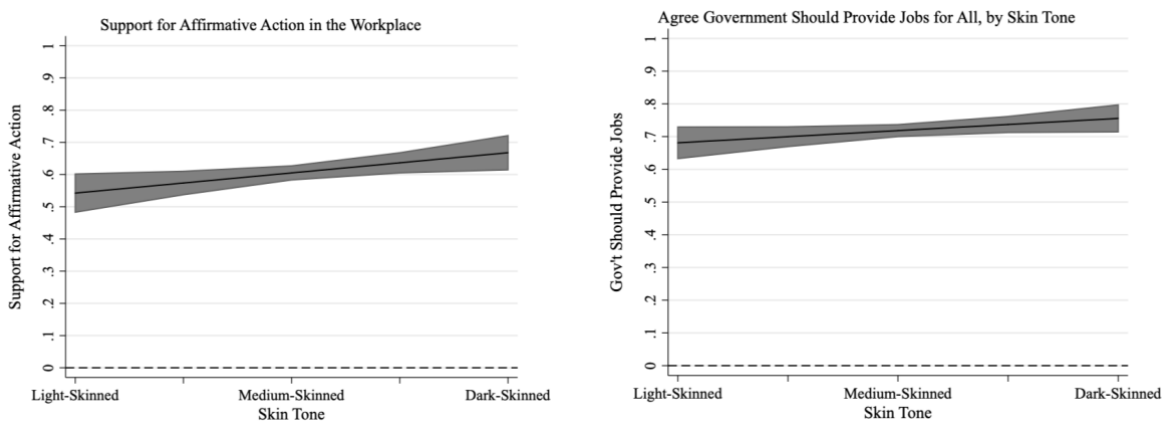
Note: These models include 95% confidence intervals and control for gender, party, age, income, education, (modified) linked fate, and racial group importance

From the NSAL data alone, we have seen some evidence that skin tone is related to political preferences of African Americans. On two of five potential policy-relevant items, there is a significant association with skin tone. Clearly then, this data from the early 2000s cuts against the skin color paradox. What about evidence from the 2010s?

I turn next to the 2012 ANES to continue examining the relationship between skin tone and policy preferences. Similar to the NSAL, the 2012 ANES data reveals that skin color and policy preferences are related in several of the expected domains (Table 4.1). Darker-skinned Black people are significantly more liberal than their lighter-skinned counterparts on a number of items. For example, darker-skinned people are 14 percentage points more supportive of increasing spending on welfare ($p < .01$) and 15 percentage points more supportive of increasing government-provided services ($p < .002$) than their lighter-skinned counterparts. Moreover, darker-skinned individuals are 15 percentage points more supportive of affirmative action in the workplace ($p < .05$) and 16 percentage points more supportive of the government reducing income inequality ($p < .003$).

With respect to policing and criminal justice, skin tone is significantly associated with support for the death penalty. Unlike the previous items, this is only significant with the continuous measure of skin tone: moving from the lightest to darkest end of the color spectrum is associated with a 31 percentage point decrease in support for the death penalty ($p < .06$). When collapsing across the three-categories of skin tone, however, the size of this differences shrinks to about 12 percentage points ($p < .18$). Additionally, darker-skinned individuals are 12 percentage points more supportive of increasing spending on police and law enforcement than lighter-skinned folks ($p < .14$). However, this effect weakens when collapsing to the three-category color variable ($p < .24$).

There is one case where darker-skinned individuals are somewhat more conservative than their light-skinned counterparts: immigration. Though it does not reach standard levels of statistical significance, it is close: darker-skinned participants are 11 percentage points more likely to believe immigrants take away Americans' jobs relative to their lighter skinned counterparts ($p < .12$). Given that darker-skinned individuals have higher levels of unemployment and may face more difficulty in securing jobs, it is not surprising that darker-skinned Black people would be more likely to believe that immigrants are more likely to take away jobs than their lighter-skinned Black counterparts.

Consistent with this hypothesis of economic competition, we can examine if skin color relates to other issues of immigration. Consistently, I find that darker-skinned Black people do not take a more negative view towards immigrants or immigration more broadly. For example, there is no relationship between color and feeling thermometers on attitudes toward illegal immigrants ($p > 0.50$). In fact, darker-skinned Black people are eight percentage points more inclined to say that levels of immigration should be *increased* ($p < .05$) and feel nine percentage points warmer towards Latinos as a group on the 101-point feeling thermometer ($p < .04$) than their lighter-skinned counterparts. In combination, this suggests that while darker-skinned Black people generally take more favorable views towards immigrants and Latinos, fears surrounding economic competition may be informing their negative views on the item specifically related to immigrants and jobs.[49] This is consistent with recent work suggesting that Black people are ambivalent towards immigration, in part because it serves as a reminder of their status in the racial hierarchy (N. M. Carter 2019; Greer 2013).

Figure 4.9: Support for the Death Penalty, by Skin Tone
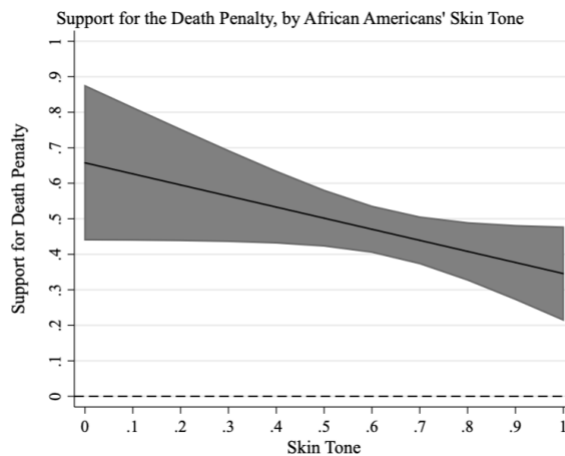
Note: This model includes 95% confidence intervals and controls for gender, age, income, education, home ownership, employment status, partisanship, ideology, region, egalitarianism, interviewer's skin tone, linked fate, and racial group importance.

[49] These findings could be developed more deeply in combination with Wilkinson, Garand, and Dunaway's (2015) evidence. Using 2010 CCES data, the authors find lighter-skinned Black people are less likely to perceive commonality with Latinos—which is consistent with my results above. What is inconsistent, however, is that they also find lighter-skinned Blacks perceive greater employment competition with Latinos than those with dark skin. This is worthy of further exploration and adjudication.

Overall, these double-digit differences between light- and dark-skinned Black people in the 2012 ANES are substantively large, and provide strong evidence of a link between skin color and politics. Across several domains—especially those where colorism is known to have its strongest effects throughout history—I have demonstrated that skin tone is significantly related to politics.

But, how do these differences based on skin tone map onto the well-documented and expansive racial divide in public opinion (e.g., Jackman 1994; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Schuman et al. 1997; Sigelman and Welch 1991; Tate 1994)? Is it the case that these differences between lighter- and darker-skinned African Americans are inconsequential given the racial divide between Black and White respondents overall? In order to answer this question, I estimate the marginal effects of skin tone among Black people (in the right panel of Figure 4.10) relative to the effect of partisanship among Whites (in the left panel of Figure 4.10). This provides a useful glimpse into the long-studied opinion divide between Black and White Americans using comparable model estimations.

Even after taking into account standard controls for each group—gender, age, income, education, home ownership, employment status, ideology, region, egalitarianism, and interviewer's skin tone, as well as linked fate and racial group importance for the Black subsample only—there is frequently little difference in opinions between light-skinned African Americans relative to White Democrats. On welfare spending ($p > .15$), affirmative action ($p > .15$), support for government reducing income inequality in society ($p > .15$), and immigrants taking jobs from Americans ($p > .15$), light-skinned Black people share indistinguishable views from White Democrats. In one other case—support for increasing spending on government services—light-skinned Black people are 12 percentage points more likely to support this spending increase than White Democrats ($p < .01$). In contrast, with respect to the death penalty, light-skinned Blacks are actually 23 percentage points *more supportive* of the death penalty than White Democrats ($p < .03$) and darker-skinned Black people.

Taken together, this evidence suggests a powerful relationship between skin color and Black people's political views. As demonstrated above, the skin tone divide is strong enough in some cases to mute the deep-seated racial divide in public opinion with lighter-skinned Black folks' policy preferences being interchangeable with White Democrats' preferences. Put differently, darker-skinned Black people hold substantively distinct—and typically more liberal policy positions—than both White Democrats and lighter-skinned Black people. On only one item (immigrants' likelihood to take away jobs) are darker-skinned Black respondents more conservative in their views than both White Democrats and lighter-skinned Black people. As I demonstrated above, however, these more conservative attitudes among darker-skinned people are limited to this domain of job competition, but not feeling towards immigrants or immigration levels broadly. All in all, this link between skin color and political views hold even after accounting for the socioeconomic factors we know to be linked to skin color—education, income, homeownership, and employment status. This suggests that something beyond these socioeconomic factors or corresponding lived experience may explain the relationship between skin tone and policy preferences—perhaps a color-based identity. This possibility will be explored further in the next chapter.

Table 4.1A: African American Policy Preferences in the 2012 ANES by Skin Tone

MULTIVARIATE MODEL WITH DEMOGRAPHIC PLUS ATTITUDINAL CONTROLS

	Increasing Welfare Spending	Spending on Government Services	Affirmative Action	Reduce Income Inequality	Immigrants Take Jobs	Death Penalty	Increase Police Spending
Skin Tone	0.227**	0.220**	0.312**	0.285***	0.184+	-0.312*	0.123+
	(0.105)	(0.095)	(0.141)	(0.108)	(0.140)	(0.164)	(0.082)
Linked Fate	0.073	0.008	0.143*	-0.069	0.165**	0.093	-0.048
	(0.053)	(0.052)	(0.074)	(0.054)	(0.070)	(0.092)	(0.040)
Racial Group Importance	0.219***	0.046	-0.097	0.088	-0.054	-0.003	0.069
	(0.074)	(0.061)	(0.084)	(0.080)	(0.091)	(0.115)	(0.060)
Female	-0.080*	0.048	0.007	0.042	0.061	-0.009	0.054*
	(0.041)	(0.035)	(0.056)	(0.048)	(0.056)	(0.071)	(0.032)
Interviewer's Skin Tone	0.189**	0.282***	-0.014	-0.054	-0.010	-0.069	0.026
	(0.085)	(0.068)	(0.102)	(0.094)	(0.098)	(0.122)	(0.063)
Constant	0.139	0.463***	-0.008	0.164	0.636***	0.629***	0.523***
	(0.137)	(0.144)	(0.195)	(0.188)	(0.207)	(0.227)	(0.137)
Observations	5,748	5,676	5,752	5,752	5,757	5,723	5,753
R-squared	0.172	0.140	0.118	0.097	0.121	0.080	0.151
N_sub	375	303	379	379	384	350	380

Notes: + p ≤ .15; * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001 for two-tailed test. All variables coded 0-1. Results are based on weighted data and incorporating survey design effects. Additional controls included in the model but not shown are age, income, education, home ownership, egalitarianism, ideology, party identification, region, and unemployment. Skin color variable is a continuous ten-point scale assessed by the respondent's interviewer.

Table 4.1B: BIVARIATE MODEL (2012 ANES)

	Increasing Welfare Spending	Spending on Government Services	Affirmative Action	Reduce Income Inequality	Immigrants Take Jobs	Death Penalty	Increase Police Spending
Skin Tone	0.148	0.070	0.282**	0.249**	0.126	-0.213	-0.075
	(0.093)	(0.084)	(0.125)	(0.101)	(0.127)	(0.154)	(0.079)
Constant	0.419***	0.615***	0.369***	0.438***	0.416***	0.615***	0.725***
	(0.062)	(0.048)	(0.079)	(0.065)	(0.082)	(0.106)	(0.047)
Observations	5,829	5,759	5,862	5,834	5,841	5,834	5,835
R-squared	0.010	0.003	0.022	0.024	0.005	0.010	0.004
N_sub	456	386	489	461	468	461	462

Table 4.1C: MULTIVARIATE MODEL WITH ONLY DEMOGRAPHIC CONTROLS (2012 ANES)

	Increasing Welfare Spending	Spending on Government Services	Affirmative Action	Reduce Income Inequality	Immigrants Take Jobs	Death Penalty	Increase Police Spending
Skin Tone	0.186*	0.192**	0.393***	0.226**	0.237	-0.216	0.083
	(0.112)	(0.096)	(0.142)	(0.109)	(0.147)	(0.164)	(0.083)
Female	-0.076*	0.071**	-0.030	0.038	0.046	-0.002	0.062*
	(0.045)	(0.036)	(0.054)	(0.048)	(0.054)	(0.067)	(0.032)
Age	0.010	-0.002	0.006	-0.002	-0.009	-0.010	0.015**
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.007)
Income	-0.123	-0.021	0.109	-0.177*	-0.003	0.012	0.133*
	(0.113)	(0.072)	(0.109)	(0.102)	(0.112)	(0.144)	(0.081)
Education	-0.041	-0.143*	0.276***	-0.015	-0.300***	0.216*	-0.075
	(0.110)	(0.077)	(0.090)	(0.103)	(0.090)	(0.121)	(0.064)
Home Owner	-0.003	0.021	-0.063	-0.011	0.048	0.086	0.045
	(0.053)	(0.045)	(0.059)	(0.050)	(0.061)	(0.063)	(0.040)
Democrat	0.110	0.189*	0.188	0.143	0.032	-0.097	0.053
	(0.086)	(0.103)	(0.133)	(0.107)	(0.128)	(0.151)	(0.084)
Liberal	0.073	0.061	0.046	-0.073	-0.053	0.016	-0.135
	(0.094)	(0.078)	(0.104)	(0.106)	(0.094)	(0.122)	(0.083)
South	-0.045	-0.048	0.069	-0.041	0.015	-0.007	-0.012
	(0.043)	(0.036)	(0.049)	(0.048)	(0.049)	(0.059)	(0.033)
Constant	0.317**	0.416***	-0.081	0.430***	0.481***	0.620***	0.505***
	(0.132)	(0.107)	(0.169)	(0.166)	(0.161)	(0.212)	(0.115)
Observations	5,765	5,704	5,789	5,770	5,777	5,758	5,771
R-squared	0.079	0.099	0.083	0.058	0.072	0.054	0.121
N_sub	392	331	416	397	404	385	398

**Figure 4.10: Policy Preferences in the 2012 ANES,
Comparing Opinions of Whites (by Partisanship) & Blacks (by Skin Tone)**
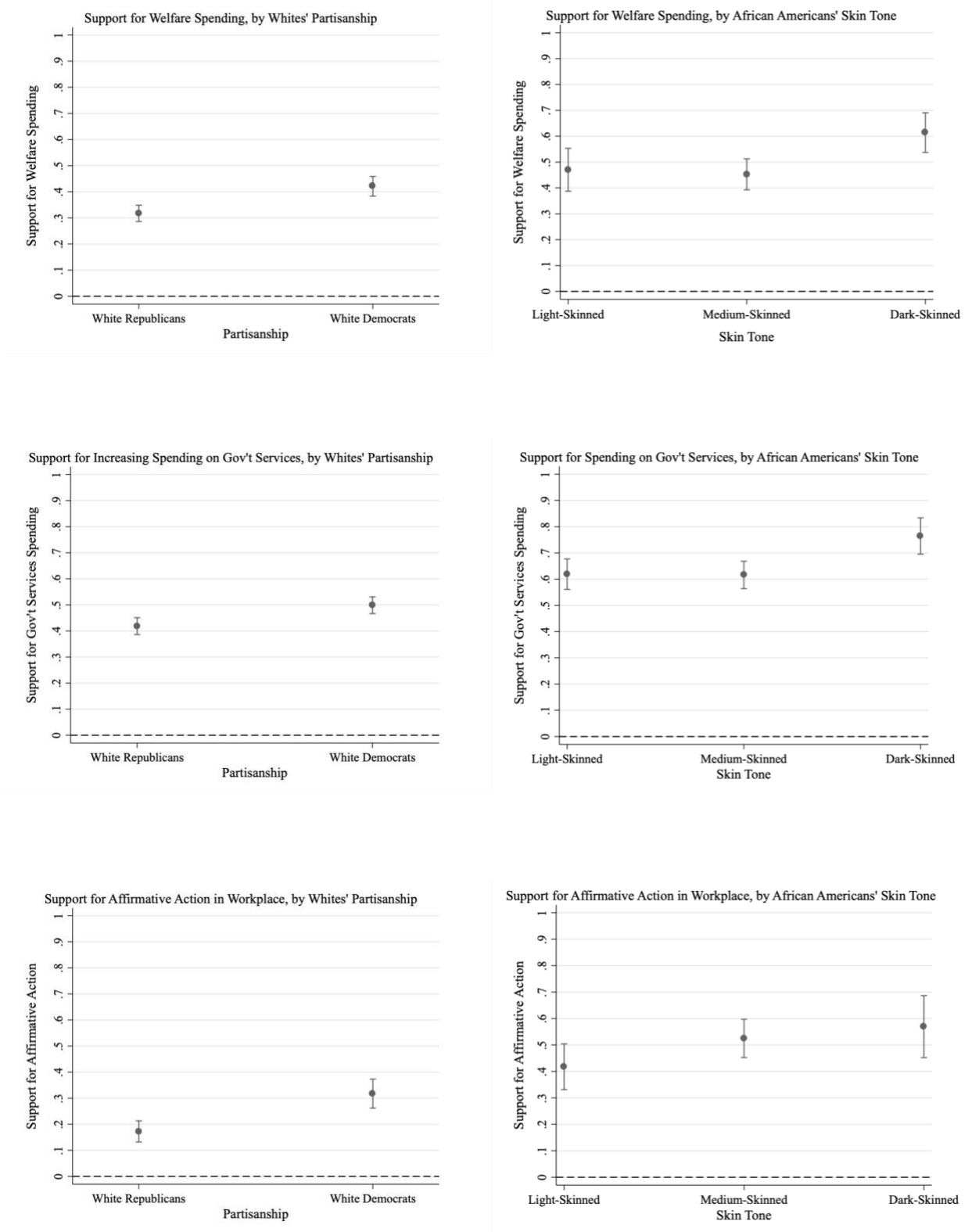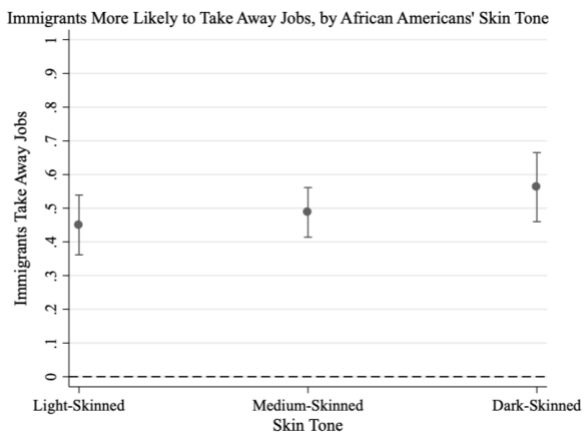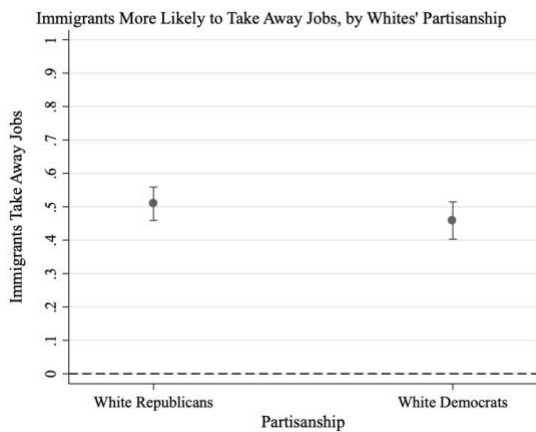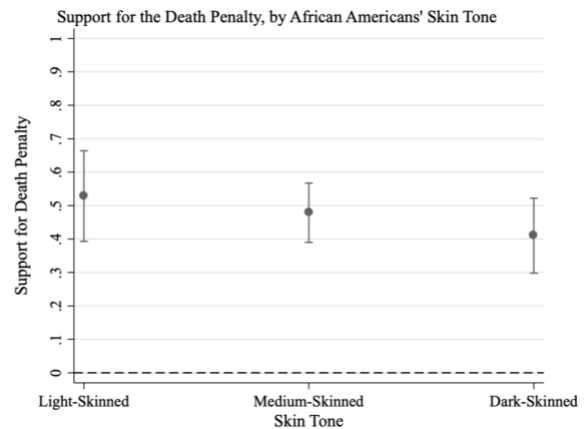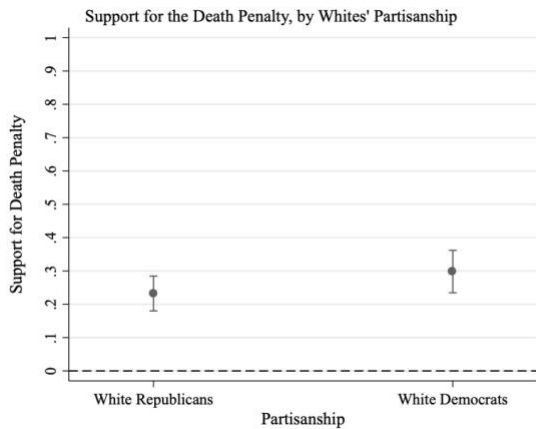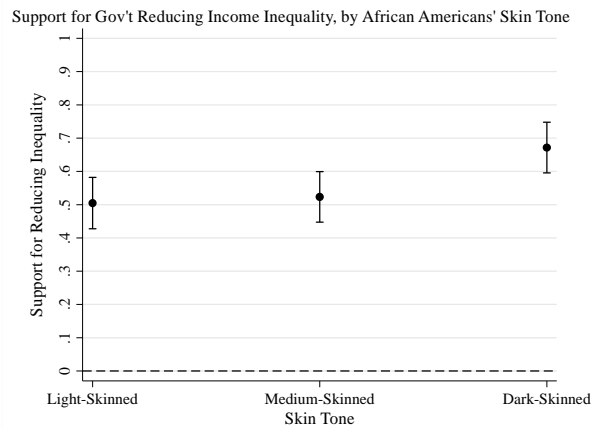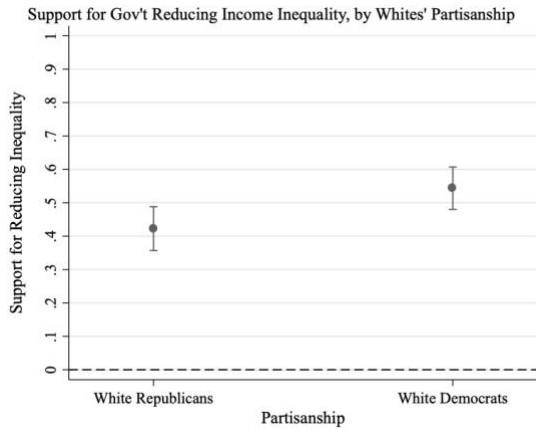
Support for Gov't Reducing Income Inequality, by Whites' Partisanship

Support for Gov't Reducing Income Inequality, by African Americans' Skin Tone

Support for the Death Penalty, by Whites' Partisanship

Support for the Death Penalty, by African Americans' Skin Tone

Immigrants More Likely to Take Away Jobs, by Whites' Partisanship

Immigrants More Likely to Take Away Jobs, by African Americans' Skin Tone

Note: These models include 95% confidence intervals and control for gender, age, income, education, home ownership, employment status, partisanship, ideology, region, egalitarianism, and interviewer's skin tone. The models in the right panels (i.e., the analyses with African Americans participants), also control for linked fate and racial group importance.

PERCEPTIONS OF SKIN TONE & COLORISM ON RACE-BASED POLICIES

As I just demonstrated, the 2012 ANES data provides a stark contrast to the skin color paradox. Across a number of items and domains—from government spending to education to immigration and criminal justice—we see a robust relationship between skin tone and political preferences. These are large substantive effects, frequently in the double digits, and these differences even minimize the well-documented racial divides between Black and White public opinion.

What the survey data cannot give us insight into, however, is *how* Black people talk about some of these policies using their own words. Turning back to the in-depth interviews, participants discussed how they felt typically racialized policies—like welfare or affirmative action—are also connected to skin color and gender. These comments reflect an understanding of the intersecting nature of race, skin tone, and gender, specifically with respect to the portrayals of these policy beneficiaries in the media and society at large. Moreover, these insights reveal a clearly political linkage between Black people's perceptions of skin tone and social positioning in society.

Interview participants were asked what comes to mind for most people when they think of beneficiaries of racialized policies like welfare and affirmative action. In addition to tropes of the so-called "welfare queen" as a Black woman (e.g., Gilens 1996, 1999), many participants had even more nuanced perceptions of who is typically portrayed as benefiting from welfare programs. Specifically, they believe the typical welfare beneficiary is portrayed not just as a Black woman, but a *dark-skinned* Black woman (see Table 4.2).

Among interviewees who described a specific mental image of a welfare beneficiary (n=45), the majority—a whopping 73 percent—offered that dark-skinned Black people were portrayed as most likely to benefit from welfare policies (n=33). Of those who referenced dark-skinned people as the most frequently depicted image of a welfare beneficiary, 17 of the 33 participants—52 percent—

invoked dark-skinned Black *women* explicitly. In fact, this was the most frequent response combining across skin tone and gender.

> Yeah there's literally people called "welfare queens." And in the media, it's been associated as poor, dark-skinned women with several kids who don't really do anything. Which speaks to a bunch of different stereotypes. –19 year old, dark-skinned woman

> Look at the picture Reagan had of the criminal. He was a dark-skinned man. And then the whole welfare queen. … They think of a mammy with a bunch of kids. –50 year old, light-skinned woman

> I think [for a welfare] recipient they think of a medium to dark complexion, overweight, Black woman with a whole bunch of kids. That's what I think when I think about welfare. I think when they think about affirmative action, they think about a dark complexion black man who is undereducated. –39 year old, medium-skinned man

The remaining participants made some reference to Black people generally, with no specific skin tone or gender provided (n=9), or to Black women with no reference to skin tone (n=3).

The mental image of affirmative action beneficiaries is murkier than it was in the case of welfare (Table 4.2). This may not be surprising for two main reasons: (1) stronger media attention given specifically to welfare and portrayals of welfare beneficiaries, and (2) all of the interviews took place in Michigan, where race and gender-based affirmative action has been illegal since 2006. Still, more than half of my interview participants reported what groups of people were perceived as the typical beneficiaries (n=35). Fourteen participants—equivalent to 40 percent of those who had a mental image—felt that the typical portrayal of affirmative action recipients invoked Black people generally, regardless of race or skin tone. An additional 34 percent of participants invoked darker-skinned Black people broadly as the most likely beneficiaries (n=12). There was not as strong of a gendered component associated with affirmative action, but in a handful of cases participants invoked light-skinned women (n=1), light-skinned men (n=1), or dark-skinned men (n=2). Interestingly, no one mentioned dark-skinned women as the prototype of affirmative action.

I think when you think of someone that's either on welfare or benefiting because of affirmative action, the person you see in your mind is a darker skinned Black person—or a poor dark-skinned Black person regardless of which one you're thinking about. … I think they kind of tie into each other. When they think of someone on welfare, they think of a poor Black person. And when they think of someone who's benefiting from affirmative action, they think of that person's child from welfare that somehow just made it. And kind of—Yeah, that they're not deserving of either of the two [policies]. –26 year old, light-skinned woman

Table 4.2: Linkage between Race, Color, & Gender on Two Racialized Policies in In-Depth Interviews		
Group Mentioned	**Welfare**	**Affirmative Action**
Dark-Skinned Women	17	0
Light-Skinned Women	0	1
Dark-Skinned Men	0	2
Light-Skinned Men	0	1
Dark-Skinned People (no gender)	16	12
Light-Skinned People (no gender)	0	5
Black People (no skin tone or gender)	9	14
Black Women Generally (no skin tone)	3	0
Black Men Generally (no skin tone)	0	0
Didn't answer directly / Unsure	22	32
Total	**67**	**67**

Altogether, the interview data provides a different perspective surrounding the topic of racialized policies. That is, while the survey data demonstrates that *policy preferences* diverge between lighter- and darker-skinned Black folks, the interview conversations provide insight into societal portrayals of *who benefits* from some of these policies. The latter point is important to investigate in its own right because even if policy preferences do not vary by skin tone, perceptions of who stands to benefit from racialized policies may still vary based on characteristics such as skin tone. Indeed, we find that in addition to political preferences diverging by skin color, societal portrayals of welfare and affirmative action recipients also vary by skin tone—as well as gender, in the case of welfare. Taken together, these data signal the important linkage between skin color and politics writ large.

Overall, across the last two sections, I have highlighted a sizable connection between skin tone and policy preferences among African Americans in the expected domains. Indeed, we saw that the differences based on skin tone frequently shrink the chasm in public opinion between Black and White people. The qualitative data adds breadth to this connection between skin tone and policies by suggesting that media portrayals connected with mainstream images of policy beneficiaries—especially with respect to welfare, but also for affirmative action—have a color component that is more fine-grained than race. This is an important and novel finding with respect to our understanding of racialized policies, adding an even more layered view to traditional studies of racialized policies and the media (Edsall and Edsall 1991; Gilens 1996, 1999; Mendelberg 2001).

PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

Next, I turn toward two other important dimensions of politics: political participation and representation. Here, I will turn back to the survey data to explore different aspects of participation. My in-depth interviews will also be used to provide insight into perceptions of Black political candidates and elected officials based on skin tone. Essentially, in this section I ask the following: How far does the impact of skin tone spread in the political realm?

To begin looking at the association between skin tone and participation, I return to the 2001-2003 NSAL. This included two measures of voting—separately for recent local and national elections—as well as experience working for a campaign or contacting public officials. Here, there were no significant differences with respect to the latter items on campaigns or contacting officials. Still, dark-skinned people were 14 percentage points more likely to report they voted in a local or state election in the past year ($p < .05$). This result is somewhat surprising given that lower-resourced individuals might be less participatory. However, given the suggestive evidence that darker-skinned

people may hold higher levels of racial group consciousness (Harvey et al. 2005; Ostfeld and Yadon 2020), it may be that darker-skinned individuals are more likely to mobilize or feel more empowered to make a difference on behalf of their communities at the local level.

Figure 4.11: Voted in a Local or State Election within the Past Year, by Skin Tone
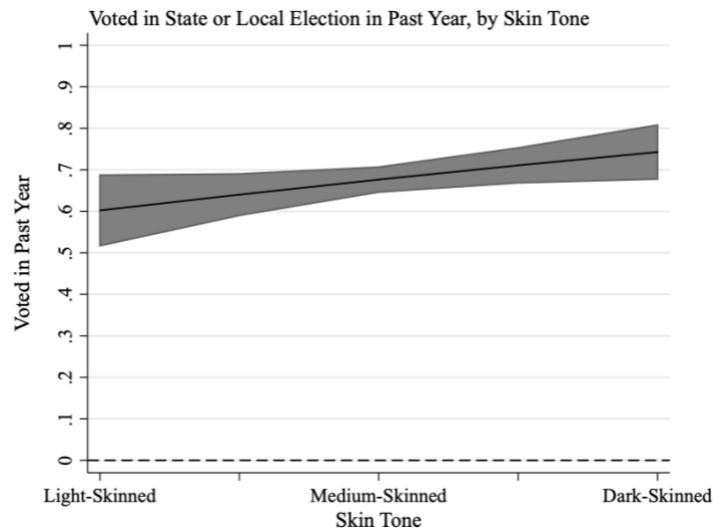
Note: This model includes 95% confidence intervals and control for gender, partisanship, age, income, education, racial group importance, and linked fate.

With respect to participation in the 2000 Presidential election, there were no differences in reported turnout. This is likely not surprising given an emphasis on the importance of voting within the Black community (Anoll 2018). Still, there was some difference with respect to vote choice. Darker-skinned Black people were significantly more likely to report voting for Al Gore than their lighter-skinned counterparts ($p < .10$). While both light- and dark-skinned Black people voted for Gore at above 90 percent, the difference between 92 percent support among lighter individuals vs. 98 percent support among darker individuals remains statistically significant. Substantively, this overwhelming support for Gore across the color spectrum exhibits the well-demonstrated attachment of African Americans to the Democratic Party (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989; Dawson 1994). Still, it is worth noting that this may reveal the potential for lighter-skinned Black people to be somewhat more likely to move away from the Democratic Presidential Candidate in support of the Republican

Presidential Candidate while darker-skinned individuals maintain near unanimous support for the

Democratic Candidate.

Figure 4.12: Democratic Vote Choice in the 2000 Presidential Election, by Skin Tone

Voted Gore in 2000 Presidential Election, by Skin Tone
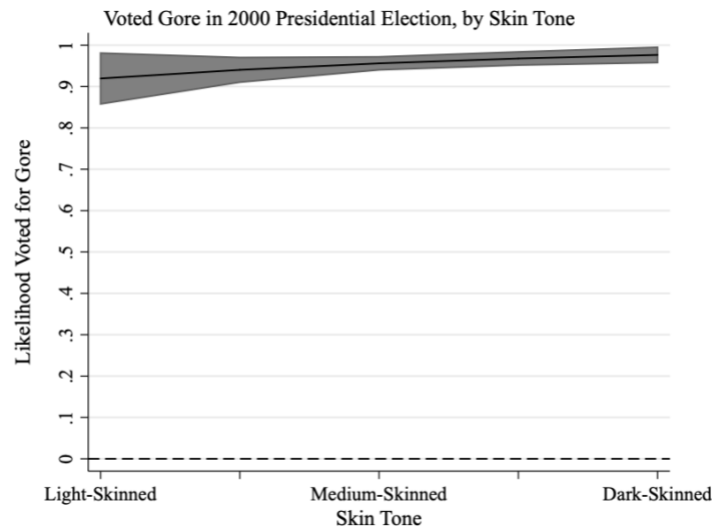
Note: This model includes 95% confidence intervals and controls for gender, partisanship, age, income, education, racial group importance, and linked fate.

The NSAL also included two other participation items. The first asked if participants have

contacted an elected official about a concern or problem, and if so, how many times. The second

asked if the participant has ever worked for a political party or campaigned for a candidate. Neither

of these items reveal significant differences based on skin tone. Thus, the primary effects of skin color

on participation are limited to participation in local elections and Democratic vote share.

Do we find similar effects of skin tone on political participation in the 2012 ANES? There is

suggestive evidence of a similar, but weaker pattern with respect to Democratic vote share in the 2012

Presidential Election. There was overwhelming support for President Obama among African

Americans in the 2012 election. While about 97 percent of light-skinned Black people reported voting

for Obama in 2012, 100 percent of dark-skinned Black people did ($p < .15$). This is a marginal effect,

both statistically and substantively, given that we are running up against unanimous support for

President Obama among African Americans. Still, the data suggest a similar pattern in 2000 and 2012 whereby lighter-skinned individuals may be marginally more willing to vote for a candidate outside of the Democratic ticket. In addition, there are no significant differences based on skin tone with respect to feelings towards the two major Presidential candidates in the 2012 election or in feelings towards the two major parties.

Although the 2012 ANES does not contain many participation items, the 2016 ANES and 2016 ANES Pilot Study included some additional measures of political participation. In the 2016 Pilot, 16 percent of Black respondents report having participated in a march or rally in the last four years. Likewise, darker-skinned Black respondents are seven times more likely to have reported participating in a march or rally relative to their light skinned counterparts ($p < .05$). This suggests that there is indeed a political action component related to skin tone beyond even differing policy attitudes. The pilot data suggests that African Americans with darker skin may be moved towards political action in a way that their lighter counterparts are not. Consistent with the findings on group consciousness and even voting at the local level, this may suggest that darker-skinned people may be more willing to mobilize and engage in different forms of politics.

Figure 4.13: Likelihood of Having Participated in a Protest, March, Rally, or Demonstration in the Last Four Years, by Skin Tone (ANES 2016 Pilot)
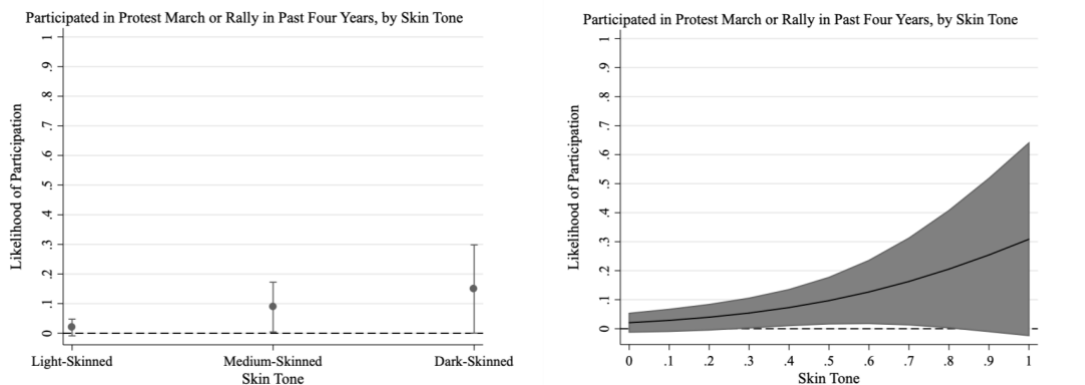
This model includes 95% confidence intervals. The results are significant both for light- vs. medium-skinned (p<.05), as well as light- vs. dark-skinned (p<.003)

In the 2016 ANES Time Series, the question wording for the protest item was altered to reduce the time period referenced: shortening the window for participation from the past four years to only in the last year. In this dataset, only six percent of the total Black sample reported having protested—and only four percent in the face-to-face sample. These small numbers make it nearly impossible to detect effects. Indeed, the relationship between skin tone and protest does not hold using the revised question wording as it did in the 2016 Pilot.

The 2016 ANES included several other participation related items—e.g., related to donations to social, political, or religious organizations, as well as signing a petition or posting about politics on social media. There is a significant association between skin tone and participation on a few of these items, including donation to religious organizations and posting about politics on social media. The latter is only significant in the web sample,[50] where 33 percent of participants reported having posted about politics on social media. Interestingly, even after controlling for internet access, light-skinned Black respondents are significantly more likely to report posting about politics on social media ($p <$ .07). Moving from the lightest to darkest end of the skin color scale is associated with a 41 percentage point decrease in likelihood of posting about politics online.

This finding suggests an interesting divide in the *types* of participation that Black folks are willing to engage in based on skin color. The previous evidence suggested that darker-skinned Black people may be more likely to turn out in local elections or to have participated in protest in the past several years, yet this evidence suggests lighter-skinned people are more willing to discuss politics online. This may signal a divide in the types of mobilization efforts or resources allocated to certain issues within the Black community. This question is worthy of further exploration in future studies.

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[50] In contrast, in the face-to-face sample, only 16 percent of Black participants (n=16) report that they posted something political on social media—half of the number who reported doing so in the web sample. Here, again, there are no detectable associations with skin tone.

Figure 4.14: Likelihood of Posting about Politics Online, by Skin Tone (ANES 2016)
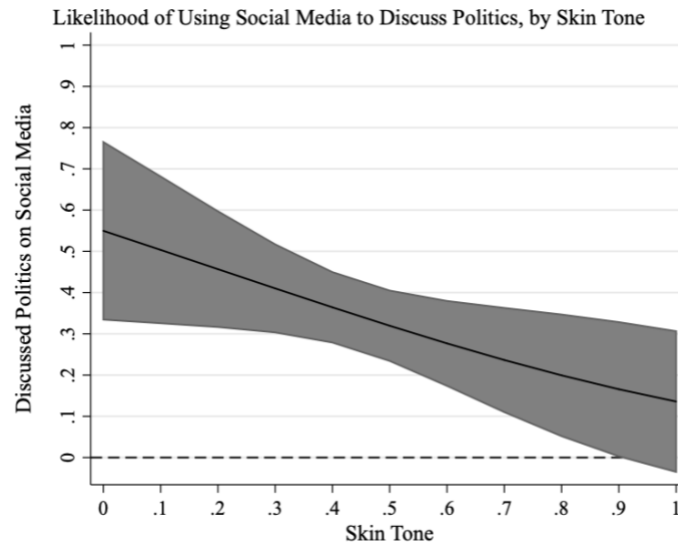
Likelihood of Using Social Media to Discuss Politics, by Skin Tone

This model includes 95% confidence intervals and controls for gender, age, income, education, home ownership, partisanship, ideology, unemployment, linked fate, racial identity, egalitarianism, and living in the South.

What about warmth towards political candidates and the major political parties? Does skin tone play a role in influencing feelings towards these people and groups?

There are no differences in feelings towards President Obama based on self-assessed skin tone. However, there are large differences with respect to evaluations of 2016 Democratic Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton—even after taking into account standard factors like partisanship, ideology, linked fate, and racial group importance. Moving from the lightest to darkest ends of the skin tone spectrum is equivalent to a 46-percentage point increase in feelings of warmth towards Clinton ($p <$ .001). This is equivalent to light-skinned individuals being close to neutral towards Clinton, while dark-skinned Black respondents are at the warmest possible point on the scale. This may signal that, yet again, darker-skinned individuals feel more positively towards the Democratic Presidential Candidate. Interestingly, with respect to feeling thermometer evaluations of Trump, darker-skinned Black respondents are close to the "neutral" mid-point of the scale, while lighter-skinned Black respondents are as cold as possible ($p <$ .002). Lighter-skinned Black people appear to hold more negative evaluations of both major party Presidential candidates relative to their darker-skinned counterparts.

Figure 4.15: Feeling Thermometer Evaluations of 2016 Presidential Candidates, by Skin Tone (ANES 2016)
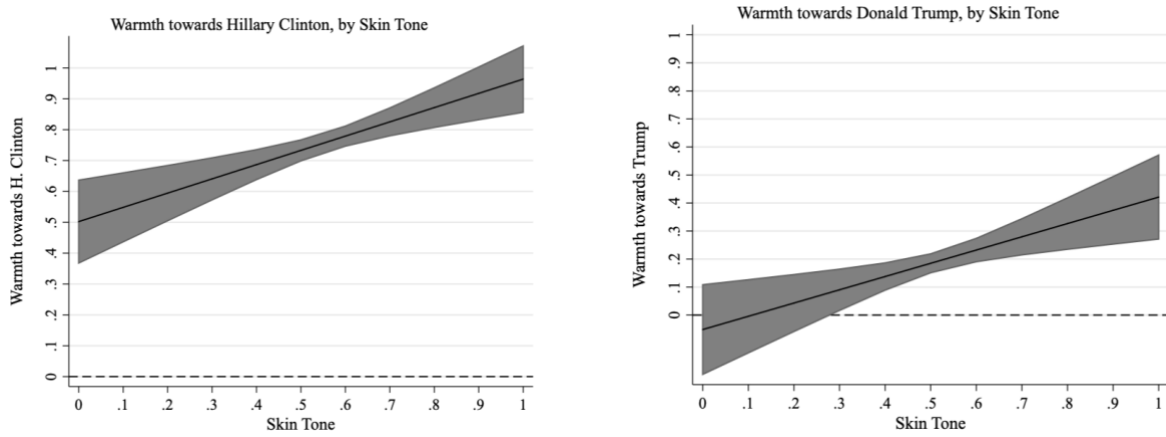
This model includes 95% confidence intervals and controls for gender, age, income, education, home ownership, partisanship, ideology, unemployment, linked fate, racial identity, egalitarianism, South, and interviewer skin tone.

In contrast to the NSAL and 2012 ANES, there is no indication that skin tone is associated with vote choice in the 2016 Presidential election. As in previous cycles, there are very small numbers of Black individuals who did not report voting for the Democratic Presidential Candidate. Given overwhelming support for the Democratic Presidential candidates combined with the context of the 2016 election—in which candidate Trump was more racially inflammatory than other recent Republican candidates (Bobo 2017; Jardina 2019)—this is likely not surprising.

Taken together, the survey evidence with respect to skin tone and political participation reveals some interesting relationships. Darker-skinned Black people are significantly more likely to report participating in a recent state or local election. Similarly, in both the 2000 and 2012 Presidential elections, lighter-skinned Black people appear somewhat more willing than their darker-skinned counterparts to vote for non-Democratic candidates—but there is still overwhelming support for Democrats among Black folks overall. Additionally, darker-skinned individuals are more likely to report participating in political rallies or marches in the past four years relative to their lighter-skinned

counterparts, but are simultaneously *less* likely to report posting about the 2016 Presidential election on social media.

In my conversations with Black folks in Michigan, how do they talk about political candidates and representation? Although there were no differences in the 2012 or 2016 ANES data with respect to skin tone and warmth towards President Obama, my interview participants expressed that he had to work hard to send signals to the Black community. Specifically, many participants highlighted the importance of a candidate's spouse and family in sending signals about the politician. For example, in asking how people perceived President Obama given his non-traditional background and being raised primarily by his White family members, a whopping 79 percent invoke his immediate family as lending credence to his dedication to the Black community. Specifically, his marriage to Michelle Obama— and, relatedly but mentioned with less frequency, having two black daughters—added credibility to his Blackness. Likewise, there was emphasis placed on the notion that Michelle Obama is "unmistakably" Black. Some participants expressed that this stands in contrast to President Obama himself and sends a meaningful signal about how he perceives himself and his relation to the Black community.

> The thing that sealed the deal was him marrying Michelle Obama, because she is a Black woman unmistakably. … It didn't matter that he was raised by his White mother, but it mattered that he embraced his Blackness. And that's a pet peeve in the Black community: that [there are] Black people who do not accept their Black identity.… It mattered to a lot of people that he was married to a darker-skinned Black woman. A woman who [laughs] didn't look like she has a drop of White in her. So, he embraced his Blackness by marrying a woman who you can't mistake for not being Black. And people resonated with that. –27 year old, medium-skinned woman

> He was more Black [because he married Michelle]. You know? … That's what made him, was her. –60 year old, light-skinned woman

Many participants note that Obama likely could have married a White woman or a lighter-skinned Black woman if he had wanted. Many participants feel that this would have changed how people assessed Candidate or President Obama. A total of 19 participants said him marrying a lighter-

skinned woman definitely would have influenced perceptions of him, with another 18 saying it

possibly or probably could have been a point of discussion—a total of 58 percent of those participants

who were asked.51 Many note that this might have made Black people more skeptical of him, while

simultaneously allowing White people to find him more appealing.

> I think that the Black community would have had more trouble embracing him [if he married a light-skinned woman]. I don't think he would have been put on the pedestal the way he has been. But, I also feel then for Whites, he may have been a more *appealing* candidate for those individuals who were uncertain of having a Black first family. –23 year old, medium-skinned woman

> I think they would have perceived that he was trying to appeal more to the White community. But even though she was Black, but she at quick glance could look like a White person, or just not a Black person, I think people would say "Oh he's kind of ashamed of who he is." –26 year old, light-skinned woman

Instead, Obama chose a prototypically Black woman as his spouse. Overall, 79 percent of participants

believe that their marriage signaled his personal embrace of his Blackness and provided him with a

greater sense of racial authenticity within the Black community. Looking forward, some even

acknowledged that they were not sure what lies ahead for future Black Presidential candidates:

> I'm always curious to know how skin color is gonna play a role. Even looking at our next kind of choice for the next, or potentially next, Black president—you have Cory Booker and [Kamala Harris]… She's also pretty light-skinned. And President Obama is also pretty light-skinned. And I don't know if that image of a dark-skinned President, besides in film, is something that's likely to come up anytime soon. –20 year old, medium-skinned man

Additionally, participants expressed little surprise at the idea that political representation, even

by African Americans, often does not reflect the diversity within the Black community. These

comments came out after the interviewer provided a brief summary of research demonstrating a lack

of darker-skinned politicians at the state and national level (Hochschild and Weaver 2007). This came

as a disappointment but not a shock to many people. Nearly all of the people I spoke with—60 of 67

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51 Three participants of the 67 total were not asked this question.

interview participants—were not surprised to hear that research shows Black elected officials at the

state and national level are disproportionately light-skinned. Further, 40 of my 67 interview

participants referenced White voters as the explanation for why we have not seen many darker-skinned

politicians in state and national political offices. Many believed this is due to Whites perceiving light-

skinned people as less threatening, more competent, and generally more acceptable.

> I feel like the darker-skinned politicians I can think of—with the exception of a few—tend to be Republicans. So I'm thinking of [Tim Scott], Herman Cain, and they're all so like—Even if we're looking at some of our judiciary folks, then I definitely think darker skin plays a role. But I don't feel like it's always representative of Black people. At least in terms of conservatives or Republicans. Because it's never really—I feel like at that point it's kind of like you have to sell-out or just have to be anti-Black people to get ahead in politics as a conservative or Republican. –20 year old, medium-skinned man

> Like with Michelle Obama because of her dark skin, she was called—You could see the depictions of her with the afro and the machine gun and eating watermelon. All the stereotypes come through with a darker skin person. … It would be great if we could have a broader spectrum of representation. 'Cause people relate to what they see. –53 year old, light-skinned man

Some participants even suggest that the lack of color diversity in representation may contribute

to different policy agendas or outcomes:

> The definition of democracy [is] "ruled by the people." And if people with all these different experiences aren't represented, then what kind of democracy is it? … I would hope if there's more representation that more progressive issues would be successful and come to fruition. –47 year old, dark-skinned man

> I also feel like maybe, whether these people want to acknowledge it or not, some of the progress in terms of their own careers has probably been to White people who want them to succeed. … I think we're at a point where we can't just look at Cory Booker and say he's representative of all Black people. Especially because of the way things like colorism—It operates. Yeah. … I know this is kind of getting away from Black people, but even the lack of Asian representation is a huge thing. But you can't say "Oh well there's a Chinese guy there, so cool, be happy." And then the Korean kids and Vietnamese kids are like, "Well what do we have?" So I don't think that's something we should settle for. Especially because, again, our experiences are tied to all these different things, whether it be skin color, hair texture, etc. –32 year old, dark-skinned man

All in all, the interview data suggests that perceptions of Black candidates and political elite

agendas are perceived in a very nuanced way, including around skin tone. This has important

implications for our understanding of political participation and evaluation of political elites. The conversations suggest that not only is the appearance of a candidate important in evaluating them, but also the composition of their family. In the case of President Obama, his marriage to Michelle was seen as a positive asset that signaled to the Black community that he allied himself with the racial group. This is consistent with work by other scholars on the influence of Michelle Obama in the Black community (Gillespie 2019; Walters 2007). Participants reported that this may not have been accomplished as easily had his wife been someone less prototypically African American, especially given his own appearance and background. Furthermore, the vast majority of interviewees were not surprised to hear that most high-level elected officials are light skinned. But, many did believe this was problematic and some even felt this had implications for policy agendas and goals.

ADDRESSING COLORISM THROUGH POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS

The evidence throughout this and the previous chapter demonstrate that the continued importance of skin color in society is evident through both Black people's perceptions of society, political views, and an accumulation of social scientific evidence. Skin tone is associated with not only socioeconomic outcomes, but also policy preferences and even evaluations of politicians.

The qualitative evidence from the last chapter demonstrated that interview participants' organic mentions of skin color were frequently related to relationships, perceived aggressiveness (and its corresponding implications for police brutality), job and promotion opportunities, as well as other attributes like intelligence, education, likelihood for success, and trustworthiness. Participants frequently provided personal examples that related to these domains, but does this translate to an understanding of systematic disparities and differential treatment in society? That is, do people seem generally aware of the broad level impacts of skin tone in society?

To examine how people think about the effect of skin color and colorism in society on a large scale, the interviewer briefly described some of research on colorism toward the end of the interview. These comments referenced research demonstrating health, employment, wealth, and criminal sentencing disparities that leave darker-skinned people worse off than their lighter-skinned Black counterparts. The reactions to this information were striking: 20 of 64 interview participants[52] said that this information was well-known, even if not discussed openly.

> Oh, they're known. But they don't care about it. … They're known! But it's never brought to the forefront. –49 year old, dark-skinned woman

> We're very aware of that. I think people don't know what to do with that information or challenge policies. And some of us don't vote [laughs], so those policies are not going to change. –30 year old, light-skinned woman

In contrast, 38 participants of the 64—a whopping 59 percent—said that these systematic differences are *not* noticed by most people. Some portion said that although these color-based disparities are not understood as being systematic, these differences would not be surprising to many people given their personal experiences. That is, given one's experiences with colorism, learning that it occurs on a large-scale across domains would not be especially surprising to many people.

> I think people look at it as being Black. I don't hear a lot of that conversation about like—When you see on TV the Black males that are being abused by police officers, you notice that they are of the darker complexion. [But] no one says anything like that. –59 year old, medium-skinned woman

> Some of the [people] that are dark skin probably see the difference in being mistreated and the prejudice of the fear or have a better concern. … I think it should be brought up. 'Cause if we don't make it matter for us, then the people that are doing it don't see nothing wrong with it. –43 year old, light-skinned woman

An additional six participants responded with mixed messages regarding how well-known the impacts of colorism are on a mass level. Several of these participants mentioned that it depends on

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[52] Of the 67 total interview participants, two did not clearly provide an answer to the question when prompted and one was not asked this question explicitly.

the context—e.g., perhaps these systematic disparities are well-known in specific domains like policing or health outcomes, but not as much with respect to employment or in a cumulative sense. In their comments, these participants wavered between saying they were not aware to saying that this is something that many people know:

> I had no idea. You learn something new every day. … I mean nothing should be based on complexion. People getting more [jail] time, some getting better jobs—It shouldn't [matter], but that's the world we live in. … Yeah I just think people are either becoming immune to it and it's getting swept under the rug. They're definitely aware of it. –47 year old, light-skinned man

These types of comments may seem like response inconsistency on their face, but it also speaks to the tension surrounding colorism's effects. That is, these comments seem to represent the real-time processing of information relayed about societal differences that one may have previously thought were happening on a smaller scale—i.e., at the personal vs. societal level. In part, this likely speaks to a lack of explicit discussion of the pernicious effects of colorism on the national level. People that fall into this category seem to suggest that while there is widespread recognition of colorism being meaningful in society dating back centuries, the full scope is not yet well-understood.

Now that I have thoroughly established that most people in my study are aware of the effects of colorism and the implications for socioeconomic status and power in society, the next step is understanding reactions to potential solutions. If we know colorism persists in society, what types of solutions might we take to reduce its effects? Consequently, a final set of questions asked participants about support for potential remedies to colorism. Namely, how supportive they felt of potential policies or social movements that might bring attention to this problem in society and ultimately reduce the effects of colorism.

First, I asked participants whether policies should be made (or more strongly enforced) to address color-based discrimination. Many people reported that they had never considered this. After considering this idea, a resounding 58 percent of all interviewees reported that they *would not support*

policies focused on reducing color-based inequities (n=38 of 66).[53] The reasoning behind this opposition varied.

Some participants felt that such policies would simply not be effective (n=6).

> The only reason why I think that would be ineffective is because who's going to uphold it? The same people who are basically the reason why we need to have it in the first place. And so, I think, unfortunately—I don't feel like putting policies in place would be any change. –32 year old, medium-skinned woman

Some people felt that issues related to skin tone should just be included in other policies aimed at achieving equality rather than receiving distinct recognition (n=10).

> I don't think enough has happened on a basic level, just like racially and socioeconomically and even gender, just all these different levels. It's hard for me to even conceptualize what would that look like? I mean like how do we make policies based on skin color? Can't we just make policies that are equal and inclusive? So that we don't even have to go to that extra level. That would be my hope. –27 year old, medium-skinned woman

Still, others felt that color is secondary to race and should take a backseat until problems surrounding racism are resolved (n=9). Of course, this line of thinking is consistent with the notion of a skin color paradox:

> I'm not sure that I think there's a need for it. I think there's race. But skin color? I don't think I see where our situation is that much that there needs to be policies. –55 year old, medium-skinned woman

> Not at all. Because we have bigger problems. Bigger problems. I mean unfortunately it's just the human condition to always hate somebody. –36 year old, light-skinned woman

Others said they thought policies focused on skin tone specifically would do more harm than good, largely because it would put a spotlight on in-group fighting and exacerbate stereotypes about Black people rather than focusing on the real problems of Whites' power and privilege (n=8).

> Wow. I don't think so. … I think it would divide the Black community. And it's divided up enough [laughs]. –59 year old, medium-skinned woman

> No. I don't—[trails off]. But, that's because—I guess it would be more publicity [for colorism]. But it's already got all the publicity that it can get because people think that's important. –23 year old, dark-skinned woman

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[53] There was one participant of the 67 total who was not asked this question related to policies.

A small portion felt that there were already policies that are not adequately enforced, so new policies would be useless (n=3).[54]

> Well, there actually is, I believe, I think. People don't really pay attention to them, until things get blown out of proportion. There is. You can't just—it's like in the workplace, the equal opportunity thing. … I'd say yes there are policies [already in place]. –40 year old, dark-skinned man

Another set of participants wavered in their response to this question about support for policies focused on reducing colorism (n=14). These participants liked the idea in theory, but worried about its practicality. Many people suggested that this type of policy would not be effective and therefore would be a waste of time. Folks in this category wavered as they talked through the idea, but frequently fell back on similar concerns to those who more consistently disapproved.

> I don't know how that would work, because I think that—I don't know that making policies against light-skinned people, not against but like to benefit dark-skinned people specifically. I don't know how that would work. …. I'm hesitating because I'm like, light-skinned Black people are still Black people. They have experiences, some similar to dark-skinned people that have systematically kept them from advancing as well. So, I don't know that I would be comfortable saying, "Yes we should have politics specifically for dark skinned people." Not because I don't think that it's f***ed up that there are these disparities based on color, but because I don't know that's okay to do. –30 year old, medium-skinned woman

The final set of participants (n=14) reported a more steady, unwavering support in favor of such policies related to reducing the effects of skin tone.

> I think so. I mean, any policy on that would be hard to pass, probably. … But I think it's the same as just racial bias. The reason that Black people have so many different shades is because we're not all just from Africa. So, it is still ethnic racism, I guess. So, I think it should be addressed somehow. Yeah. –26 year old, light-skinned woman

> I do. I think they should have policies concerning that. It should be at county, state, it should be—Yeah. In fact, if I had it my way, I would make it mandatory [everywhere]. –58 year old, dark-skinned man

> There should be. But we Black and we don't have no money for lawyers. We got caught either way. –46 year old, light-skinned man

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[54] The remaining participants (n=2) did not provide as detailed of an explanation, but just said they would not support policies centered around skin tone specifically.

Interestingly, many of the participants who expressed unwavering support for policies to address colorism were on the lighter end of the color spectrum themselves: seven of the 14 people who expressed support were lighter-skinned. The remainder were either medium- or dark-skinned. While the survey evidence presented in this chapter so far is centered on how one's own skin tone is related to policy preferences or participation, responses to this question suggest the story is potentially more nuanced. That is, beyond one's own skin tone, there may be another factor related to propensity to support (or oppose) policies related to colorism: one's attachment to a color- or race-based identity. This will be explored further in the next two chapters.

Despite the general unpopularity of policies related to skin tone in my interviews, it is possible that people feel a social or political movement centered on skin tone would be a more appropriate or effective avenue for addressing color-based inequities. Fifty-three percent of all interviewees asked (n=34 of 64)[55] expressed that they would not be in favor of any type of movement centered around skin tone. The substance behind these explanations mirrored similar explanations to the policy question: that it could potentially divide the Black community, that skin tone should be tied up in broader efforts for equality rather than its own movement, that it simply would not be effective, or that it is not a top priority.

> That's scary. … Because what I've seen so far with younger people is that they think it means not embracing the darkness, but hating the light [skinned]. Resenting. Instead of saying "Let's all join together," they say "Leave those people out. We're gonna embrace ourselves." And I don't like that. –50 year old, light-skinned woman

> I think if a movement emerged, I would not be against it. I don't—So I think one response to this could be we don't need any other thing dividing us up more. But I don't think that that's true. I think, probably, our differences make us stronger as a racial group. … I would say that if the movement is supposed to be benefiting darker-skinned Black people, I think that that's what the race-based movements are already addressing. I actually think that that's what people are picturing when they think of Black Lives Matter. That it's combating race issues that are mostly affecting dark-skinned Black people. –26 year old, light-skinned woman

[55] Three participants were not asked the question about social movements. These individuals were not asked because they had given such strong answers to the previous items—in favor of focusing on race and minimizing skin tone differences—that the interviewer felt it was not appropriate to ask another color-focused item.

Twelve interview participants—19 percent of interviewees—had a more mixed reaction to the idea of a movement focused on skin color. Their sentiments and concerns mirrored those who flat-out said they opposed the idea of a movement, similar to the reactions from the policy item.

> I think there's a moral part of me that says yes. Because I know that's a thing. And maybe this is my privilege speaking, but to give up power that you have is – right? – scary. Why would you do that? But I think it also has the potential to split the Black community. The division that would create would be a dangerous thing to do. When I think there are bigger battles to fight, as far as, you know, police brutality and just structural racism in this country in general. –23 year old, medium-skinned woman

That leaves 28 percent of interviewees (n=18) who were supportive of a movement focused on skin tone and addressing colorism. In contrast to many of the previous comments, these individuals often explained that they thought this type of movement would be useful for making progress and uniting the Black community.

> I do think that's needed. Because I know in my generation it's there. I hear the kids talk about it. And I thought to myself "That issue is still not addressed." We never really confronted it. The Black community never really confronted it. –59 year old, medium-skinned woman

> Of course. That wouldn't hurt at all. … Yeah, I think Blacks would have to initiate it. But I think it could have some Whites stand up for it so it could get some recognition and attention. –48 year old, light-skinned man

> I think it would be looked at as equality for everybody. You know? I don't think it's looked at as a separation. –36 year old, medium-skinned man

Overall, just over 20 percent of Black folks offered unwavering support when prompted to give their reactions to potential *policies* to minimize color-based disparities in society. This number rises slightly—closer to 28 percent—when asked about a movement focused on bringing attention to and addressing colorism. Around 20 percent of interviewees expressed some support for either policies or movements, but appeared to waver back and forth in their views. Nearly two-thirds of respondents, however, expressed clear opposition to policy approaches, while just over 50 percent were opposed to a movement. The most frequent explanation was that skin tone should be caught up in other general

policies aimed at achieving equality, that it is secondary to race, or that it would take focus away from the bigger issue of Whites' power and privilege. Thus, although skin color is recognized as being influential and problematic throughout our conversations, there is a hesitancy to try to resolve the problem. In part, there seems to be a resignation that this is just the way things are.

Does this lack of support for bringing attention to colorism—through policies or movements—true in the general population as well? To answer this question, I conducted a survey of African Americans in Summer 2018 using the survey firm Lucid[56] and in early 2019 via AmeriSpeak.[57] In both of these surveys, I included a number of novel measures related to skin tone to expand the breadth with which we understand perceptions of differential treatment, experiences, and opportunities in society as being associated with differentiation based not only on race, but on skin color.[58] These survey items included opinions about how the government should prioritize inequalities based on race vs. color, as well as perceptions of the influence of skin tone in society.

One item in my Lucid survey asked participants whether they thought the government should respond to inequalities based on race and skin tone. For those who said yes (84 percent), they were then asked a follow-up question: How do you think the government should prioritize responding to inequalities based on race and skin color? Their response options were a five-point scale ranging from "focus completely on race" at one end, to "focus equally on race and skin color" in the middle, or "focus completely on skin color" at the opposite end. In contrast to the general sense among my interview participants, I find that nearly 70 percent of survey participants think that there should be

[56] Survey data from the Lucid panel has been shown as comparable to MTurk data (Coppock and McClellan 2017).

[57] This was the largest survey of African Americans run via TESS and using AmeriSpeak's panel as of its fielding in early 2019. The NORC AmeriSpeak panel contains nearly 6,000 African American participants total. While the whole panel is nationally representative, there were difficulties encountered with making the African American subsample consistent with Census estimates. Specifically, gender and education were heavily skewed towards women and higher educated participants. Ultimately, while this is high quality data, it does not map onto Census estimates of African American subgroups. Given these disparities, the survey weights are not employed in my AmeriSpeak analyses.

[58] Inspiration for these items came from my in-depth interviews as well as recent work by Harvey et al. (2017) on creating a scale related to colorism. Indeed, much of the question wording for the item about societal mobility was drawn from Harvey et al.'s work.

equal focus on race and skin color. The remaining 28 percent favor focusing more on race, while only

2.5 percent said skin color should be the focus. This suggests that the majority of people believe that

skin tone should be taken up as part of a broader set of issues (e.g., race) or that a focus on race should

be more explicitly prioritized over skin tone, which is more consistent with my interview data.

Table 4.3: Prioritizing Government Response to Race and Skin Color Inequalities (2018 Lucid)				
	Should government respond to inequalities based on race and skin color?			How should gov't prioritize race vs. skin color inequalities?
Yes	84%		Focus completely on race	12.1%
No	16%		Focus more on race	16.0%
			Focus equally on race and skin color	69.4%
			Focus more on skin color	2.0%
			Focus completely on skin color	0.5%

Table 4.4: Frequencies on Skin Tone Opinion Items (2018 Lucid)				
	How often do you think that black people with darker skin **receive harsher treatment by police** compared to those with lighter skin?	How often do you think that black people with lighter skin are **given better employment opportunities** in our society than those with darker skin?	How often do you think that black people with lighter skin are **treated better** than those with darker skin **by white people** in our society?	How often does skin tone play a part in determining how far someone can make it in society?
Always	30%	17%	17%	17%
Most of the time	41%	34%	32%	30%
About half of the time	14%	24%	22%	22%
Some of the time	12%	19%	31%	24%
Never	3%	6%	8%	8%

The next set of items tap into different dimensions related to skin tone in society that came

forth from my interview data and the body of research across the social sciences. The items—detailed

in Table 4.4 and Table 4.5—deal with police treatment, job opportunities, favorable treatment of

lighter-skinned Black people by Whites, and the importance of skin tone in society. As the frequencies

show, while there are differences in how common differential treatment based on skin tone is in each of these domains, very few people believe that this type of differentiation "never" happens.

Now that we see there is variation on each of these skin tone-centered items, are there differences in opinion based on one's own skin tone? In the Lucid data, skin tone is significantly associated with responses towards each of the four items (Figure 4.16). Darker-skinned Black people are 10 percentage points more likely to agree that police treat darker-skinned people worse than lighter-skinned people ($p < .001$) and that lighter-skinned people get better job opportunities ($p < .001$). Similarly, darker-skinned people are 12 percentage points more likely than their lighter-skinned counterparts to believe that White people treat lighter-skinned people better than darker-skinned people in society ($p < .001$). Finally, darker-skinned respondents are six percentage points more likely to believe skin tone plays an important part in determining how far someone can make it in society ($p < .05$). In addition to these color-based differences, this data reveals another important point: at a baseline level, many light-skinned Black people recognize and acknowledge the existence of colorism—saying that it is frequent for darker-skinned people to receive worse treatment in society.

Figure 4.16: Opinion on Skin Tone Related Items, by Skin Tone (Lucid 2018)
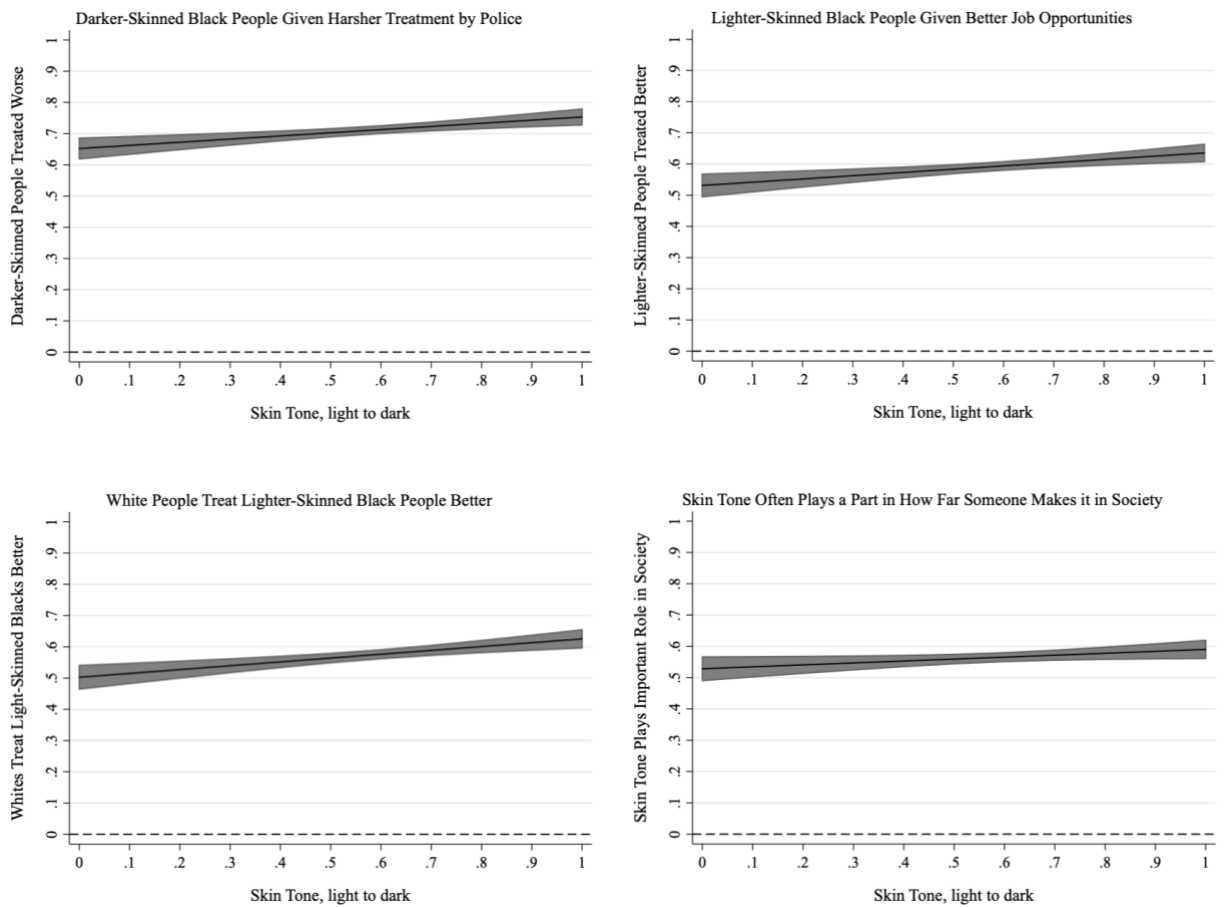
Note: Models include 95% confident intervals and control for age, education, income, partisanship, ideology, gender, region, Hispanic ethnicity, racial group importance, and survey design effects

In the AmeriSpeak data, skin tone is significantly associated with responses to three of the four items also included in Lucid, plus several additional items (Figure 4.17). Darker-skinned people are 10 percentage points more likely to believe that lighter-skinned people get better job opportunities ($p < .03$), nine percentage points more likely to believe darker-skinned people are treated more harshly by police ($p < .06$), and 14 percentage points more likely to believe Whites treat lighter-skinned Black people better than those with darker skin ($p < .002$). Interestingly, however, there is no relationship between skin tone and belief that skin tone determines how far one can make it in society in the

AmeriSpeak data ($p > 0.40$). Again, at a baseline level, both lighter- and darker-skinned Black people recognize disparities based on skin color in society. Darker-skinned people are *more* likely to recognize these differences, but only by about 10 percentage points.

This 2019 AmeriSpeak survey also included several additional items related to skin tone in society and politics broadly. These items begin to reveal some of the nuance around perceptions of the influence of skin tone in society. For example, darker-skinned participants are 13 percentage points less likely than their lighter-skinned counterparts to believe that talking about skin color is simply a distraction from race used to divide the black community ($p < 0.01$). Additionally, darker-skinned people are 15 percentage points less likely than those with light skin to believe that lighter- and darker-skinned Black people are discriminated against equally in society ($p < 0.000$). In contrast, there is no discernible relationship between skin tone and belief that either resolving issues related to race will also resolve issues related to color ($p < 0.18$) or that Black people would be better represented by darker-skinned politicians ($p > 0.60$). Moreover, skin tone is not associated with belief that more darker-skinned people should be in positions of power in society. The lack of relationship to skin tone on these last two items suggest that the conversation about different treatment based on skin color has not yet spilled over explicitly to these domains—power and political representation—in the minds of everyday people.

Overall, this section has presented considerable evidence regarding the widespread recognition of colorism within the Black community across multiple national samples. Setting aside differences between lighter- and darker-skinned individuals, I highlight high levels of agreement regarding the pervasiveness of colorism from jobs to police treatment to treatment by White people. Above and beyond this, I find darker-skinned people to be significantly more inclined to recognize these disparities than light-skinned people. On the whole, though, these concerns are not unknown or appear highly contested among certain subgroups across my datasets. The inclusion of color-specific

survey items reveals important differences in perception of treatment and opportunities in society based on one's own skin tone. This is important because it illustrates important variation in opinion within the Black community that scholars miss by asking questions only about the aggregate racial level.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has covered significant ground in reassessing the skin color paradox from multiple angles. I have moved through a number of politically relevant domains: attachment to the racial group, policy preferences, participation and representation, and opinions about policy prescriptions for colorism. At each turn, we have found evidence of the ways in which skin color is intimately connected with politics from policy preferences to representation to one's connection with Black community. This has implications for both our understanding of the one-drop rule in American society and naïve depictions of African Americans as a politically homogenous group.

In this chapter, I found some evidence of darker skin being linked to stronger attachment to the racial group across different measures in three datasets. Moreover, darker-skinned people were more likely to vote in local elections, as well as somewhat more likely to vote the Democratic candidate in the 2000 and 2012 Presidential elections. Further, there is some evidence that darker-skinned individuals are more likely to have participated in political rallies or marches in the last several years. Further, my interviews reveal that skin tone plays an important role in perceptions of Black political candidates and evaluations of broader political agendas with respect to policy goals.

What about with respect to policy preferences? Here, I illuminated sizable connections between skin tone and policy views for African Americans across multiple domains: education, jobs, and criminal justice. Similarly, I found lighter- and darker-skinned Black people hold significantly

different views of the impact of skin tone—including treatment by police, job opportunities, treatment by White people, and perceived importance of skin tone on social mobility. Further, the sense of who is portrayed in society as the typical recipient of policies like welfare or affirmative action were shown as strongly connected with not just race, but also skin tone and gender.

Even after taking into account sociodemographic factors like income, education, and racial group attachment, skin tone holds a significant relationship with policy preferences. The independent effect of skin tone above and beyond these socioeconomic factors suggests that another factor may be at work here beyond one's lightness or darkness alone. That is, perhaps it is not skin color itself doing much of this work, but one's attachment to their skin tone group—their *skin tone identity*. Although skin color identity is not something typically captured in standard surveys, it is something I measure. Consequently, in the next chapter, I explore how to measure skin tone identity and examine its relation to politics.

Next, please tell us how often you believe the following statements are true…	Black people with darker skin **receive harsher treatment by police** compared to those with lighter skin.	Black people with lighter skin are **given better employment opportunities** in our society than those with darker skin.	Black people with lighter skin are **treated better** than those with darker skin **by White people** in our society.	Skin tone plays a part in determining how far someone can make it in society.	Focusing on issues related to racial discrimination will automatically resolve any issues related to skin tone discrimination.	Talking about skin tone is just a way to divide Black people and keep us from talking about the bigger issue of race.	Black people would be better represented in politics if more dark-skinned Black people were elected.	We need to get more dark-skinned Black people into positions of power in society.	Light-skinned Black people experience just as much discrimination and hardship in society as dark-skinned Black people.
Table 4.5: Frequencies on Skin Tone Opinion Items (2019 AmeriSpeak)									
Always	10%	25%	15%	16%	7%	28%	11%	25%	12%
Most of the time	29%	32%	32%	24%	13%	25%	19%	19%	22%
About half of the time	21%	16%	17%	22%	19%	17%	26%	25%	28%
Some of the time	31%	20%	28%	28%	31%	20%	26%	23%	33%
Never	9%	7%	8%	10%	31%	10%	18%	8%	5%

Figure 4.17: Opinion on Skin Tone Related Items, by Skin Tone (2019 AmeriSpeak)
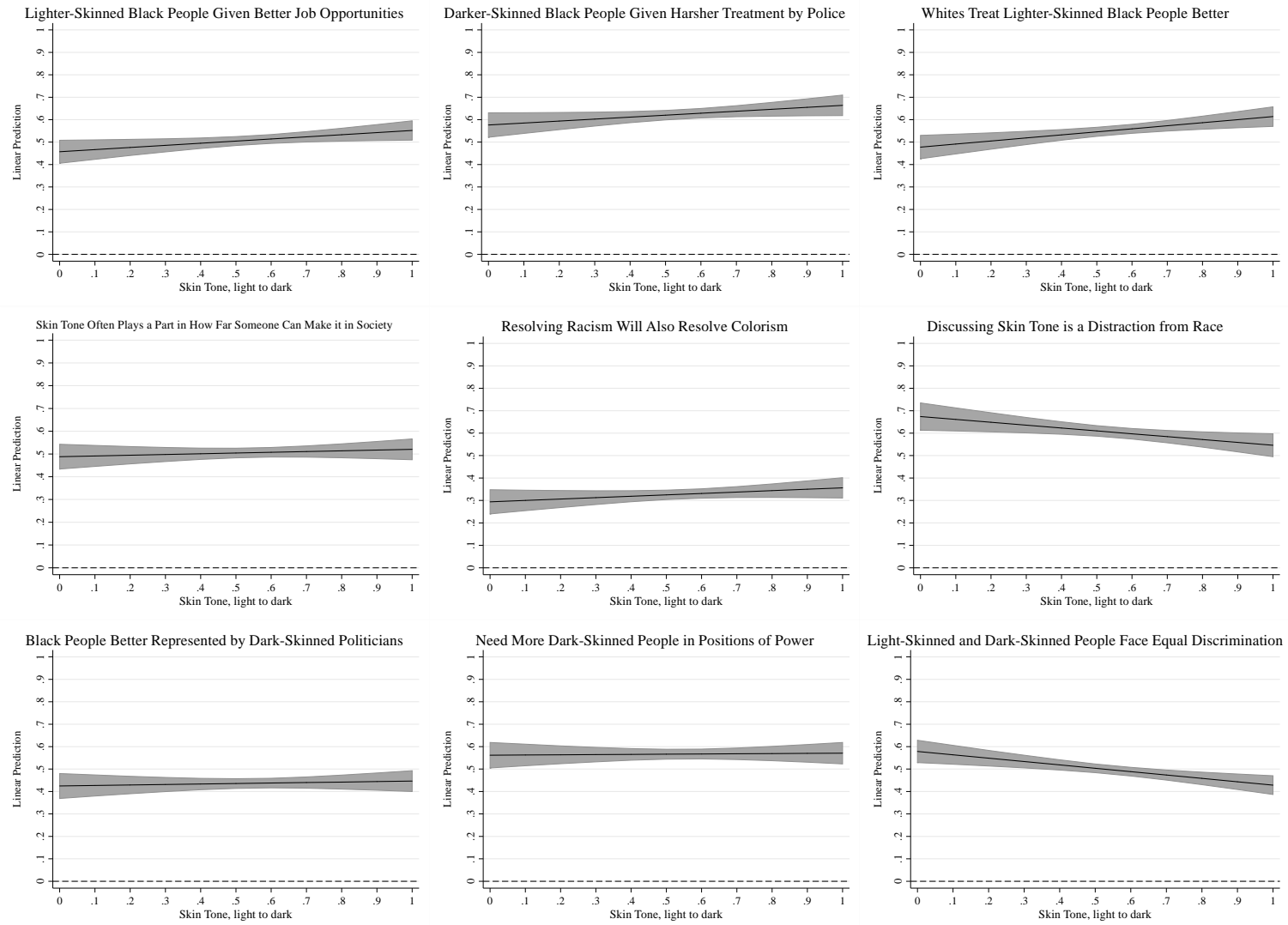
Note: These models include 95% confidence intervals and control for gender, education, region, income, age, partisanship, ideology, homeownership, unemployment, racial group importance, and survey design effects.

Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics from Samples of African Americans

	ANES 2016		ANES 2012	YouGov	Lucid	AmeriSpeak
Survey Mode	FTF	Web	FTF Only	Web Only	Web Only	Web Only
% Female	55%	58%	51%	55%	56%	66%
Age (average)	45 years	43 years	40 – 44 years	44 years	40 years	42 years
Income (average)	$35,000 - $39,000	$30,000 - $34,999	$27,500 - $29,999	$30,000 - $39,999	$40,000 - $44,999	$35,000 - $39,999
Education (average)	Some college	Some college	Some college	Some college	Some college	Some college / Associate's degree
% South	52%	53%	59%	40%	55%	60%
Partisanship	6% Republican 8% Indep. 87% Democrat	8% Republican 13% Indep. 79% Democrat	6% Republican 4% Indep. 90% Democrat	8% Republican 24% Indep. 68% Democrat	11% Republican 12% Indep. 78% Democrat	7% Republican 16% Indep. 77% Democrat
Ideology	36% Conservative 4% Moderate 60% Liberal	25% Conservative 28% Moderate 47% Liberal	45% Conservative 8% Moderate 47% Liberal	26% Conservative 34% Moderate 41% Liberal	19% Conservative 40% Moderate 42% Liberal	12% Conservative 27% Moderate 61% Liberal
Number of observations	108	235	512	577	1,825	1,045

Note: ANES and YouGov samples incorporate survey weights.
Partisanship and ideology calculations combine leaners and weak partisans/ideologues into the broader partisan/ideology category.

CHAPTER 5
Skin Tone Identity

"I think that the same way that privilege operates for a lot of different social identities, skin color privilege operates. I don't think it's any mistake that I've made it to where I am based on my skin color."
– 26 year old, light-skinned woman

"[Dark skinned black people are] undesirables, unattractive, 'dirty', considered to be more an 'animal' than a decent human being, often considered as 'thugs' or violent, dark skin children treated as adults instead of kids by racists or stereotype[s], seen as the lowest form of the Black community, me."
– Dark-skinned MTurk Respondent

Significant differences between Black and White Americans in their views of the world are well-documented, across time and contexts (Dawson 2011; Hutchings 2009; Kinder and Sanders 1996; White et al. 2007). Indeed, these rifts remain even when comparing Black people to only White liberals or White millennials (Hutchings 2009). Further, it is well known that racial identity is heightened for African Americans compared to other racial groups, and influences their political views and voting behavior (Dawson 1994; Harris-Lacewell 2006; Miller et al. 1981; Tate 1994; Walton 1985; White 2007). Dawson (2001) compares the connection between personal experiences and the broader Black community's experiences with subjugation in American society to Converse's (1964) view of ideological thinking: "To use Converse's language, there are a number of linking mechanisms between blacks' social locations, their racial identities, and various (generally unsatisfactory) aspects of their social, economic, cultural and political worlds" (Dawson 2001, p. 65).

What about skin color identity? One might imagine given the historical importance of skin color in the United States (e.g., Drake and Cayton 1945; Frazier 1957; Myrdal 1996[1944]), that skin color could be taken up as a meaningful social identity within the Black community. As we saw in the

previous two chapters, skin color is important in shaping both social and political views of Black people. Similarly, work across the social sciences has explored the ways in which skin color matters within racial groups, finding that in some cases there are larger differences in outcomes between light- and dark-skinned Black people than between Blacks and Whites (e.g., Monk 2015, 2018).

Building from the foundation of colorism research in the social sciences and the demonstration of a systematic relationship between skin tone and politics in the previous chapters, I argue it is worth examining whether skin tone is a source of social identity. If it is, how does skin tone identity matter for politics? I find evidence that skin tone is meaningful to a sizable portion of the Black community—with over 50 percent of Black people across samples and measures reporting their skin color as important to them. Moreover, I find that skin tone identity influences some political attitudes, especially on issues that invoke skin color explicitly. Before evaluating this empirical evidence, I review the components of a social identity.

WHAT MAKES AN IDENTITY?

There is a broad understanding that social identities are multidimensional but have at least two primary components: one cognitive and the other affective (Cameron 2004; Citrin and Sears 2009; Klandermans et al. 2002; Tajfel 1981). This cognitive component requires self-categorization into the group: recognition that Groups X and Y exist, and that one fits into a given group. For example, does someone identify as being either male or female, Black or White, rich or poor, religious or atheist? The identification of these different social groups and categorization of the self into these groups satisfies the cognitive component of social identity.

Another aspect of this cognitive component is the *evaluation* of the groups. This evaluative component involves an understanding that Group X is associated with a given characteristic, attribute,

or stereotype, whereas Group Y has contrasting or distinct associations. Although there is room for greater clarification of this component in the literature on social identity—e.g., on whether evaluations are about the group itself (Hinkle et al. 1989; J. W. Jackson 2002) or comparing one's group to another group (Klandermans et al. 2002)—this moves beyond simply recognizing the existence of groups to understanding perceptions of and stereotypes about various groups.

Finally, the affective component of social identity is regarded as the most meaningful indicator of attachment to the group. As Citrin and Sears (2009) note, "identifying *as* is not the same as identifying *with*" (p. 147). This affective component defines the psychological impact of group membership, concern about the well-being of the group, and even the ways in which perceptions of the group influence perceptions of the self. Further, this affective component is the most powerful predictor of the relationship between in-group attachment to a given identity group and corresponding behavior (Ellemers 1993; Klandermans et al. 2002). Research across different identities reveals that greater political cohesion is frequently associated with holding stronger identities. This includes the likelihood of internalizing normative group beliefs (Conover and Feldman 1984), adopting policy positions that are advantageous to the group (Tate 1994), and even behavioral outcomes like protesting on behalf of the group (Klandermans et al. 2002; Sears et al. 2003; Simon et al. 1998). Overall, the affective component is the most important dimension for determining whether skin tone is its own social identity.

I argue that each of these primary criteria for a skin tone identity is met. Survey and qualitative data support the notion that skin tone is a meaningful social identity to many African Americans, with clear political consequences. To demonstrate this, I will walk through the following pieces of data. First, I will examine the language used by interview participants and survey-takers in the open-ended response portion of a survey. These data demonstrate the ways in which these different criteria of social identities are met with respect to skin tone. Next, I will examine responses to survey items

centering on skin tone identity in two national surveys. Finally, I will examine how skin color identity predicts African Americans' policy preferences. The latter two investigations, in combination, demonstrate that African Americans have an affective attachment to their skin tone identity groups.

But first, I take a step back and ask a broader question: How could skin tone develop into a social identity that is politically meaningful? This was discussed in Chapter 2, but is worth re-emphasizing here before turning to the corresponding analyses that build from this concept.

THE THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF SKIN TONE IDENTITY

Social categories are created only when certain characteristics, be they cultural or physical, are recognized socially (Banton 2011). As discussed in Chapter 2, social interactions shape the concept of the self (e.g., Burke 1980; Stryker 1968, 1980; Stryker and Serpe 1982). One's attachment to certain identities is heavily influenced by interpersonal experiences (Davenport 2016b; Foote 1951). Similar to other identities (like race, gender, or class), I argue that a distinct color-based identity may take shape through societal linkages of darker skin with greater stigmatization, as well as perceptions of greater racial authenticity and closer cultural linkages to the racial group.

The inescapable linkage between race, skin color, status, and power throughout our nation's history leaves room for the development of skin color identification being central to one's self-concept. Drawing from the long history of colorism in the United States (Drake and Cayton 1945; Frazier 1965; Reuter 1918), skin tone has been linked to differential experiences, treatment, and status among people who share a common racial group label. Consistent with this notion, Monk (2015) argues that self-assessed skin tone is a form of "subjective social status." He argues that this perception of status may fluctuate throughout the life course based on one's experiences and treatment by both Black and non-Black people (Monk 2015, p. 412).

This complements other arguments that lighter skin tone serves as a form of social capital—e.g., affording more prestige to those with lighter skin and advantaging them in the domains of the marriage market, education, and income (Hunter 2002, 2005, 2007; Reece 2018). While dark skin is frequently associated with lower social status, it does provide one layer of protection to the racial group—serving as a signal of racial authenticity or legitimacy (Hunter 2005, 2007). Darker skin tone may even serve as a signal to other group members of legitimacy because those with darker skin are known to face more discrimination (Allen et al. 2000; Burge et al. 2020; Ransford 1970)—which may be especially important for Black politicians in the post-Civil Rights Era (Wamble 2018). This is consistent with arguments that "authenticity is the vehicle through which darker-skinned people take back their power from lighter-skinned people" (Hunter 2005, 2007, p. 244). This suggests that more stigmatized groups can take back power by taking pride in that stigmatized identity, knowing that it is counter to "American" norms, standards, and expectations. The claiming of pride in one's skin color could serve as a rejection of the predominant power structure, making it a political statement held especially strongly by those with darker skin.

Similar to the notion that racial identity formation is developed in response to the way society is organized and ruled (Omi and Winant 1994), it is plausible that a distinct skin tone identity could develop given the clear association of color with status and power in society. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, Black people recognize the more negative treatment—historically and in the present day—faced by those with darker skin. For those viewed as being at the bottom of the social hierarchy and are most stigmatized, there may simultaneously be a greater sense of connection to the shared cultural and historical experiences of Black people that help inform one's identity (Cross 1971, 1991; Sellers et al. 1998). This may serve to heighten levels of skin tone identification among those who are most proximate to these experiences.

There is some evidence across the social sciences that skin tone and Black racial consciousness are intertwined. For example, even after taking into account other socioeconomic and demographic factors, darker-skinned Black people have been shown to hold stronger negative attitudes towards Whites and integration (Ransford 1970), report greater affinity with other Black people (K. T. Brown et al. 1997), and have more awareness of racial discrimination and racial pride (Edwards 1973). This evidence suggests two things: one may expect to find differences in some political views based on skin tone (consistent with what I demonstrated in the previous chapters); and, different lived experiences are associated with skin tone and therefore may contribute to the formation of a skin tone identity.

Despite bountiful evidence that colorism is associated with significant socioeconomic disparities, there is virtually no mainstream discussion of this issue in the media or among elites. Consequently, this may result in a perceived exclusion from the goals associated with the broader racial group, similar to what Cohen (1999) discusses with respect to certain subgroups of African Americans during the HIV/AIDS crisis. Because skin tone overlaps with socioeconomic outcomes, political conversations focused on resolving racial disparities may implicitly speak to issues related to colorism.[59] This may make it more difficult for a strong subgroup-based identity formation than if colorism was part of the broader political conversation. Still, the shared cultural, experiential, and historical aspects that lend itself to greater perceived racial authenticity for those with darker skin may be sufficient for a color-based identity to form, at least among this group.

Moreover, the connection between skin tone and status is further solidified through media portrayals of Black people. There are frequently implicit references to skin tone embedded in broader racial stereotyping. For example research shows that negative stereotypes associated with African

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[59] Further, in-group policing and risks of social sanctioning also serve as means by which social pressure to vote or hold attitudes consistent with the racial group are applied (White, Laird, and Allen 2014). However, in the case of skin tone, it is likely that those with darker skin will hold *more liberal* policy positions, and thus concerns of social sanctioning should not be as relevant. Still, there may be attempts to avoid subgroup-based issues like skin tone because they may reveal fractures within the racial group that could become worrisome for group coalitions.

Americans are attributed especially strongly to darker-skinned Black people (Anderson and Cromwell 1977; Maddox and Gray 2002; Monk 2015b). Experimental work also demonstrates that dark-skinned Black criminals elicit stronger feelings of emotional concern compared to light- or medium-skinned Black criminals (T. L. Dixon and Maddox 2005). Although some of this work focuses only on race, skin color may be implicitly invoked as well. For example, survey research demonstrates that White people race-code phrases, like "inner city" (White 2007), and policies such as welfare with Blackness (Gilens 1996, 1999). Content analyses also demonstrate less sympathetic media coverage of the Black poor relative to White poor (Gilens 1996, 1999). An area for fruitful further research could include examinations of how race and skin color intersect in terms of perceived deservingness.

Furthermore, a body of research in psychology suggests that, "people actively produce identity through their talk" (Howard 2000, p. 372). This literature suggests that identity is created, shifted, and shared through language as well as through media (Howard 2000; McAdams 1995). In the context of skin color identification, discussions of skin tone or colorism—amongst family, friends, or even with relative strangers on social media—produces opportunities for people to share and shape identity through conversations. As I demonstrated through my qualitative interviews, people may not be fully aware of the extent to which color manifests in differential treatment in society—e.g., with respect to criminal justice (Burch 2015; Kizer 2017; Monk 2018), education (Hughes and Hertel 1990; Monk 2014), or income (Goldsmith, Hamilton, and Darity 2007; Monk 2014)—but they do observe that dark-skinned people face more challenges in society (see Chapter 3). Because greater racial authenticity may be associated with darker skin and the corresponding exposure to worse treatment, skin tone may contribute not just to one's racial identity but to a color-based identity as well. In short, just as the combination of status, experiences, and cultural links are associated with racial group identification, they should also be associated with attachment to one's skin color subgroup.

Thus far, this discussion has centered the ways in which skin tone is linked with status and societal perceptions. In the next section, I attempt to explore the more tangible manifestations of these issues that may directly contribute to the formation of a skin color identity.

ASSESSING THE UNDERPINNINGS OF SKIN TONE IDENTITY

A number of factors likely contribute to the development of skin tone as a durable social identity. In the previous section I outlined several macro-level influences that can contribute to the creation of a color-based identity. If these influences hold, we should see this reflected in the ways that people talk about skin color in their own lives. Consequently, I turn back to my interview data to examine if there is evidence through participants' discussions of skin color to suggest it may be taken up as an identity. Building from my foundational evidence in Chapter 3, here I explore discussions related to the socialization processes, shared language, and inherent status dimensions associated with color. I find that there is not only a recognition among Black people that different skin tone groups exist, each with different experiences and sets of attributes, but also a recognition that one belongs to a given color-based group. In combination, this evidence appears to satisfy the cognitive and affective dimensions that serve as the foundation of social identity formation.

Although it was not a primary objective of the interviews, participants commonly provided insight into the socialization processes surrounding skin color. That is, participants frequently shared detailed stories and examples of the ways in which skin tone was discussed, derided, praised, and/or avoided in their families or social circles. Participants recalled memories from childhood and their teenage years that still stuck with them many years later. One component of this socialization process is navigating one's own color and treatment within families. This is, of course, complicated by the fact that there can be vast color diversity within both extended and nuclear families. This can be

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underscored by the commonalities across participant's distinct narratives that involved family and discussion of skin color:

> "A lot of people did, from sisters and brothers and cousins…"
> "My nephew, his father was jet black…"
> "My dad always told me growing up…"
> "So also, by having a very fair mother…"
> "Even now, with me dating [my dark-skinned boyfriend], my grandma was like…"
> "And so in that context, my sister and I—my sister's a little lighter than me…"
> "The two darker kids in her family, my grandmother told me they were…"
> "…. So that's in my family."

The diversity in appearance within families can lead to nuanced observations both implicitly and explicitly related to language and treatment, which children observe and internalize. Many interview participants reflect on a struggle as adolescents between accepting who they are and wanting to be lighter, given associations between lightness and perceptions of intelligence or attractiveness. Participants can easily recall stories surrounding their own socialization of skin color, as well as stories from their family and friends. Many people told stories about sisters of different shades arguing about differential treatment based on color, resulting in them not speaking for extended periods of time, or of darker-skinned family members criticizing lighter-skinned members. As one participant summarized: "It wasn't like one time, it was constant jokes about me being a 'pretty boy.'"

Several participants even referenced skin bleaching. Some described considerations about and even attempts at bleaching their skin while growing up: "I saw how the light-skinned crowd was treated [so well], so it led me to wrestle with bleaching my skin." Others noted hearing and participating in conversations with other people about skin bleaching. This included recognition that one's mother had used skin bleaching products, despite it never being explicitly discussed between parent and child. In another case, a teacher recalled hearing darker-skinned students in high school discussing bleaching their skin to better fit in and avoid being teased:

> But as a teacher, I had students, Black students, who were always trying to bleach
> their skin. And things like that. And so I know that it's something that worries the

> dark-skinned children. How people can make fun of them, and things like that. …
> And so, unfortunately, I do think that the skin tone of African Americans does still –
> is still important and still has a bearing on people's self-esteem and their identity who
> they are and their opportunities and choices. – 36 year old, light-skinned woman

In addition, parents discussed their attempts to build up confidence of their darker-skinned children, knowing the negative treatment they will more regularly face in society. This can present unique challenges, however, when the parents themselves are not dark-skinned. As one participant summarized: "My oldest daughter is dark-skinned, and she tries, and we try, but I can tell there's a void missing in her because there's no one dark-skinned around."

In discussing their teenage years, participants report the influence of the media and pressure to "fit in" as extending the discussion of skin color away from the family alone and to a broader social realm—with classmates and peers commenting and teasing one another based on color, as well as forays into dating and sexual relationships tied up in colorism. For example, with respect to what types of friends you should have: "Some girls are like 'you have to be team light-skin', or 'team brown-skin', or 'team dark-skin' [to be friends]." And, skin color can even play an important role in making relationship decisions among adolescents beginning to navigate the realm of dating:

> [Growing up] there was a dark-skinned girl who I was attracted to, but she was dark-skinned… when the lights was off, she was everything to me. But, I also had another girl that was brown-skinned, light-skinned, who I had on my shoulder. Around me with my friends, wherever I would go. I had her in public, because, you know, she was light-skinned. And that was perceived as—Basically, the light-skinned girls are the girls you wife, marry, and treat with respect and honor, and the dark-skinned girls are the ones you sleep with, and creep with, but don't get into a committed relationship with. – 30 year old, medium-skinned man

Some parents impart lessons about dating and skin tone to their kids. In one case, a father reported advising his sons regarding their dating lives, drawing from color-based stereotypes:

> When [my sons] were in middle school, them and their friends were looking at the yearbook, going through picking out who the most attractive woman was in the yearbook. There were all these light-skinned women and I was like, "Nope. Nope, nope, nope." We had a talk. ... As they got older, they started dating women who were medium complexion. You know? I haven't seen them date a dark complexion woman

yet, but I think it's getting better with the generations. – 39 year old, medium-skinned man

It is interesting to note that this father felt that his children's generation is more open-minded than his own generation with respect to color, despite the fact that neither of his sons dated dark-skinned women.

As adults, participants seem to reflect on their experiences surrounding skin tone in their childhood and adolescence with more insight. For example, many people acknowledge they wanted to be lighter when they were young but didn't really know why. Implicitly, they recognized the perceived higher social status and more positive treatment associated with light skin, both within the Black community as well as by Whites. Many participants felt that as adults they have a better sense of the historical context, societal or media influences, and are more accepting of their natural color because they can better contextualize the link between skin color, status, and societal perceptions.

Participants also commonly referred to the role of the media in perpetuating race- and color-based stereotypes. They refer to television shows or movies that feature mainly lighter-skinned Black actors, as well as music and music videos that feature lighter skinned women while making reference to light skin as more beautiful. It was especially common for people to refer to the news as perpetuating negative stereotypes about Black people as a whole, but darker-skinned people specifically—e.g., in the realm of crime or receiving welfare benefits (Dixon and Maddox 2005). Younger participants also attribute the perpetuation or exacerbation of color-based stereotypes and conversations to social media or videos posted on YouTube that discuss issues related to skin tone:

> I took a class on gender. And we talked about [skin color], and it was analyzing how the media portrays or analyzes these ideas and how society plays a role in these types of things. And basically, the lighter the skin, the more it's praised. And the darker the skin, the more it's not praised. And it's in media, and in Black music videos you'll see lighter girls. But darker girls are coming into it now in 2017. But if you look over rap videos or music videos, you'll see it's like light girls and not girls that are darker. And people praise the lighter tones. They like that more. They put down the darker tones. – 20 year old, light-skinned woman

I heard a debate on CNN about music videos, that they're tending to use more lighter-skinned or quote-unquote "exotic looking" Black women, as opposed to using darker-skinned Black women because the lighter-skinned women appeal to the mass media. Sometimes things go from being a stereotype to being a fact. When you can put up statistics that show that—just like, this picture in general, only people who are in elected officials' positions—even our president, he wasn't a dark-skinned Black man, he wasn't a brown-skinned Black guy. He was a light-skinned Black guy. And even when you show elected officials and they're of lighter skin, those start to become— stereotypes become facts. And I think that's more of a fact that people are more comfortable with people who are lighter because they seem less threatening or dominating personality, or they feel less of a threat or more assimilated to them. – 32 year old, medium-skinned woman

These comments suggest that signals are sent not only to Black adolescents emphasizing that lighter skin is more valuable, but also influence Whites' perceptions of Black people based on skin tone (i.e., associating more negative attributes with Black people seen as more prototypical, especially having darker skin). Moreover, younger participants referenced skin tone-related discussions on social media, including the use of hashtags related to skin color:

I think the—like the widespread [normalization] of the natural hair movement and a lot of women doing the "big chop" and embracing their hair, and throwing out hair relaxers and stuff like that. And, too, I think it's more so on Twitter that I see these things. With the hashtag thing—and you know Twitter is very powerful. – 22 year old, light-skinned woman

I'd befriend any complexion. Some girls don't. Some girls are like, "You have to be team light skin. You have to be team brown skin, or team dark skin." –29 year old, light-skinned woman

Overall, these findings are consistent with research demonstrating the different lived experiences associated with skin tone and suggest that the media and social media for younger generations play a key role in influencing color-based and race-based stereotypes, perceptions, and even conversations about colorism. This evidence suggests that there may be heightened concern about the well-being of one's skin tone group—especially for those with darker skin, if they are known to be more heavily policed, monitored, and discriminated against in society.

Finally, the interviews reveal a tension between negative stereotypes about dark skin and notions that darker skin symbolizes racial authenticity. Participants frequently express competing

sentiments related to darker-skinned members of their racial group as being the pinnacle of Blackness and simultaneously the most disdained in society:

> I've seen darker-skinned women have more interest for maybe like a Caucasian male, right? Because she's like the epitome of Blackness. – 27 year old, medium-skinned woman

> Somehow even though dark skin is derided within the Black community, I also think it's upheld as the ultimate form of Blackness. So for people that are like super down, super Afrocentric, I feel like your dark skin is a really great asset. It's not necessary, but it's kind of one of those things that people would never question. … People believe that they're fighting and trying to do what's best for all Black people [because they're dark-skinned]. – 26 year old, light-skinned woman

> But just the role in general society, the darker you are, more of the fear factor. And whatever stereotype people have about Black people, the darker you are, the more likely those might be attributed to you in society. – 47 year old, dark-skinned man

This paradox between darker skin being associated with negative stereotypes, but also with racial authenticity or legitimacy may be especially important for Black men given participant's repeated references to dark skin as inducing fear or aggression, which are more male-centric stereotypes.

In short, the evidence presented here strongly suggests that people not only recognize but have attachments to skin color groups, which may well have ramifications for politics. This is evidenced through the socialization processes, shared language, and inherent status dimensions recognized as clearly linked to skin color in society. These themes from my interviews cleanly tie back into the broader argument regarding the linkage of darker skin with greater stigmatization, as well as perceptions of greater racial authenticity and closer cultural linkages to the racial group. In combination, these factors may create opportunities for the politicization of a skin tone identity.

SELF-CATEGORIZATION AND EVALUATION OF SKIN TONE GROUPS

To deepen our understanding of skin tone as an identity, I examine two data sources: my in-depth interviews, as well as responses to open-ended survey items regarding skin tone from a national

survey. The latter responses are part of a study conducted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in February 2016 (n=229 Black participants). I asked two open-ended items related to skin tone and stereotypes. Participants reported what comes to mind when they think about light-skinned and dark-skinned Black people. I received a variety of responses to these items, but two main themes emerged that suggest the criteria for skin color to be a social identity are clearly met.

From both data sources, there was a common use of in-group ("we") and out-group ("they") terms to discuss skin color. In addition to providing evidence that skin tone is commonly thought about by African Americans, this suggests the cognitive component of identity has been met. That is, identifying an in-group ("we") and an out-group ("they") signals not only self-categorization into one group, but also some attachment to that group through this language:

> "I think **they** [light skinned blacks] are same as me[,] the color is not important. I think **we** [dark skinned blacks] are similar[,] the color is not important". (MTurk Respondent)

> "When I think of darker skinned individuals I think of people who hate themselves because of skin color. **We** are not proud to be who **we** are because of the melanin in our skins. **We** are thought to be ugly, dumb and under achievers." (MTurk Respondent)

> "[With respect to light skinned black people,] I think of people who are isolated from the black community because **they** don't think **we** are black enough. However at the same time **we** are still discriminated against by white people. In the end **we** feel as if we don't belong anywhere." (MTurk Respondent)

Although the content of the messages varies across these comments, there is a consistent signaling of either being an in-group or out-group member. Some participants noted that skin color was divisive to the Black community, while others wrote that it was important to daily life. Others opted not to write detailed answers, but no one wrote that they did not understand the question.[60]

In the context of MTurk, participants are paid the faster they complete a given task. The average length of open-ended responses to the question about light-skinned stereotypes and dark-

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[60] With respect to the light-skinned stereotypes question, only two percent of participants (n=5) left the textbox blank. Similarly, on the dark-skinned stereotypes question, 3.5 percent of participants (n=8) did not provide any response.

skinned stereotypes was 27 words and 20 words, respectively. This is equivalent to writing two or more sentences. Thus, despite being able to write short responses and finish the survey more quickly, participants took the time to write fairly lengthy responses. This signals that this is an issue that the vast majority of participants have some perspective to share that is easily accessible in their minds and they believe is worth sharing.

My in-depth interviews suggested a similar pattern with respect to in- and out-group language during the conversations:

> I believe—I'm not trying to sound messed up, but a lot of light-skinned people I meet, **they** think they're White. So I feel like it's a complex. The lighter you are—it's a complex, I don't know how to explain it, but a lot of lighter skinned people **they** feel like **they're** White. **They** feel like **they're** better than you. **They** feel like, you know, **they're** on that pedestal. But I'm like "You're African American, just like me." It's weird. It's really hard to explain but I do notice that lighter-skinned people do feel more privilege. And feel like **they** have a little more leeway in life than other African Americans, and darker-skinned African Americans. – 28 year old, medium-skinned man

> I worked for a company in Atlanta, a very large corporate company, and I was on a team with darker-skinned Black females. I was the lightest of them—me and another young lady. Both of **us** ended up getting promoted very fast. It has nothing to do with skin color. It was the fact that **we**—not to be braggy—**we** were just better! **We** did what **we** were supposed to do, and **we** showed more of a conscious effort. And as soon as **we** moved up, you go to a different floor. So everybody thought "Oh it's because **they're** lighter, **they're** just assimilating with the White people up-top. **They're** keeping all the darker-skinned Black people at the bottom." But it wasn't that at all, it wasn't that at all. – 32 year old, medium-skinned woman

> As soon as the conquer and divide thing [happened during slavery], **they** [darker-skinned people] feel like **we** [lighter-skinned people] have it better than them—and **we** do to some degree, you know. **We** have built-in privileges because of our complexion. It's obvious **we** have some kind of European ancestry [laughs], you know? – 48 year old, light-skinned man

The second theme that emerged was that color-based stereotypes remain alive and well today. Consistent with literature dating back to the mid-1900s, more negative attributes were ascribed to darker-skinned Black people whereas more positive attributes were ascribed to lighter-skinned Black people (e.g., Parrish 1946; Myrdal 1996[1944]; Hunter 2002). For example, participants noted lighter skin is associated with the following: being attractive, entitled, "soft," someone who is "not down for

the cause," and feeling superior to darker-skinned Black people. Alternatively, the majority of responses related to darker skin tone invoked a distinct set of characteristics—e.g., darker Black people suffer more hardships, are more athletic, violent, criminals, are "hard to deal with," have a "bad attitude," are less intelligent, and given a "harder time with law enforcement." Moreover, participants invoke in- and out-group language in discussing these stereotypes:

> "[With respect to dark-skinned Black people:] I think people are afraid of **them** because of the stereotypes from movies and tv shows." (MTurk)

> My dad had the struggle of being a dark-skinned Black man. **They** [dark-skinned people] have been—stereotypically over time, and in truth, things have been harder for them. **They're** automatically seen as a dominant threat for some reason. Or, **they** are seen in a threatening matter for being dark-skinned. – 32 year old, medium-skinned woman

> A lot of people I hang around with are dark skin. So, it's like—When situations come in effect, people look at **them** more so as the stern, standoff-ish type of person. Where it's like, **they** might not even be like that. **They** might be more friendlier, more welcoming, and warm than I am. But because **they** come in the room with me and they look at me and I'm light skin and they look at **them** like "Oh **they** dark skin," they automatically feel like Oh **they're** going to be more of a threat to them than I am. So yeah I feel like, shit, all my [dark-skinned] friends get felt like that. – 23 year old, light-skinned man

As expected, participants have well-formed views about skin color, distinctions and stereotypes associated with different groups (Parrish 1946; Myrdal 1996[1944]; Hunter 2002, 2005), and use language that demonstrates they view skin tone groups as in- and out-group terms. These observations satisfy both the self-categorization and group evaluation components of identity formation. Given a combination of factors—i.e., a shared history based on skin tone (see Chapter 1B), references to this history of colorism during the interviews (see Chapter 3), and the reliance on skin tone group-based terms—the deeply rooted nature of skin tone divisions in society are well-known.

In turn, this may lead to a strong potential for an affective component associated with skin tone divisions. That is, understanding the different treatment of lighter-skinned and darker-skinned Black people in society—coupled with one's own self-categorization into a corresponding skin tone

group—may give rise to differing levels of concern towards the well-being of one's skin tone group. We might expect this to be especially meaningful for the more stigmatized group members.

MEASURING SKIN TONE IDENTITY

Although the primary components of social identity—cognitive and affective dimensions—are broadly agreed upon, there is much less agreement on the appropriate measures to use to assess identification. Some scholars have relied on questions regarding group "closeness" (Wong and Cho 2005) while others have used "feeling thermometers" to assess warmth or coolness towards different groups (Conover 1988; Winter 2008). In contrast, I employ a simplified measure of identity that has commonly been used in assessing partisan identities and has been adapted to assess affective attachment to other groups (Citrin et al. 2001; Hooper 1976; Huddy and Khatib 2007; Jardina 2019; Junn and Masuoka 2008; Winter 1996). This question simply asks how important it is for one to identify with a specific group, tapping into the notion of identity centrality—or the perceived importance of one's attachment to a given group.

This measure has several advantages. First, because participants are asked about groups they have self-identified with earlier on the survey—race, partisanship, or even skin tone—it takes into account the identity component of self-categorization. Further, through its brief language, it directly assesses the centrality or importance of a given identity. Finally, from a practical perspective, it is easier to include on surveys because it is only a single measure. While this measure has frequently been used with respect to racial or ethnic groups, it has not previously been used or adapted to assess skin tone identity importance.

My measure of skin tone identity mirrors the identity importance items commonly fielded on the American National Election Study: "How important is your skin tone to your identity? (Not at all

important, a little important, moderately important, very important, or extremely important)." This question measures whether people feel an affective attachment towards their skin tone group, distinct from their racial group. Throughout this chapter, I assess the centrality or importance of skin tone identification using this measure of skin tone identity.

First, drawing from the same national sample of 229 Black MTurk respondents discussed earlier, I find evidence that skin tone is important to a sizable portion of the participants: nearly 30 percent of respondents said their skin tone identity was either "very" or "extremely important" to them, and 23 percent said it was moderately important. In combination, over half of the sample reported their skin color as at least moderately important to their identity. Further, there are significant differences in the strength of identification by self-rated skin tone—with dark-skinned people being 23 percentage points more likely to report their skin tone as important to their identity than light-skinned counterparts ($p < .01$; see Figure 5.1).

Although these data suggest skin tone identity is meaningful to large numbers of African Americans, MTurk samples tend not to be very representative of the American population. Do we observe similar patterns on more representative national samples? To assess this, I included the measure of skin tone identity on two more original surveys: 2016 YouGov (n=577) and 2019 AmeriSpeak (n=1,041). Using the same measure of skin tone identity importance, 51 percent of Black participants in the YouGov sample reported that their skin tone was at least moderately important to them. Skin tone is 29 percentage points more important to Black people with darker skin than those with lighter skin ($p < .01$; see Figure 5.2A). In the AmeriSpeak sample, 55 percent of Black respondents said that their skin tone was at least moderately important to their identity. Broken down by skin tone, we see a difference of 19 percentage points in reported skin tone identity importance between those with lighter vs. darker skin ($p < .01$; Figure 5.3A). The average skin tone importance for light-skinned individuals is 0.36 on the 0 to 1 scale compared to an average of 0.55 for participants with darker skin.

Thus, across multiple national samples of African Americans, skin tone is seen as important to a large share of the racial group *and* especially so to those with darker skin tones.

Figure 5.1: Skin Tone Identity Importance over Respondent Skin Color (MTurk 2016)
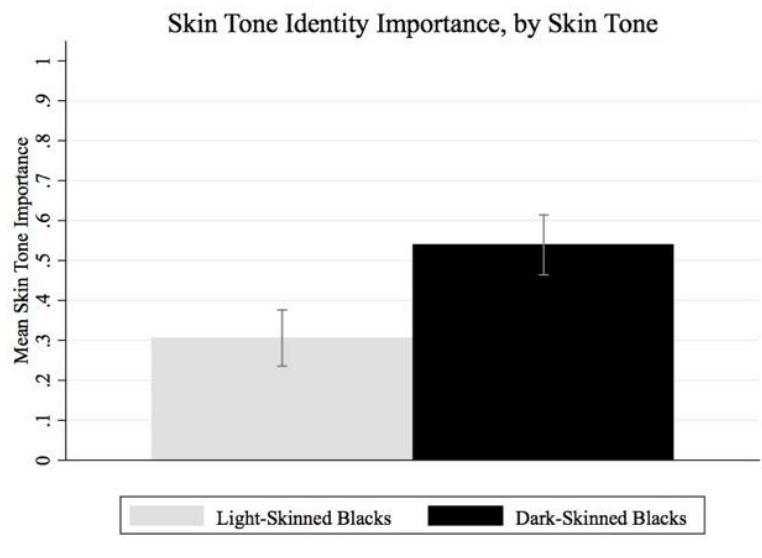
Note: Figures include mean identity importance across subgroups and 95% confidence intervals.

I also developed a second measure of skin tone identity for these surveys drawing on the psychological concept of introjection. Introjection explores "the degree to which the group is experienced as an integral and inseparable part of the self" (Rosenberg 1979, p. 179). While this measure has frequently been used to ask about attachment to racial groups, I adapted this item to ask about skin tone: "If someone said something bad about [light/medium/dark-skinned] people, how likely is it that you would feel almost as if they said something bad about you?" Here, which skin color group label is included in the question wording depends on participants' self-reported skin color.

Using this original measure, 57 percent of Black YouGov participants reported that if someone said something bad about people of their skin color (light, medium, or dark), it was likely they would feel as if that person said something bad about them personally (see Figure 5.2B). Participants with dark skin were 19 percentage points more likely to agree with that statement than those with light skin

(p<.05). In the AmeriSpeak sample,[61] I find comparable results: 56 percent of participants in the AmeriSpeak sample said that if someone said something bad about their skin tone group, it was at least moderately likely they would feel as if that person said something bad about them personally. Moreover, a difference of 21 percentage points emerges between those with lighter skin (with a mean of 0.38 on a 0 to 1 scale) and darker skin (0.59) with respect to how personal a comment about the group would feel ($p < .01$; Figure 5.3B).

Taken together, these measures demonstrate for the first time that skin tone is an identity among a considerable portion of the Black community in the United States. Across three surveys and two distinct measures, a majority of Black people consistently reported their skin tone as quite important to them. This evidence underscores that skin tone plays a powerful role in the self-perceptions of many Black people. It also suggests that, like other social identities, skin tone identification may have important implications for how Black people think about and respond to their social and political environments.

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[61] Note: The analyses of the AmeriSpeak data do not employ survey weights given that their African American sample demographics are quite distinct from Census estimates for African Americans, specifically with respect to gender and education (the latter of which is also significantly associated with skin tone). As a result, employing the weights results in drastic over- and under-weighting of certain observations.

Table 5.1: Descriptive Statistics from Samples of African Americans

	YouGov 2016	Lucid 2018	AmeriSpeak 2019
Survey Mode	Web Only	Web Only	Web Only
Percent Female	55%	56%	66%
Age (average)	44 years	40 years	42 years
Income (average)	$30,000 - $39,999	$40,000 - $44,999	$35,000 - $39,999
Education (average)	Some college	Some college	Some college / Associate's degree
Percent South	40%	55%	60%
Partisanship	8% Republican 24% Indep. 68% Democrat	11% Republican 12% Indep. 78% Democrat	7% Republican 16% Indep. 77% Democrat
Ideology	26% Conservative 34% Moderate 41% Liberal	19% Conservative 40% Moderate 42% Liberal	12% Conservative 27% Moderate 61% Liberal
Number of observations	577	1,825	1,045

Note: YouGov samples incorporate survey weights. Partisanship and ideology calculations combine leaners and weak partisans/ideologues into the broader partisan/ideology category.

Figure 5.2A: Skin Tone Identity Importance over Respondent Skin Color (YouGov)
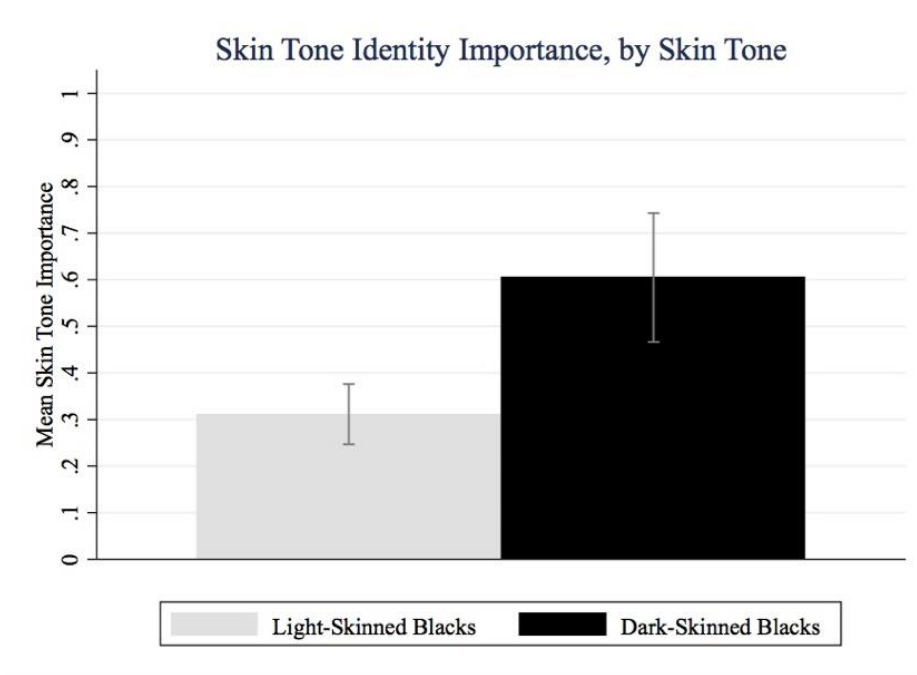
Figure 5.2B: Skin Tone Introjection Measure (YouGov)

Question wording: "If someone said something bad about [light/medium/dark-skinned] people, how likely is it that you would feel almost as if they said something bad about you?"
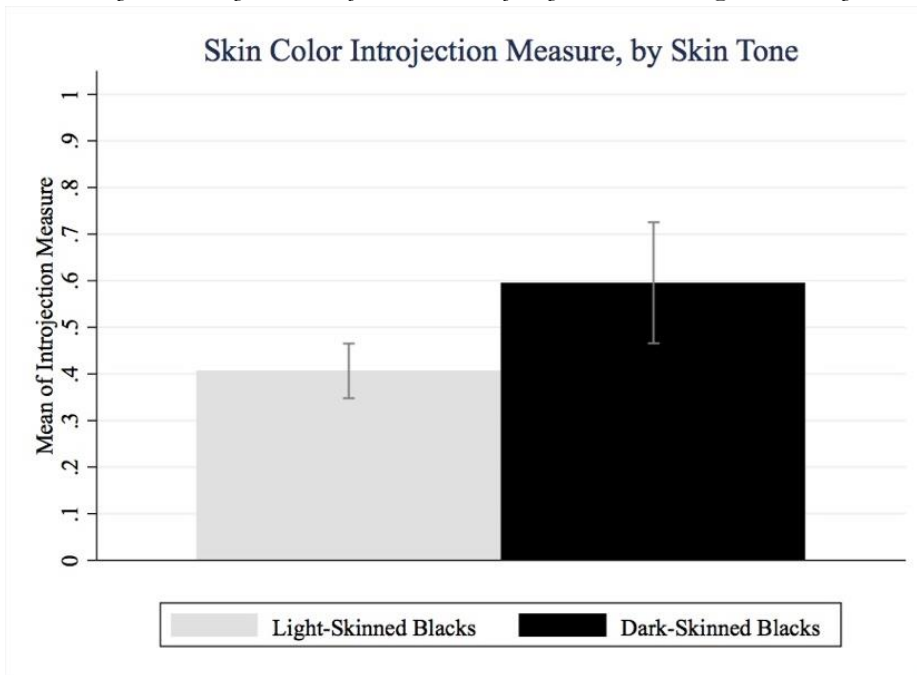
Note: Figures depict group means with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 5.3A: Skin Tone Identity Importance over Respondent Skin Color (AmeriSpeak)

Skin Tone Identity Importance, by Skin Tone
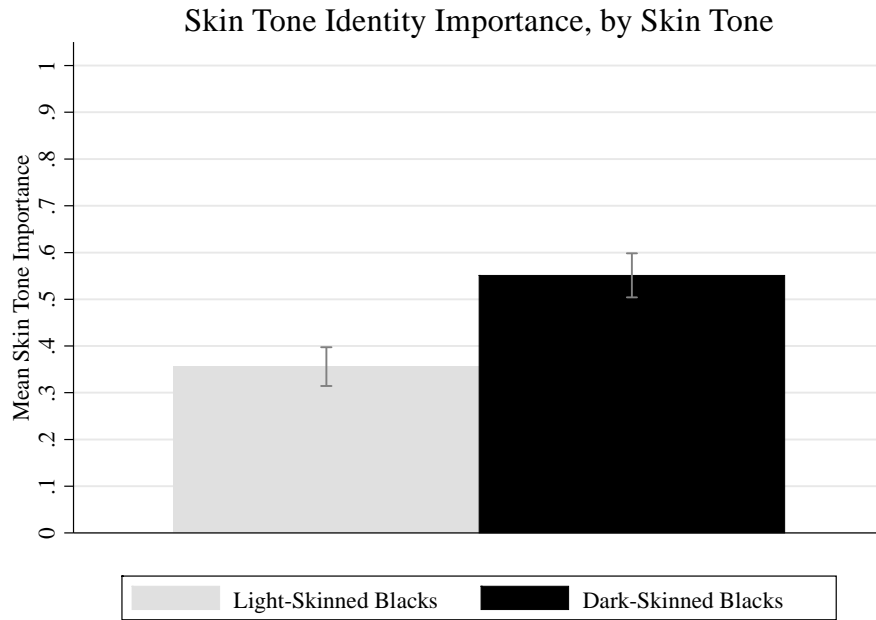
Figure 5.3B: Skin Tone Introjection Measure (AmeriSpeak)

Skin Color Introjection Measure, by Skin Tone
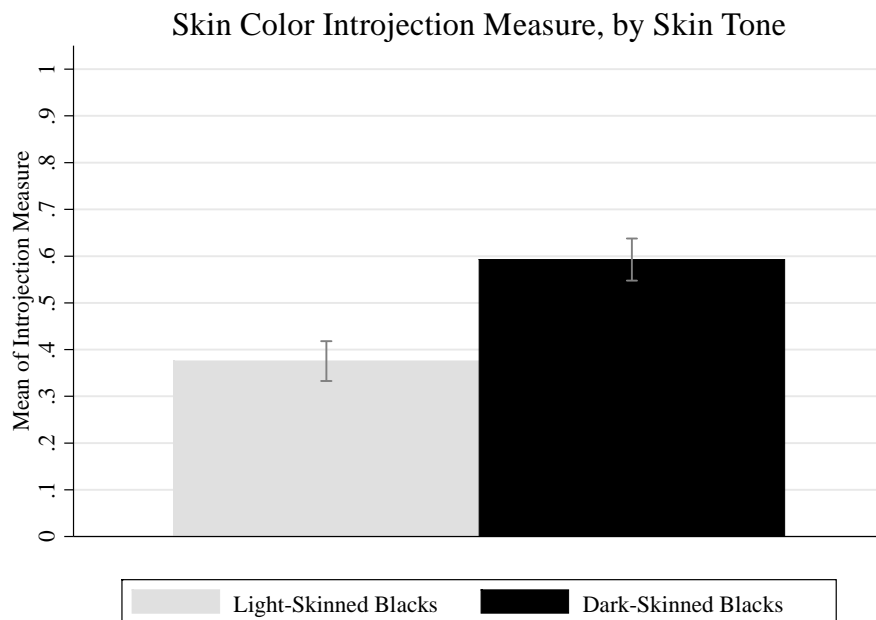
Note: Figures depict group means with 95% confidence intervals.

Now that we have a clearer grasp on the extent of skin tone identification, we can examine in a multivariate context if this relationship holds or if skin tone identity is actually just another way of measuring racial identity. Even after controlling for a litany of background characteristics—gender, education, income, region, age, party identification, and ideology—there is a sizable relationship between self-assessed skin tone and skin tone identity importance. The difference in skin color identity importance among those with the lightest skin relative to the darkest skin is a shift from 15 percentage points to 67 percentage points on the primary identity item—a difference of 52 percentage points on identity importance between the lightest vs. darkest survey participants (see Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4: Predicted Probability of Skin Tone Identity Importance by Skin Tone (YouGov)
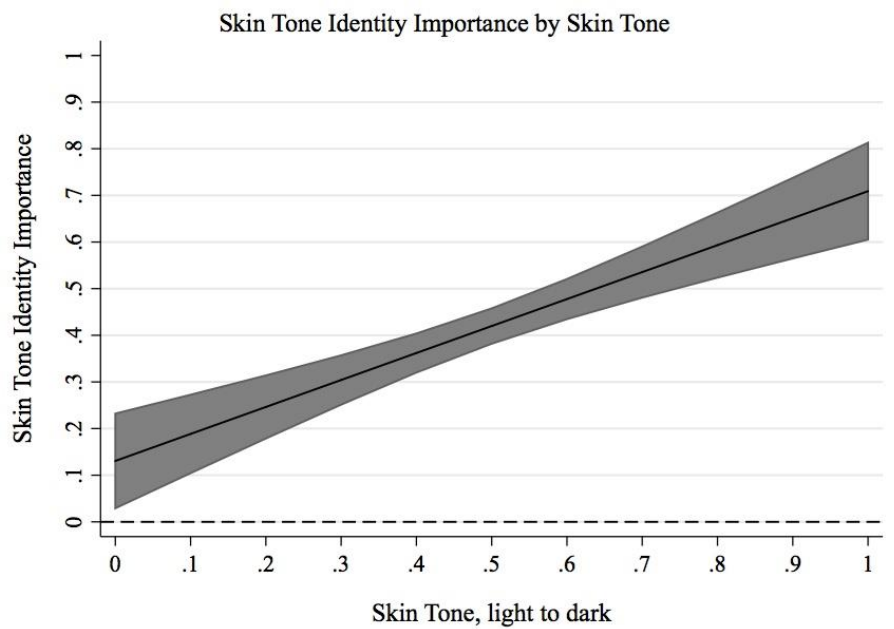
Note: The predicted probabilities here are derived from a multivariate model with 95% confidence intervals that uses survey weighting. This model controls for gender, education, region, income, age, partisanship, ideology, and question ordering effects. The skin tone variable draws from the 10-point Massey-Martin skin color scale.

But, perhaps skin color identity is just the same as racial identity? For skin tone to be a distinct identity, it cannot be interchangeable with racial identity. To this end, I conduct some tests for discriminant validity. First, one can examine the distributions of these variables for comparison

purposes. Looking at the distributions of skin tone and racial identity in the YouGov and AmeriSpeak data suggest that these are, in fact, distinct constructs. Consistent with what we would expect given a dominant focus on racial identity and race-based appeals in the United States, there is a higher proportion of people who report their race is important to their identity than those who say the same about skin tone (see Figures 5.5).

To dig deeper, I explore the correlation between skin tone identity and racial identity. In the AmeriSpeak sample of over 1,000 Black participants, the correlation is modest: $r = 0.44$. The relationship between the skin tone introjection item and racial importance is even weaker: $r = 0.27$. Similarly, in the YouGov sample of nearly 600 Black participants, the correlation is also quite low: $r = 0.24$. The skin tone introjection item is also very weakly correlated with racial identity: $r = 0.23$. In the MTurk sample (n=229), the correlation is also modest: $r = 0.39$. Alternatively, given the strong correlation between skin tone and skin tone identity, could it be that skin tone identity is simply the same thing as reporting having darker skin? The correlation between skin tone ratings and skin tone identity is also not strong: $r = 0.32$ in the YouGov data and $r = 0.27$ in the MTurk data. Taken together, this indicates that questions about skin tone identity are tapping into something distinct from questions about racial identity.

Figure 5.5A: Comparing Skin Tone Identity vs. Racial Identity Proportions (YouGov)

Distribution of Racial Group Identity Importance (YouGov)

Category	Value
Not at all important	10.15
A little important	5.72
Moderately important	17.41
Very important	25.29
Extremely important	41.43

Distribution of Skin Tone Identity Importance (YouGov)

Category	Value
Not at all important	40.69
A little important	7.02
Moderately important	22.03
Very important	13.30
Extremely important	16.97

Figure 5.5B: Comparing Skin Tone Identity vs. Racial Identity Proportions (AmeriSpeak)

Distribution of Racial Group Identity Importance (AmeriSpeak)

Distribution of Skin Tone Identity Importance (AmeriSpeak)
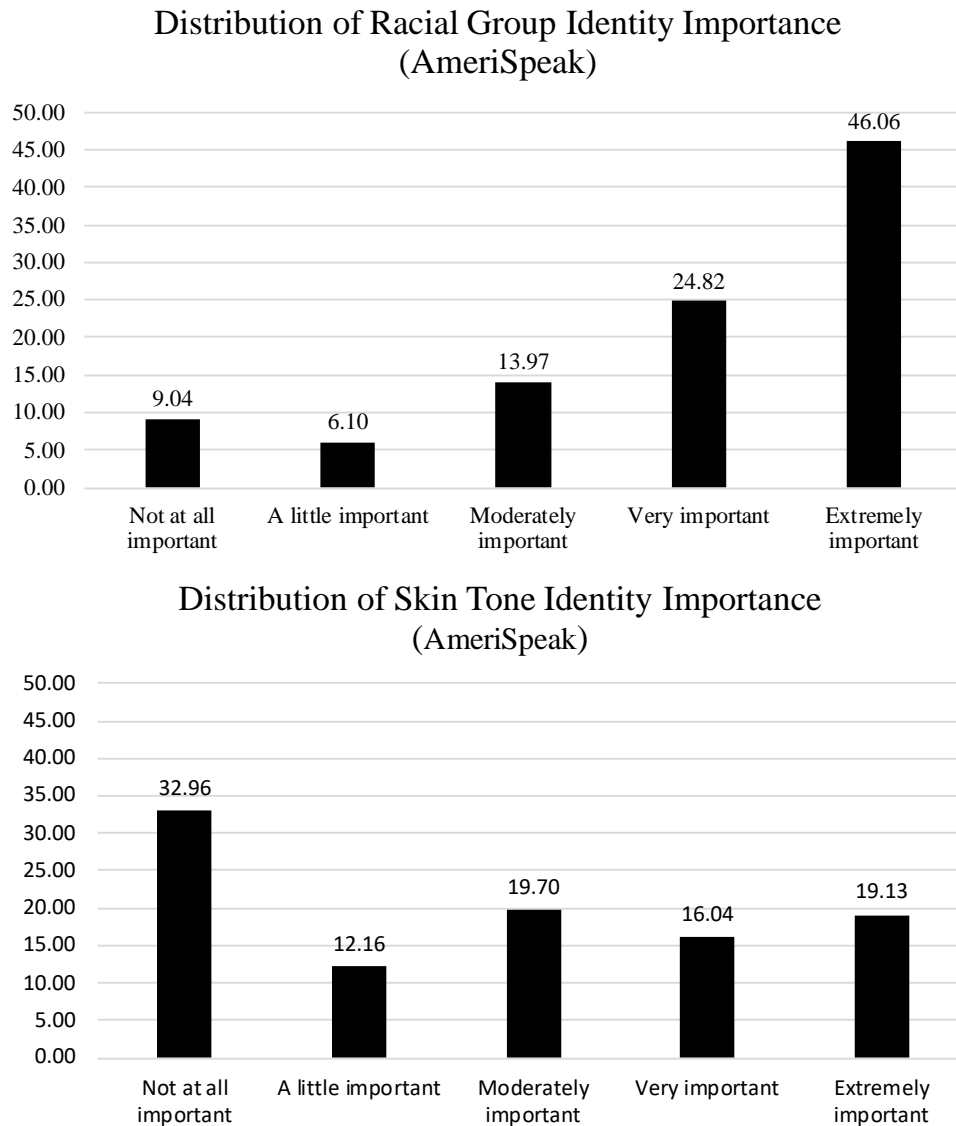
THE CORRELATES OF SKIN TONE IDENTITY

Given that skin tone identity and racial identity are distinct constructs, what are the predictors of skin tone identity? Is it the case that other demographic, socioeconomic, or political factors are significantly associated with skin tone identity? We can begin to answer these questions by analyzing the YouGov and AmeriSpeak data.

The primary correlates of skin tone identity in both datasets are having darker skin and reporting a stronger racial identity (Figure 5.6). The former is consistent with what we saw in Figure 5.4, with respect to a sharp incline—a 58 percentage point shift—of skin tone identity with increasing self-reported darkness of skin tone ($p < .000$). For the latter, those who report their race as important are 26 percentage points more likely to report skin tone as important to their identity ($p < .000$). This suggests that race and color identities actually work in conjunction—with people being likely to identify strongly with one also identifying strongly with the other. While both self-reported skin tone and level of racial identity have big effects on skin tone identity, the effect of self-reported skin tone is over twice as large as the effect of racial identity in the YouGov data. In contrast, the AmeriSpeak data suggests that stronger racial identity is the most important correlate of skin tone identity, such that those who have a higher racial identity are about 51 percentage points more likely to have a higher skin tone identity. Still, those who report a darker color are 19 percentage points more likely to report a stronger skin tone identity than their lighter counterparts.

A third factor that is meaningful with respect to skin tone identity is age. In both samples, older age is associated with a decreased propensity to take up skin tone as an identity (Figure 5.7). In the AmeriSpeak data, people around age 80 are 16 percentage points less likely than their early 20 year old counterparts to report skin tone as important to their identity ($p < .002$). Similarly, in the YouGov data, older age is associated with a 29 percentage point lower likelihood of saying skin tone is important ($p < .000$). This result may not be surprising given that Black people growing up before and during the Civil Rights Era may have focused less on skin tone in order to emphasize race, consistent with Hochschild and Weaver's (2007) skin color paradox argument. Still, the importance of skin tone

identification among *younger* individuals suggests that skin tone is an issue that may be of increasing

importance in the years ahead.[62]

Figure 5.6A: Coefficient Plot of Skin Tone Identity Predictors (YouGov)
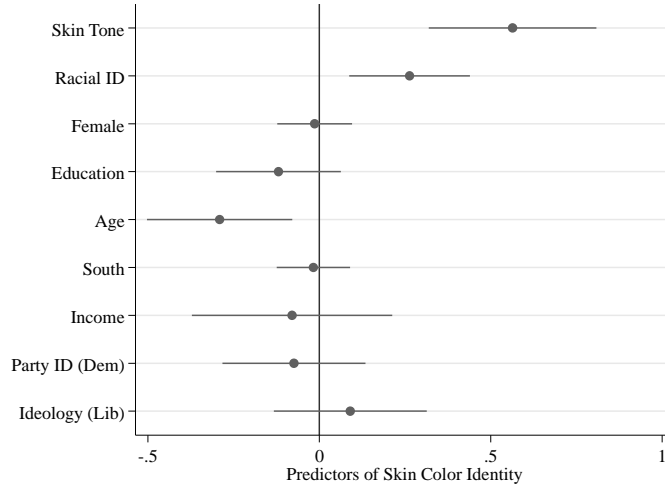
Note: Coefficients estimated with 95 percent confidence intervals based on multivariate model estimations. These estimates incorporate survey weights and question ordering effects (not shown).

Figure 5.6B: Coefficient Plot of Skin Tone Identity Predictors (AmeriSpeak)
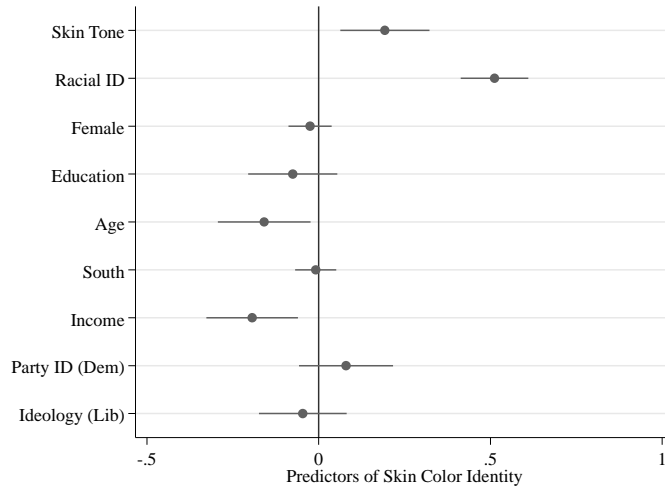
Note: Coefficients estimated with 95% confidence intervals based on multivariate model estimations.

[62] Two other factors have an inconsistent impact on skin tone identity across samples. In the YouGov data, I find that Black people who identify with the Democratic Party are 15 percentage points *less likely* to say their skin tone is important to their identity ($p < .06$). Those who strongly identify with the Democratic Party may be resistant to identifying with a skin tone identity, as this may be seen as a dividing force for the larger racial group.[62] Upon further examination, this partisan difference is driven by those who identify as strong or moderate Republicans, who compose only five percent of the YouGov sample (n = 29 of 577). Moreover, this partisan effect is not detected in the AmeriSpeak sample ($p < .13$). The second inconsistent correlate is income. In the AmeriSpeak data, those with higher income are 19 percentage points less likely to say their skin tone is important to their identity ($p < .05$). Income effects are not detected in the YouGov sample, however ($p < .48$).

Figure 5.7: Skin Tone Identity Importance by Age (AmeriSpeak)
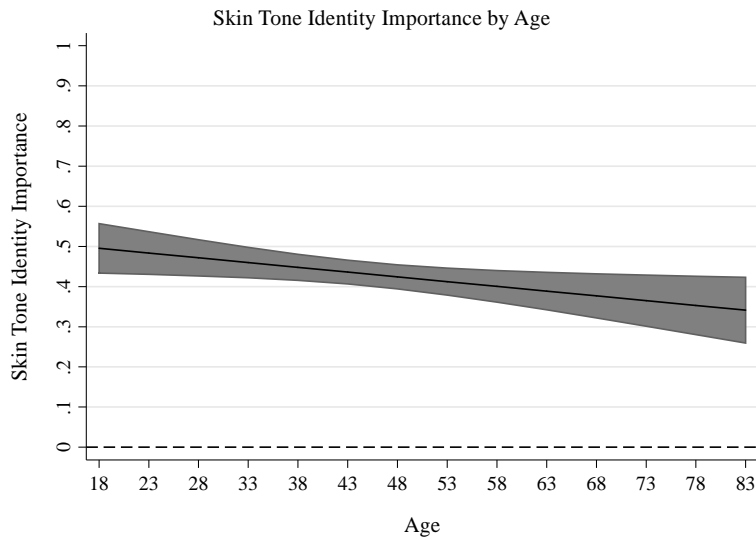
Note: Model estimations include 95% confidence intervals and control for racial identity, gender, age, south, income, partisanship, and ideology.

Given differences in skin tone identity importance by skin tone, we might imagine there are different incentives for lighter- and darker-skinned people to strongly identify with their skin color. From a theoretical perspective, there may be different motivations for lighter- and darker-skinned Black people to identify with their color. For dark-skinned people, strong identification likely represents combination of acknowledging stigmatization that is associated with dark skin, as well as a heightened sense of racial authenticity. Light-skinned people who identify strongly with their skin tone have the potential to be of two kinds. One may involve recognition of and pride in having a light skin tone because it is viewed positively in society. They may be less concerned about issues related to colorism or resistant to discussing it. Alternatively, they may recognize their color-based privilege *and* acknowledge its detrimental effects for those with darker skin. This stands in contrast to the way other identities often operate, such that individuals who identify strongly may recognize they have light skin and identify it as such, but not embrace that identity in the way other groups often do. This suggests that the subgroup of strongly-identified light-skinned people as a whole may be a mixture of people without a set of shared views.

To get to the heart of the question of how skin color identity may operate differently based on one's skin color, I examine if the correlates of skin color identity vary by one's skin color. The AmeriSpeak data provides a larger sample to conduct these subgroup analyses with more confidence (204 light-skinned and 207 dark-skinned participants). The YouGov data has a comparable number of light-skinned respondents (n=171), but a much smaller number of those with dark skin (n=117).

There are different predictors associated with skin tone identity for light- and dark-skinned people (Figures 5.8 and 5.9). For darker-skinned participants, we see two primary correlates associated with holding a stronger skin tone identity: racial identity and age. A strong racial identity is far and away the most important predictor of having a strong skin-tone-based identity for darker-skinned people—with those high on racial identity being 75 percentage points more likely to be high on skin tone identity as well in the AmeriSpeak data ($p < .000$) and 35 percentage points in the YouGov data ($p < .01$). Additionally, dark-skinned older individuals are about 30 percentage points less likely to report having a strong skin tone identity ($p < .004$ in AmeriSpeak and $p < .09$ in YouGov). Finally, in the YouGov data only, dark-skinned participants who identify as ideologically liberal are 23 percentage point more likely to report holding a stronger skin tone identity ($p < .07$).

What are the predictors of skin tone identity for light-skinned individuals? The AmeriSpeak data reveal that racial identity is also the strongest predictor of skin tone identity for lighter-skinned Black folks, but this effect is much weaker than for darker-skinned people. That is, having a strong racial identity is associated with a 39 percentage point greater likelihood of also having a strong skin tone identity in the AmeriSpeak data ($p < .000$) or 18 percentage points in the YouGov data ($p < .07$). While this is still a very strong relationship, it is nearly half the size that it was for those with darker skin in both datasets. In addition, there are a few results that are consistent only in one dataset. For example, age is not related to skin tone identity for lighter-skinned individuals in the AmeriSpeak data, but is in the YouGov data: with light-skinned older participants being 27 percentage points less likely

to take up a color-based identity ($p < .06$). In the AmeriSpeak data, light-skinned women are nine percentage points less likely to report a strong skin tone identity than men ($p < .08$), more educated people are 21 percentage points less likely to hold a strong skin tone identity ($p < .06$), and higher income people are also 25 percentage points less likely to hold a strong skin tone identity ($p < .03$).

Figure 5.8: Correlates of Skin Color Identity by Skin Color (AmeriSpeak)
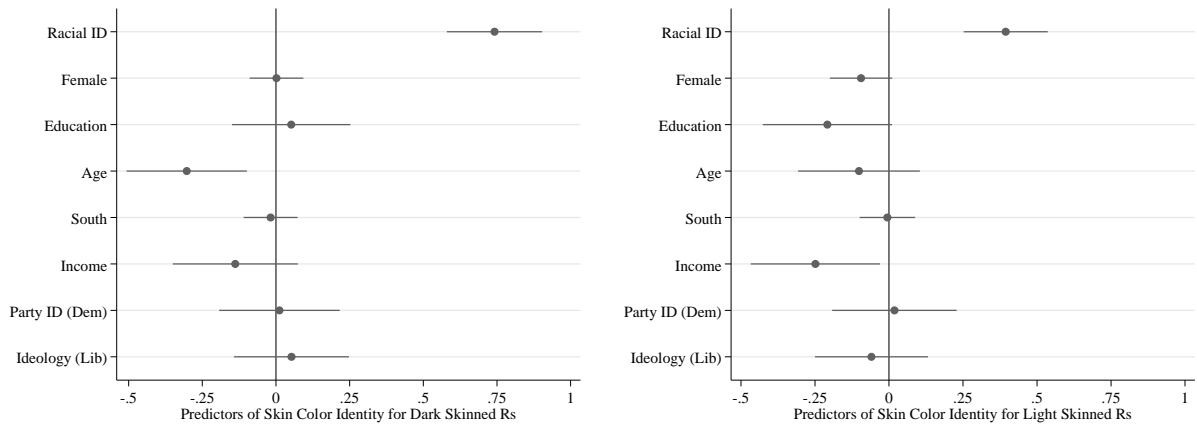
Note: Coefficients estimated with 95 percent confidence intervals based on multivariate model estimations.

Figure 5.9: Correlates of Skin Identity by Skin Color (YouGov)
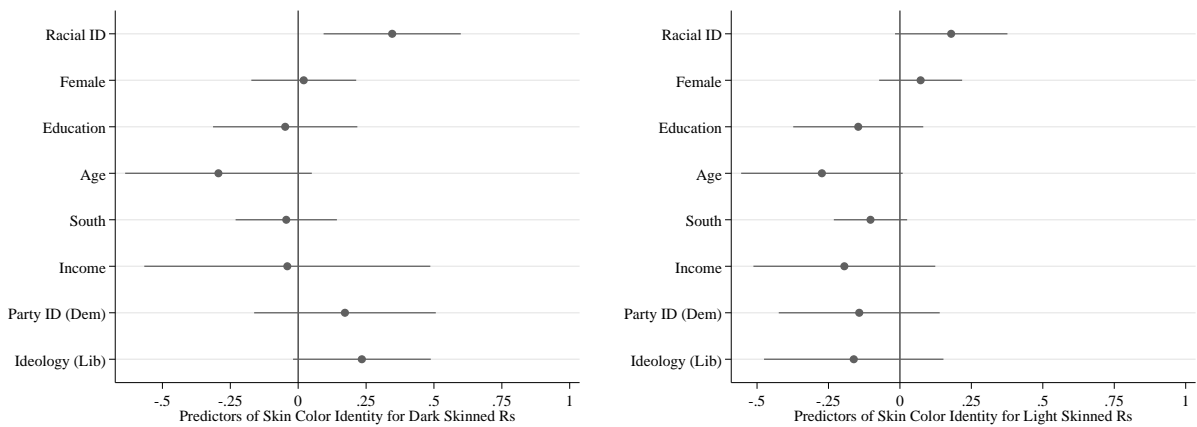
Note: Coefficients estimated with 95 percent confidence intervals based on multivariate model estimations. These estimates incorporate survey weights and question ordering effects (not shown).

POLITICIZATION OF SKIN COLOR IDENTITY

As I demonstrated in the last chapter, skin tone itself is associated with political views. And, as I demonstrated in this chapter, skin tone identity is a distinct identity meaningful to a sizable portion of African Americans. No measures of skin tone *identity* were included on those national political surveys, however, so it is not possible with those data to assess how skin tone identity may influence preferences separately from skin tone. This leaves us with unanswered questions regarding how skin tone identity may be associated with political views. Put differently, is skin color identity politically meaningful in its own right, or do racial identity and assessments of skin tone fully account for any political associations of skin color identity?

To answer these questions, I use the YouGov and AmeriSpeak data to examine two dimensions of politically relevant attitudes where skin tone identity might be expected to have an impact: policy preferences and group-based attitudes.

Policy Preferences and Presidential Approval

To begin, I will examine several policy preferences similar to those in the American National Election Study (ANES) from the previous chapter. Unlike the 2012 ANES data, which had only measures of participant skin color as assessed by interviewers, the YouGov data has both self-assessed skin color *and* skin tone identity. This allows us to explore the ways in which skin tone identity directly influences policy preferences (see Table 5.2).

To begin, we will turn to the types of items where we should expect skin color and skin color identification to be especially powerful—i.e., issues in which skin color has a prominent legacy, such as education or income. While several of these types of items were significant in the 2012 ANES, there is no significant relationship between skin tone or skin tone identity and any of these attitudes in the YouGov data. There is only one case where skin tone identity has a distinct and significant effect: approval of President Obama's job performance. Here, racial identity is also significantly associated

with approval of Obama's performance—such that those high on racial identity are 17 percentage points more likely to approve of Obama's performance as President. Over and above this effect, however, people high on skin tone identity are approximately 9 percentage points more likely to approve of Obama's performance relative to those low on color identity. The effect of skin tone identity is not as large as racial identity but has a distinct and non-trivial impact.

Overall, we do not find consistent associations between skin tone or skin tone identity and policy preferences in the YouGov sample. The only case where there is a significant relationship is on evaluations of Obama, with those reporting their skin tone identity as important are more likely to approve of Obama's performance than their low-identifying counterparts. There are several potential explanations for these discrepancies between the YouGov and ANES findings. For example, there is a relatively low number of dark-skinned African Americans in the YouGov sample relative to the ANES. There are also important discrepancies on sociodemographic variables: the average income is greater for YouGov, there are fewer Southerners (nearly 20 percent less than in the ANES), and the distribution of partisanship has more independents and fewer Democrats. Additionally, the 2012 ANES that featured an oversample of Black participants recorded only interviewer-assessed skin tone, whereas YouGov is self-reported. In combination, these differences in the sample and measurement may diminish the ways in which skin tone or skin tone identity can be detected in the political realm.

In the AmeriSpeak sample, we have fewer political items to draw from than the YouGov survey. However, there are three primary political questions: a question related to government reducing income inequality and two affirmative action items—one related to race-based affirmative action and the other skin-tone-based affirmative action. With respect to government action on inequality, skin tone and skin tone identity are not doing any work above and beyond racial identity. In each multivariate model, racial identity is a strong and significant predictor of increased support for reducing income inequality. Similarly, with respect to affirmative action based on race, racial identity

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is a strong and significant predictor in favor of affirmative action policies. Skin tone identity is not related to support for race-based affirmative action, and surprisingly, darker skin tone itself is negatively associated with support for race-based affirmative action ($p < .05$).

However, when it comes to skin-tone-based affirmative action, skin tone identity is the strongest and only significant predictor of support for this policy. Skin tone itself is not significantly associated with feelings towards color-based affirmative action, and neither is racial identity. In contrast, those high on skin tone identity are seven percentage points more likely than their low-identity counterparts to be in favor of affirmative action policies based on skin tone ($p < .05$).

Taken together, this evidence shows that, on issues that are traditionally discussed in more race-focused terms—like income disparities between Black and White people, and affirmative action to assist Black people in college admissions or employment, skin tone identity is weak relative to racial identity. However, on the one policy that explicitly centered on skin tone—*color*-based affirmative action—skin tone identity predominates. This suggests that if issues were framed around skin tone rather than race, we would expect skin tone identity to play a more prominent role in the political preferences of Black people.

Table 5.2: Policy Preferences by Skin Tone, Skin Tone Identity, and Racial Identity (YouGov)

	Support for Affirmative Action (Jobs)	Support for Affirmative Action (Education)	Support for Reducing Income Inequality	Support for Increasing Welfare Spending	Approval of Obama's Performance
Skin Tone ID	0.050	-0.016	-0.074	0.042	0.086**
	(0.042)	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.040)	(0.042)
Skin Tone (10 categories)	-0.032	-0.017	-0.066	-0.045	0.016
	(0.079)	(0.100)	(0.094)	(0.089)	(0.078)
Racial ID	0.222***	0.202***	0.133**	0.075	0.173***
	(0.057)	(0.060)	(0.054)	(0.050)	(0.062)
Constant	0.300***	0.271***	0.231***	0.415***	0.139*
	(0.077)	(0.081)	(0.077)	(0.072)	(0.075)
n	500	499	502	503	505
R-squared	0.146	0.126	0.216	0.129	0.299
	Support for Affirmative Action (Jobs)	**Support for Affirmative Action (Education)**	**Support for Reducing Income Inequality**	**Support for Increasing Welfare Spending**	**Approval of Obama's Performance**
Skin Tone ID	0.059	-0.017	-0.077	0.051	0.081*
	(0.042)	(0.051)	(0.048)	(0.039)	(0.043)
Skin Tone (3 categories)	-0.060	-0.006	-0.033	-0.067	0.032
	(0.063)	(0.078)	(0.076)	(0.064)	(0.062)
Racial ID	0.220***	0.202***	0.132**	0.072	0.174***
	(0.057)	(0.060)	(0.054)	(0.049)	(0.062)
Constant	0.305***	0.267***	0.217***	0.417***	0.136*
	(0.075)	(0.077)	(0.074)	(0.067)	(0.071)
n	500	499	502	503	505
R-squared	0.148	0.126	0.215	0.131	0.299

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1   These multivariate models employ survey weights and include multiple other standard control variables not included in the truncated version of this table for presentation purposes: gender, education, region, income, age, partisanship, ideology, and question ordering effects.

Table 5.3: Policy Preferences by Skin Tone, Skin Tone Identity, and Racial Identity (AmeriSpeak)

	Support for Reducing Income Inequality	Support for Affirmative Action (Skin Tone)	Support for Affirmative Action (Race)
Skin Tone ID	-0.033	0.067*	0.035
	(0.032)	(0.038)	(0.034)
Skin Tone (10 categories)	0.072	0.035	-0.100**
	(0.047)	(0.054)	(0.049)
Racial ID	0.108***	0.039	0.170***
	(0.039)	(0.045)	(0.040)
Constant	0.291***	0.305***	0.215***
	(0.064)	(0.074)	(0.067)
n	806	798	801
R-squared	0.131	0.051	0.107

	Support for Reducing Income Inequality	Support for Affirmative Action (Skin Tone)	Support for Affirmative Action (Race)
Skin Tone ID	-0.033	0.069*	0.035
	(0.032)	(0.038)	(0.034)
Skin Tone (3 categories)	0.020	0.003	-0.031**
	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.016)
Racial ID	0.109***	0.040	0.169***
	(0.039)	(0.045)	(0.040)
Constant	0.290***	0.316***	0.223***
	(0.066)	(0.077)	(0.069)
n	806	798	801
R-squared	0.131	0.051	0.107

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1   These multivariate models do not use survey weights given issues with weighting the AmeriSpeak sample to Census benchmarks, but do include multiple other standard control variables not included in the truncated version of this table for presentation purposes: gender, education, region, income, age, partisanship, ideology, and question ordering effects.

Table 5.4: Group-Based Attitudes by Skin Tone Identity and Racial Identity (YouGov)

	Personal Discrimination Based on Race	Personal Discrimination Based on Skin Tone	Linked Fate: Black	Linked Fate: Dark-Skinned	Linked Fate: Light-Skinned	Believe Police Treat Whites Much Better than Blacks	Believe Police Treat Light-Skinned Much Better than Dark-Skinned	Comfort around White people	Comfort around Black people
Skin Tone ID	0.108**	0.115**	0.026	0.093	0.090	-0.062**	0.050*	-0.072*	-0.069
	(0.050)	(0.052)	(0.057)	(0.063)	(0.064)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Skin Tone (10 categories)	0.120	0.083	0.015	0.049	-0.081	-0.086	-0.099	0.072	0.171**
	(0.094)	(0.091)	(0.099)	(0.104)	(0.115)	(0.072)	(0.064)	(0.084)	(0.076)
Racial ID	0.111*	0.144**	0.236***	0.157**	0.073	0.201***	-0.025	-0.066	0.196***
	(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.071)	(0.075)	(0.077)	(0.042)	(0.035)	(0.053)	(0.054)
Constant	0.303***	0.256***	0.286***	0.187*	0.189*	0.676***	0.507***	0.679***	0.395***
	(0.084)	(0.089)	(0.106)	(0.110)	(0.110)	(0.071)	(0.046)	(0.074)	(0.083)
n	503	504	501	500	496	505	503	505	503
R-squared	0.099	0.119	0.084	0.085	0.073	0.172	0.060	0.136	0.139
	Personal Discrimination Based on Race	Personal Discrimination Based on Skin Tone	Linked Fate: Black	Linked Fate: Dark-Skinned	Linked Fate: Light-Skinned	Believe Police Treat Whites Much Better than Blacks	Believe Police Treat Light-Skinned Much Better than Dark-Skinned	Comfort around White people	Comfort around Black people
Skin Tone ID	0.105**	0.119**	0.043	0.096	0.102	-0.063**	0.048*	-0.083**	-0.071*
	(0.051)	(0.053)	(0.058)	(0.065)	(0.064)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.041)	(0.042)
Skin Tone (3 categories)	0.090	0.040	-0.062	0.019	-0.104	-0.053	-0.054	0.096	0.124**
	(0.073)	(0.069)	(0.075)	(0.082)	(0.087)	(0.053)	(0.045)	(0.060)	(0.054)
Racial ID	0.115*	0.145**	0.233***	0.157**	0.069	0.199***	-0.027	-0.063	0.200***
	(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.070)	(0.075)	(0.077)	(0.042)	(0.035)	(0.052)	(0.054)
Constant	0.320***	0.274***	0.307***	0.199*	0.189*	0.661***	0.488***	0.679***	0.420***
	(0.079)	(0.083)	(0.104)	(0.108)	(0.104)	(0.067)	(0.042)	(0.067)	(0.078)
n	503	504	501	500	496	505	503	505	503
R-squared	0.099	0.118	0.086	0.085	0.076	0.170	0.056	0.141	0.139

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 These multivariate models employ survey weights and include multiple other standard control variables not included in the truncated version of this table for presentation purposes: gender, education, region, income, age, partisanship, ideology, and question ordering effects.

Table 5.5: Group-Based Attitudes by Skin Tone Identity and Racial Identity (AmeriSpeak)

	Lighter-Skinned People Receive Better Job Opportunities	Police Treat Darker-Skinned People Worse	Whites Treat Lighter-Skinned People Better	Skin Tone Determines How Far One Can Make it in Society	Discussing Skin Tone is Divisive & a Distraction from Race	Light-Skinned & Dark-Skinned People Face Equal Discrimination
Skin Tone ID	0.097***	0.060*	0.052*	0.153***	-0.003	0.055*
	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.037)	(0.030)
Skin Tone (10 categories)	0.077*	0.078*	0.127***	0.004	-0.127**	-0.161***
	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.045)	(0.046)	(0.052)	(0.043)
Racial ID	0.077**	0.130***	0.171***	0.109***	0.146***	0.142***
	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.044)	(0.036)
Constant	0.270***	0.318***	0.239***	0.368***	0.501***	0.485***
	(0.061)	(0.065)	(0.063)	(0.064)	(0.073)	(0.059)
n	808	808	808	808	810	810
R-squared	0.088	0.086	0.110	0.119	0.045	0.059
	Lighter-Skinned People Receive Better Job Opportunities	Police Treat Darker-Skinned People Worse	Whites Treat Lighter-Skinned People Better	Skin Tone Determines How Far One Can Make it in Society	Discussing Skin Tone is Divisive & a Distraction from Race	Light-Skinned & Dark-Skinned People Face Equal Discrimination
Skin Tone ID	0.095***	0.061*	0.050	0.153***	-0.000	0.057*
	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.037)	(0.030)
Skin Tone (3 categories)	0.030**	0.021	0.046***	0.002	-0.048***	-0.058***
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.014)
Racial ID	0.078**	0.132***	0.172***	0.109***	0.145***	0.140***
	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.044)	(0.036)
Constant	0.253***	0.318***	0.216***	0.365***	0.526***	0.513***
	(0.063)	(0.068)	(0.064)	(0.067)	(0.075)	(0.061)
n	808	808	808	808	810	810
R-squared	0.089	0.085	0.112	0.119	0.047	0.063

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1   These multivariate models do not use survey weights given issues with weighting the AmeriSpeak sample to Census benchmarks, but do include multiple other standard control variables not included in the truncated version of this table for presentation purposes: gender, education, region, income, age, partisanship, ideology, and question ordering effects.

Group-Based Attitudes

Next, I turn to another dimension of interest: group-based attitudes. These items are not focused on policies specifically but are generally focused on topics that are meaningful for politics. This includes personal experiences with discrimination based on race and skin tone, linked fate, police treatment, and reported levels of comfort around both White and Black people.

First, I turn to the YouGov data. Two questions asked how much discrimination each respondent reports personally facing because of race or skin tone ($r = 0.82$). Skin tone high-identifiers in the sample are 11 percentage points more likely to report facing racial discrimination in their own lives relative to low-identifiers ($p < .05$). This is equivalent from moving from just shy of "a moderate amount" of racial discrimination (0.48 on a 0-1 scale, when using the 3-category skin tone scale) up closer to "a lot" of discrimination (0.59). Skin tone identity is a more powerful predictor of reporting experiencing racial discrimination than racial identity, although the substantive effects of racial and skin tone identity are similar.

On the item about color-specific discrimination, skin tone identity is again a significant predictor: skin tone high-identifiers are 12 percentage points more likely to report facing discrimination in their lives based on their skin tone relative to low-identifiers ($p < .05$). This is equivalent to moving from shy of "a moderate amount" of color-based discrimination closer to "a lot" (with marginal effects of 0.46 for low-identifiers vs. 0.58 for high-identifiers using the 3-category skin tone scale). This effect is on par with that of racial identity but is clearly picking up something distinct from racial identity.

There are three measures of linked fate. In addition to the standard question asking whether what happens to Black people broadly will affect the participant personally, I also amended the group specified to ask about two additional groups: light-skinned and dark-skinned Black people specifically. Interestingly, skin tone identity is not significantly associated with any of these three items, but racial

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identity importance is significantly related to both the standard linked fate item *and* the amended item about darker-skinned individuals. In both cases, people high on racial identity are significantly more likely to say what happens to Black people broadly ($p < .01$) and dark-skinned people as a group ($p < .05$) will impact them. The same relationship is not found with respect to racial identity and the question about light-skinned people. Thus, for both sets of items so far—about personal experiences with discrimination and linked fate—there is a significant relationship between racial identity and perceptions about skin tone. This is worthwhile to emphasize given the relative paucity of discussion regarding skin tone in studies of politics and group attitudes to date.

Next, there were two items asked about treatment by police. The first asked whether police treat White people better than Black people. The second amended the question to ask whether police treat light-skinned Black people better than dark-skinned Black people. On the first item, higher skin tone identity is significantly associated with feeling that police treat Blacks and Whites more equally ($p < .03$)—with weak skin color identifiers agreeing with this statement that Black people receive worse police treatment at around 90 percent on a 0-1 scale versus strong skin color identifiers at 84 percent. Thus, both groups overwhelmingly agree that Black people receive worse treatment. On the item about police treatment based on skin tone, people high on skin tone identity are five percentage points more likely to say that police favor light-skinned Black people over those with darker skin ($p < .10$). There is no significant relationship between racial identity and responses to this item. Again, on an item centering skin color as the central issue, skin tone identity is doing most of the work.

Finally, I examine reported levels of comfort around White and Black people based on color. This pair of questions speaks to some takeaways from the qualitative interviews discussed previously: a sense that Black people with lighter skin fit better in White society, and that lighter-skinned Black people may feel more comfortable around White people than darker-skinned Black people. These questions ask: "How comfortable do you feel around [White/Black] people?"

With respect to comfort around White people, individuals high on skin tone identity are approximately eight percentage points less likely to say that they feel comfortable around Whites than their low-identifying counterparts ($p < .05$). Racial identity, however, is unrelated to comfort around Whites. On the second item—concerning comfort around other Black people—there are mixed results. Using the continuous measure of self-reported skin tone, there is no effect of skin tone identity, but skin tone itself is important: darker-skinned participants report feeling significantly *more* comfortable around Black people than their lighter-skinned counterparts ($p < .05$). The same goes for those high on racial identity feeling more comfortable around Black people than weak racial identifiers ($p < .01$). When relying on the truncated three-category measure of skin tone, however, there is a puzzling result: those high on skin tone identity report being slightly less comfortable around Black people ($p < .10$).[63] When the analyses are broken down by skin tone of respondents, this negative relationship between color identity and comfort around other Black people is wholly driven by light-skinned participants—with high-identifying light-skinned people being 15 percentage points less likely than their low-identifying light-skinned counterparts to report being comfortable around other Black people ($p < . 01$). There is no relationship with skin tone identity among either medium- or dark-skinned participants. In contrast, using the 3-category skin tone model specification, dark-skinned participants and strong racial identifiers remain significantly more likely to say they feel comfortable around Black people ($p < .05$ and $p < .01$, respectively).

These results provide evidence that high skin tone identifiers feel significantly *less* comfortable around White people—unlike strong racial identifiers, who report feeling no more or less comfortable around Whites. Moreover, darker-skinned people—regardless of their levels of skin tone identity—report feeling significantly more comfortable around other Black people than their lighter-skinned

[63] This is the only item on which there is a discrepancy depending on which measure of skin color is used (continuous vs. categorical), although the results trend in the same direction for both measures.

counterparts do. This is consistent with my qualitative evidence and work by Hunter (2005, 2007) whereby concerns about racial authenticity are invoked by light-skinned participants. In some cases, those with lighter skin may feel out of place or concerned about signaling their authenticity when interacting with other Black people, especially those with darker skin.

With respect to the AmeriSpeak data (see Table 5.4), we have a more limited number of items to draw from, but many items are directly related to skin tone. For example, there are items related to differential treatment and opportunities in society based on skin tone—in the realm of employment, police treatment, treatment by White people, and potential for mobility in society. Moreover, there are two additional items that ask reverse-coded questions suggesting skin tone is *not* important relative to race. Consistent with the preceding evidence, I find that when skin tone is explicitly implicated, skin tone identity is frequently a strong predictor of one's attitudes.

First, let's turn to those sets of questions related to treatment and opportunity in society. The first item asks whether lighter-skinned Black people receive better job opportunities than darker-skinned Black people. Skin tone, skin tone identity, and racial identity are all significantly associated with attitudes towards this item. But, skin tone identity is by far the largest predictor—with those high on skin tone identity being 10 percentage points more likely than their low-identity counterparts to believe lighter-skinned people have better job opportunities ($p < .01$). The second item asks whether police treat darker-skinned Black people worse than lighter-skinned people. Again, all three predictors of interest are significantly and positively associated with agreement with this statement. Racial identity is the strongest predictor of belief that police treat those with darker skin worse, but skin tone and skin tone identity remain significantly associated ($p < .10$). Similarly, on the third item—related to whether White people treat lighter-skinned Black people better—we again see that all three predictors of interest remain significant. Here, skin tone and racial identity are the most significant predictors ($p < .01$ and $p < .01$, respectively), compared to a much weaker effect of skin tone identity ($p < .10$).

The fourth item asks how often skin tone determines how far one can make it in society. Both skin tone identity and racial identity are positively and significantly associated with agreement that skin tone is an important factor in societal mobility. Both have double-digit influences, but skin tone identity has a larger substantive effect than racial identity—with a difference of 15 percentage points between those low vs. high on skin tone identity ($p < .01$), versus a ten percentage point difference for those low vs. high on racial identity ($p < .01$).

Finally, let's turn to the last two items that were reverse coded to suggest that skin tone is not important relative to race. The first of these items asks whether skin tone is simply a distraction from focusing on the bigger issue of race. Interestingly, skin tone identity is not significantly associated with opinions towards this item. Still, those with darker skin are 13 percentage points less likely to agree with this sentiment than their light-skinned counterparts ($p < .02$). In contrast, racial identity is significantly associated with agreement that skin tone is a distraction, such that it cuts the opposite way: those high on racial identity are approximately 15 percentage points more likely than their low-racial identity counterparts to agree with this statement ($p < .01$). Critically, this strongly signals that skin tone identification and racial identity are capturing distinct things and map onto group cleavages.

The second item proposes that light- and dark-skinned Black people face equal amounts of discrimination in society. Here, all three predictors of interest are significantly associated with attitudes towards this item. Again, the strongest predictors are skin tone itself—with darker-skinned people being 16 percentage points less likely to agree with this statement than their lighter-skinned counterparts ($p < .01$)—and racial identity importance ($p < .01$). Surprisingly, skin tone identity is weakly associated with agreement with this statement—such that those high on skin tone identity are approximately six percentage points more likely to believe Black people face equal discrimination regardless of skin tone ($p < .10$). Breaking out these analyses by skin tone reveals that this result is being driven by high-identifying light-skinned people. Indeed, when interacting skin tone and identity,

high-identifying light-skinned individuals are approximately 13 percentage points more likely to agree with this notion relative to their high-identifying dark-skinned counterparts ($p < .05$; Figure 5.10). This suggests that the views of high-identifying individuals vary based on their skin tone. This interaction of skin tone and identity will be explored further in the next chapter.

Figure 5.10: Interactive Effect of Skin Tone and Skin Tone Identity (AmeriSpeak)

Light-Skinned & Dark-Skinned People Face Equal Discrimination
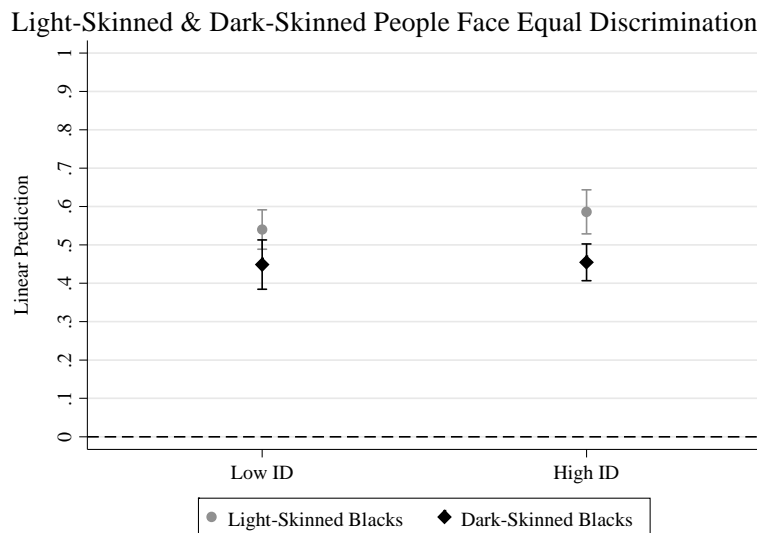
Note: Model estimates include 95% confidence intervals, interacting skin tone and skin tone identity, and control for racial identity, gender, education, age, South, income, partisanship, ideology, and survey design effects.

Overall, I have shown that skin tone identity is related to evaluations of President Obama's job performance, personal experiences with discrimination based on both race and color, treatment by the police, levels of comfort around White people, and a variety of items assessing the impact of skin tone in society. These analyses also uncovered a significant relationship between racial identity and some items related to personal discrimination, linked fate, and police treatment based on race. In many cases, the effects of skin tone identity rivaled or even eclipsed the effects of racial identity, especially with respect to items explicitly invoking skin tone. This suggests the importance of future study of how skin tone and racial identities influence politics, policy preferences, and group attitudes.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have measured and analyzed skin tone as an identity. The evidence demonstrates that skin tone serves as a meaningful identity to many African Americans, both in terms of self-image and with respect to worldviews. Relying on a mix of open-ended survey items, in-depth interviews, and closed-ended measures of skin tone identity, I find evidence of both cognitive and affective attachments to color as an identity group. Consistent with the extant literature on colorism, its deeply-seated history and corresponding socialization practices around skin tone—from family, friends, and media exposure—all contribute to self-categorization into skin tone groups and knowledge of group stereotypes. Furthermore, color identity is a distinct construct from racial identity.

Building from the colorism literature signaling the relevance of skin color across time and context, I examine if Black people explicitly report their skin tone as important to their identity. This comes through from the language used in open-ended survey responses and my interviews, signaling in-group ("we") and out-group ("they") attachment. Our understanding of this group attachment is further strengthened through the development of new measures of skin tone identity. Given that race is a central organizing principle of American society, it is not surprising that skin tone identity is not as ubiquitous as racial identity. Still, over half of Black participants say their skin tone is important to their sense of self and that if someone insulted their skin tone group it would feel personal. Moreover, those with darker skin report their skin tone as significantly more important to their identity than their lighter-skinned counterparts. As a point of comparison, recent work highlights that 30 to 40 percent of Whites in the U.S. possess a strong racial identity (Jardina 2019, p. 261). I have demonstrated that comparable or greater levels of skin color identity are held within the Black community but have received little attention. Additionally, attachment to one's skin tone group is more prominent among younger individuals, suggesting that this identity may grow in importance in the coming decades.

In combination, this evidence reveals a strong affective attachment to one's skin tone among a sizable portion of Black people. How then might skin tone identity influence political attitudes? The data reveal that strong skin tone identifiers are more likely to evaluate President Obama's job performance positively, as well as being significantly associated with reporting higher levels of discrimination (on the basis of both race and skin tone), perceptions that police treat light-skinned Black people better than dark-skinned people, and feeling less comfortable around Whites compared to weak skin tone identifiers. There is also some suggestion that skin tone and skin tone identity work in tandem with respect to a number of color-based issues. This will be explored more thoroughly using a survey experiment in the next chapter.

There are many important takeaways here. First, despite a lack of study of skin tone in politics, there is interesting variation in responses to questions regarding skin tone identity *and* questions involving differential treatment based on one's skin tone. This suggests that asking questions related to skin tone in the political and social realms would add greater depth and nuance to our understanding of public opinion. Moreover, there is no reason to expect that the impact of skin tone or a potential skin tone identity is unique to African Americans. Future research should expand the scope of this project to other communities of color as well, both in the United States and globally.

Second, the effects of skin tone identity frequently rivaled those of racial identity—especially with respect to items involving skin tone rather than race. This is quite stunning given that racial identity importance is viewed as a central predictor in understanding public opinion. Still, this was less true for standard policy items than the group-based issues, however. This suggests interesting room for further study. For example, can skin color identity be primed to be more meaningful for politics? Or, has the primary focus on race in political discourse, both historically and contemporarily, removed the possibility of politicizing other subgroup identities within the Black racial group?

CHAPTER 6
Activating Skin Tone Identity

In the previous chapter, I developed the importance of skin tone as an identity that is interwoven with and yet distinct from one's racial identity. Through multiple, original measures of skin tone identity and comparisons to standard measures of racial identity, I highlighted that these concepts are indeed distinct. Moreover, I found that skin tone identity is related to views on some social and political issues, especially those issues that explicitly center on skin tone.

Building from this, I expect that skin tone can be activated as an identity in ways similar to other identities, such as race or gender. In this chapter, I examine if skin tone can be activated through an experimental treatment and, if so, what implications this has for one's attitudes and opinion on a variety of items. Through the use of a survey experiment via the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) nationally representative AmeriSpeak panel, I demonstrate that skin color identity can be activated in response to reading a story about inequalities. Furthermore, I expand on the ways in which skin tone identity acts in distinct ways from racial identity. This is important because it provides additional evidence that measuring and studying skin tone identity is not simply another way of examining racial identity. Focusing on racial identity without taking into account skin tone misses important nuance in our understanding of race and politics in the United States.

After laying a foundation for understanding how skin color operates and some of the conditions under which it matters (or does not matter), I move towards asking some second-order questions in this chapter: What are the conditions under which skin color identity can be activated to

influence public opinion and political behavior? How does activating one's skin color identity influence their views towards social and political issues?

Because this is the first study to examine skin color and race as interrelated but distinct *identities*, it is not entirely clear how skin tone identity may operate. The combination of these two identities could represent either a complimentary or competing set of views when presented with information about colorism. Consequently, I put forth competing expectations for this experiment.

One possibility is that (**H1**) when viewing a message regarding skin color inequities and remedies, the interaction of skin color and skin color identity will result in those with high levels of skin tone identity—but at opposite ends of the color spectrum—to exhibit the largest differences in support for political remedies to color-based inequities. Put differently, this would mean that despite a shared sense of strong color-based identity, light- and dark-skinned Black people experience the world in such different ways that their views would not align. Specifically, one might expect that after having their color identity activated, dark-skinned would increase their recognition of color-based inequities as well as their support for various policies to diminish these inequities. Light-skinned people, on the other hand, may minimize color-based disparities when prompted to think about these issues and express less support for efforts to provide policy remedies. This may be for a number of potential reasons—e.g., because strong light-skinned identifiers believe race supersedes color in terms of importance, because they are unaware of the extent of colorism's effects in society since they largely do not face this issue, because discussing skin color may make them more self-conscious about their authenticity within the racial group, or even because they may recognize the privileges associated with their light skin. Thus, it is not simply that skin tone identity that matters, but the intersection of one's color *and* level of identity.

Alternatively, (**H2**) those with high levels of skin tone identity—regardless of skin tone—may be most willing to acknowledge colorism and thus most supportive of political remedies to address

color-based inequities. In this scenario, one would expect skin tone identity to be a unifying identity regardless of one's actual color. If this were the case, we would find evidence that relative to weak color identifiers, those who identify strongly with their skin tone (whether light- or dark-skinned) would be most supportive of taking actions to reduce color-based inequities when reminded of discrimination in society. Thus, while dark-skinned strong identifiers look equivalent across these two competing hypotheses, it is *high-identifying light-skinned* people who act in distinct ways: here, with them recognizing the negative impact of colorism and choosing to set aside their own color-based privilege to do what they perceive is best for the racial group by lifting up those with dark skin. Put differently, one's level of color identity is what may matter most, above and beyond their actual skin tone.

Both my quantitative and qualitative data suggest that skin color and skin color identity can be politicized. Still, there is good reason for uncertainty surrounding the experimental expectations. In my in-depth interviews, for example, darker-skinned individuals seemed to be more willing to acknowledge and discuss colorism, which may support **H1**. Still, some light-skinned interviewees were also very willing to acknowledge their privilege based on skin color—which suggests that **H2** will be supported, given that light-skinned individuals who recognize color-based disparities may be willing to (at least in theory) give up their privileges based on skin tone in the fight towards equity. However, there was also a larger portion of light-skinned individuals who recognized being light-skinned but downplayed the importance of or value placed on skin color in society (thereby minimizing any potential privilege). This may suggest that **H1** will be supported—with the possibility that these individuals may strongly identify with their skin tone, but be less likely to acknowledge the significance of colorism and therefore be less likely to support remedies. Similarly, some evidence from the end of Chapter 5 suggests that examining levels of skin color identity in combination with one's skin color may reveal the clearest picture of how these two forces operate in conjunction.

Examining the case of skin color as an identity is unique because skin tone is closely intertwined and rooted in one's racial group identity. While other identities are also intersectional—e.g., race and gender, or race and religion—they are not inherently intertwined such that one is a subgroup of the other. Indeed, skin color is a subset of racial categorization, whereas gender or religion intersect with race but are still distinct groupings. This means that skin color and racial identity are often studied as two dimensions of the broader construct of racial categorization (Banton 2011, 2012). The interwoven nature of race and color is especially important to consider with respect to understanding light-skinned people who identify strongly with their color. If people are simultaneously Black *and* light-skinned, what does it mean for them to identify strongly with being light-skinned? The combination of identities could represent a competing set of views—i.e., when one regularly experiences discrimination based on race, but not based on color, what happens when presented with information about colorism? One response may be an attempt to work towards a goal of propelling the racial group upward by addressing colorism. Alternatively, their appearance could limit their support for color-based remedies given that they are largely shielded from colorism or may even have fears about being seen as less authentic members of the broader racial group.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, I examine if skin color can be activated as a social identity in a socially and politically consequential way. If so, what are the ramifications of activating skin color identity for one's social and political views? Below I outline my research design and measures before discussing the findings. In short, I find that skin color is an identity that can be activated by reading about inequalities in society, but only among high-identifying dark-skinned people.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND MEASURES

To assess the ways in which skin tone identity could be activated, I draw from a body of literature that examines the activation of one's identity across a variety of contexts (e.g., Hutchings and Jardina 2009; Klar 2020; Mendelberg 2001; White 2007). To do so, participants were randomly assigned to read a brief article. There were three possible types of stories to which they could be assigned to read. The first was the control group who read a (fictional) story about a Sci Fi convention. The second and third were the treatment groups which involved reading a press release from an organization about either race-based or skin tone-based inequities in society.[64] These treatments drew from research in the social sciences to demonstrate the stark differences in outcomes based on race or skin tone with specific examples of these disparities.[65] The only information changing across conditions was whether the inequities in the press release were attributed to race or skin color groups.

This survey experiment was run using NORC's AmeriSpeak panel thanks to support from Time-Sharing Experiments with the Social Sciences. The sample included 1,045 African American respondents recruited between January 16 and February 22, 2019. While the entire AmeriSpeak panel is nationally representative, there were a number of inconsistencies between the African American subsample and Census estimates of the African American population. Specifically, gender and education were heavily skewed towards women and more educated participants (refer back to Table

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[64] Within these broader treatment categories, participants were assigned to view one of two versions of the article (see Appendix 6.2). In both treatment categories, the information regarding inequities was presented, but one condition had additional information that suggested some potential policy solutions put forth by the organization. To increase power in my analyses, I combine across these conditions because I do not find consistent patterns of results when broken down by these more fine-grained treatment conditions.

[65] With an eye toward keeping the text constant across conditions, I looked up the statistics based on both race- and color-based inequalities, ultimately taking an average across those two references to keep the information provided as close to factually correct as possible in each treatment condition. Thus, while the information provided to participants could not be described as entirely accurate (because it is an average across two sets of statistics), they give the reader an approximate sense of these disparities.

4.6 for descriptive statistics). Thus, while this is far better than other online convenience samples of African Americans, it is not nationally representative.[66]

My key dependent variables are related to policies, perceptions of discrimination, and behavioral outcome measures (see Appendix 2). The key independent variables are consistent with those presented in Chapter 5: self-placement on the 10-point Yadon-Ostfeld Skin Color Scale and my skin color identity importance item. On the key skin color measure, I collapse across responses to the 10-point color scale. Here, the light-skinned category includes points 1 to 4 on the scale, which constitutes 27 percent of the sample (n=283). The dark-skinned category includes points 8 to 10, which is 25 percent of the sample (n=260).[67] On the skin color identity importance item, I find that 44 percent of Black participants say their skin color is not very important to them (the two lowest response option categories; n=460). Twenty percent of participants fell into the middle category, saying their skin color was moderately important to them (n=210), and 36 percent said their skin tone was very or extremely important to them (n=370). For the analyses presented below, the primary focus is comparing those who fall into the highest and lowest skin color identity importance categories to reveal how skin color interacts with color-based identity to influence one's perspectives (n=830 total).

Now that I have provided a sense of the measures and treatments, I turn back to the question at the center of this chapter. We have seen throughout the previous chapters that skin color is related to a myriad of social and political views. Using original measures of skin color identity, I demonstrated in the last chapter that color identity is distinct from racial identity, is meaningful to more than half of

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[66] For the purposes of my analyses, given the disparities between the sample and Census estimates, the weighting procedure heavily over-weights some singular observations and vastly under-weights others. As a result, the survey weights are not employed in my analyses of this experimental data.

[67] The largest category is medium-skinned individuals at 48 percent (n=500). The primary comparison of interest is between those with light and dark skin, so the sample size is significantly reduced given the lack of substantive focus on those medium-skinned participants. Still, over half of my sample (n=543) falls into the light- and dark-skinned categories.

African Americans across multiple samples, and is associated with various opinions on social issues. So, how does one's skin color *and* level of skin color identity interact to influence one's world-views?

To answer this question, I am interested in examining the interaction of three things: (1) exposure to the treatment—i.e., reading a story about color vs. racial inequities; (2) one's self-reported skin color as light or dark; and (3) one's level of skin color identity being low or high. As a point of comparison to skin color identity, I also estimate a separate set of models that incorporate one's level of racial identity to explore how skin color identity and racial identity work in distinct ways.[68]

RESULTS

To begin, I examine if there are main effects of the treatments across the key dependent variables of the interest. These initial analyses do not incorporate one's skin tone or skin tone identity with respect to political views. Did viewing either the race-based or color-based inequities treatments influence political views? Yes, I find that the treatments had significant main effects in each category of dependent variables: traditional policy outcomes, behavioral outcomes, and my original color-specific items. While neither treatment had a significant effect on support for affirmative action based on race, viewing the skin color inequities treatment increased support for affirmative action based on skin tone by approximately six percentage points ($p < .07$). Only the race-based, but not color-based, inequities treatment increased support for government efforts to reduce income inequality by approximately five percentage points ($p < .07$). This suggests that exposure to information about inequities can cause people to be more supportive of some policies that can reduce such inequities.

[68] I include the tables with the estimates from all of the models at the end of this chapter. The first set of tables (6.1) show the treatment main effects. The next set of tables (6.2) shows the analyses interacting skin tone and skin tone identity with the treatments, and the third set (6.3) includes racial identity interacted with the treatments.

On the behavioral outcomes, there are mixed effects. Those in the race inequities treatment were five percentage points more likely to express an interest in signing a petition urging members of Congress to resolve these inequities ($p < .07$). Surprisingly, the strongest effects are with respect to the interest in protesting—but move in the opposite direction of what is expected. That is, participants who read about color-based inequities are seven percentage points *less likely* to express an interest in protesting these inequities ($p < .01$) and those in the racial inequities condition are also five percentage points less likely to express an interest in protesting ($p < .09$) than those in the control. Across the board, then, the treatments have a dampening effect on participant's interest in protesting. In combination, these results may signal differences in engaging in protest activity based on how costly that behavior is. For example, people may be willing to sign a petition as a relatively low-cost way of fighting injustices, but may not be willing to engage in costly participation—like protest—for something they believe is deeply engrained in the ethos of the United States.

Finally, the most limited set of results in these analyses is with respect to the color-based items. Here, the only significant effect is with respect to the belief that White people treat light-skinned people better—with participants who viewed the color-based inequities story being five percentage points more likely to believe this is the case ($p < .09$). Taken together, these initial analyses suggest that the treatments have some effect on the views of Black participants.

Is it possible that there are further effects to uncover when taking into account skin tone or skin tone identity as well? To answer this question, I examine the interaction between exposure to the treatments, skin color, and reported levels of color identity. These analyses capture the primary question of interest at the heart of this chapter—while we know that race matters for how one views the social world, does one's skin color and level of color identity interact to influence one's views?

The first set of dependent variables—traditional policy outcomes—include attitudes towards income inequality and affirmative action. In this domain, there is not a significant relationship between

skin color and skin color identity after viewing either the color- or race-based inequities treatment. That is, participants who are high on skin tone identity are no more likely than those low on skin tone identity to support either the government taking steps to reduce income inequality or to support employers taking race into account in hiring decisions. Even on my measure of affirmative action that asks about favoring (or opposing) taking skin color of African Americans into account in hiring decisions, there is no effect.

What about if we substitute racial identity in place of skin tone identity on these analyses with traditional policy items? Here, too, there is no significant relationship with income inequality or support for race-based affirmative action. There is a significant relationship on the color-based affirmative action item among participants who read about racial inequities. I find dark-skinned individuals who are low on racial identity are much *less* supportive of color-based affirmative action programs—by 51 percentage points—than light-skinned weak racial identifiers ($p < .07$; Table 6.3A). Thus, there appears to be a particularly strong backlash effect against color-specific policies among dark-skinned individuals who say their race is not important to them. Of course, it is important to recall that only about 13 percent of my sample—and only about nine percent of dark-skinned respondents—weakly identifies as Black.[69] Thus, there is a significant effect on the color-based affirmative action item only among dark-skinned weak racial identifiers, a unique subset of the group.

So far, then, we have not seen much evidence of a relationship between skin color and skin color identity interacting with exposure to either of my experimental treatments. The only instance in which there was some suggestion of an effect is on the color-based affirmative action item specifically, but this only occurred in the racial inequities treatment and among dark-skinned Black respondents who identified weakly with their racial group. The lack of findings on these traditional policy items is

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[69] Only 24 of 259 dark-skinned individuals in my sample said their race is not very important to them, and 46 of 283 light-skinned individuals said the same.

consistent with what we saw in the previous chapter, whereby skin color identity was a predictor of political views more frequently for items that focused specifically on color than traditional items focusing on race.

Next, I examine a second set of dependent variables. After exposure to either of the treatments about inequities in society, one might expect a heightened interest in some behavioral interventions—especially among those who are particularly invested in a given group. To this end, I include a set of four items that signal different levels of behavioral engagement: one's interest in signing a petition, protesting, volunteering, or talking with friends or family regarding the issues they read about. Here, too, I do not find any significant relationships between exposure to either of the treatments and skin color interacted with either skin color identity or racial identity.

Across these two sets of dependent variables, we have not seen any significant associations between traditional political views or political behavior and one's skin tone, skin tone (or racial) identity, and exposure to the treatment. This suggests that activating one's skin tone and skin tone identity may not be sufficient to mobilize action or change one's political views. But, recall that this is also true with respect to racial identity. That is, even strong racial identifiers were no more likely to express interest in any of the behavioral measures or support the race-related policies after exposure to a story about racial inequities. This suggests another possible explanation: when limiting the analyses to light- vs. dark-skinned individuals *and*, within those categories, to only those who identify weakly or strongly with their color-based identity, the small sample size may reduce the opportunities with which we might be able to detect results.

Alternatively, it may be that questions specifically related to skin color are most likely to draw out the starkest contrasts based on the combination of one's skin color and level of color identity. To this end, I turn to my final set of dependent variables. These original items are broadly related to skin

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color discrimination in society.[70] Is it possible that attitudes can be activated on these issues following exposure to the group inequities treatments?

I find a number of treatment effects among this subset. I first turn to examine the subset of items that I discussed in the last chapter related to skin color and treatment in society—with respect to job opportunities, treatment by police, treatment by White people, and the potential for upward mobility in society. I find a significant interaction between the skin color inequities treatment, skin tone, and skin tone identity on these items (Figure 6.1; Table 6.2B).

The strongest effect is on opinions toward lighter-skinned people receiving better job opportunities. Figure 6.1 highlights this effect with a direct comparison between the control and treatment groups. The dashed line at zero on the y-axis signals the exact same levels of agreement on a given issue in the treatment *and* the control. Thus, anything with confidence intervals that do not overlap with zero represents a significant treatment effect. As shown in the top left panel of Figure 6.1A, after viewing the color inequities treatment, dark-skinned respondents are 18 percentage points more likely than their counterparts in the control group to say that it's very common for light-skinned people to get better job opportunities than those with dark skin ($p < .05$). Moreover, even among those who viewed the color treatment, dark-skinned strong color-identifiers believe this happens nearly "most of the time" (0.68 on a 0 to 1 scale) relative to "only about half the time" for low-identifying light-skinned (0.47; $p < .05$) or low-identifying dark-skinned participants (0.45; $p < .05$). In contrast, as shown in the right panel of Figure 6.1A, there is no similar effect in the racial inequities treatment. Thus, reading about color-based inequities—but not race-based inequities—contributes to shifting opinion among one subgroup: high-identifying dark-skinned participants.

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[70] Inspiration for these items came from my in-depth interviews, as well as recent work by Harvey et al. (2017) on creating a scale related to colorism. Indeed, the question wording for the item about societal mobility was adapted from a similar item used by Harvey et al.

The next strongest effect is with respect to perceived societal mobility (Figure 6.1B). Here again, there is a significant triple interaction only in the skin color treatment (but not race treatment) relative to the control ($p < .08$). I find a 19-percentage point gap between strongly identifying dark-skinned participants in the color inequities treatment relative to the control. This subgroup is likely to believe that color determines how far someone can make it in society approximately "most of the time" (0.70 on a 0 to 1 scale) relative to less than half the time for low-identifying light-skinned (0.46; $p < .05$) or low-identifying dark-skinned participants (0.43; $p < .05$) in the color inequities condition. Again, activating skin tone identity only shifts the views of high-identifying dark-skinned people.

There is a similar effect with respect to views that White people treat light-skinned Black people better than dark-skinned people. Yet again, the racial inequities treatment does not significantly influence views on this issue in combination with skin tone or color identity. There is evidence that the skin color treatment has a significant effect, however. There is a 24 percentage point difference between high-identifying dark-skinned people in the treatment vs. control on their views about Whites' perceptions of Black people based on skin color ($p < .05$). Among those who viewed the color treatment, high-identifying dark-skinned participants say "most of the time" Whites treat lighter-skinned people better (0.77 on a 0 to 1 scale) relative to each of the three other subgroups who say this happens "about half the time" (0.51 for low-identifying light-skinned people, $p < .05$; 0.56 for low-identifying dark-skinned people, $p < .10$; 0.54 for high-identifying light-skinned people, $p < .10$).

Finally, the weakest relationship is with respect to treatment by police. There is suggestive evidence that high-identifying dark-skinned participants are again the only subgroup moved by the skin color treatment. After viewing the color treatment, this subgroup is 13 percentage points more likely to report that police treat dark-skinned people worse relative to those in the control group ($p < .11$). Dark-skinned high-identifiers believe police treat their group worse "most of the time" (0.73 on a 0 to 1 scale) relative to approximately "half the time" in the control (0.60). In contrast, the other

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subgroups believe this happens "about half the time" in both the control and treatment groups. Still, these results should be interpreted with caution as the triple interaction coefficient with respect to the treatment, skin tone, and color identity is not even close to statistically significant ($p > .50$). There are also no effects for those in the racial inequities group relative to the control on this item.

Overall, I find significant relationships between skin color and color identity on this set of color-focused items. It is only strongly-identified dark-skinned people who are more likely to believe skin color inequities are more common across a number of domains in society after viewing the treatments. This presents some evidence against **H1**: skin color identity appears to work in distinct ways for high-identifiers at the lighter and darker ends of the spectrum. Indeed, it is only those with dark skin that change their views in the face of a reminder about colorism in society.

Figure 6.1A: Treatment Effects by Skin Tone and Skin Tone Identity on Four Original Items

Left panel shows effect of skin color treatment for each subgroup relative to the equivalent subgroup in the control; Right panel shows effect of race treatment vs. control (95% confidence intervals)
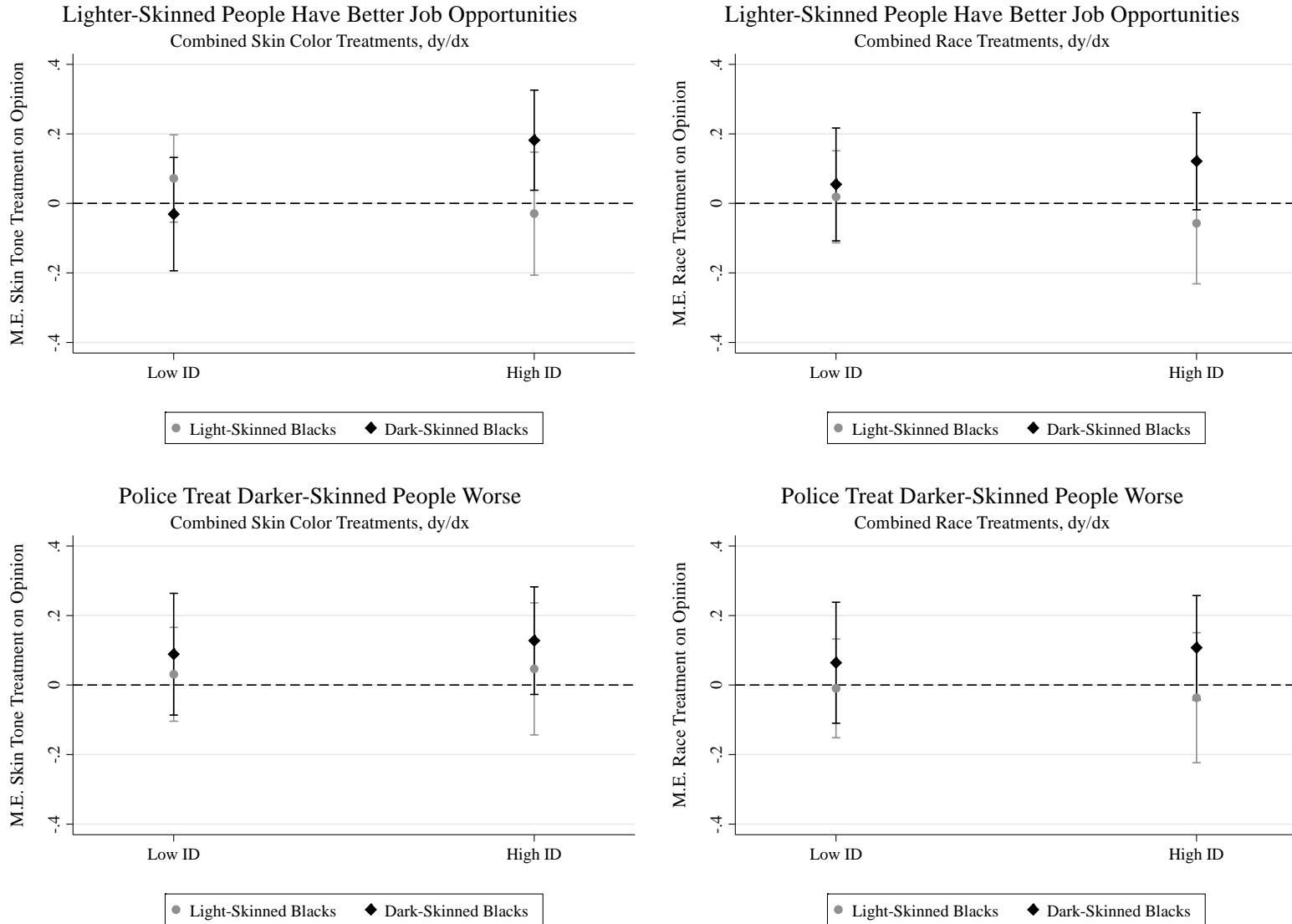
Figure 6.1B: Treatment Effects by Skin Tone and Skin Tone Identity on Four Original Items

Left panel shows effect of skin color treatment for each subgroup relative to the equivalent subgroup in the control; Right panel shows effect of race treatment vs. control (95% confidence intervals)

Whites Treat Lighter-Skinned People Better
Combined Skin Color Treatments, dy/dx

Whites Treat Lighter-Skinned People Better
Combined Race Treatments, dy/dx

Societal Mobility is Based on Skin Tone
Combined Skin Color Treatments, dy/dx

Societal Mobility is Based on Skin Tone
Combined Race Treatments, dy/dx

● Light-Skinned Blacks   ◆ Dark-Skinned Blacks
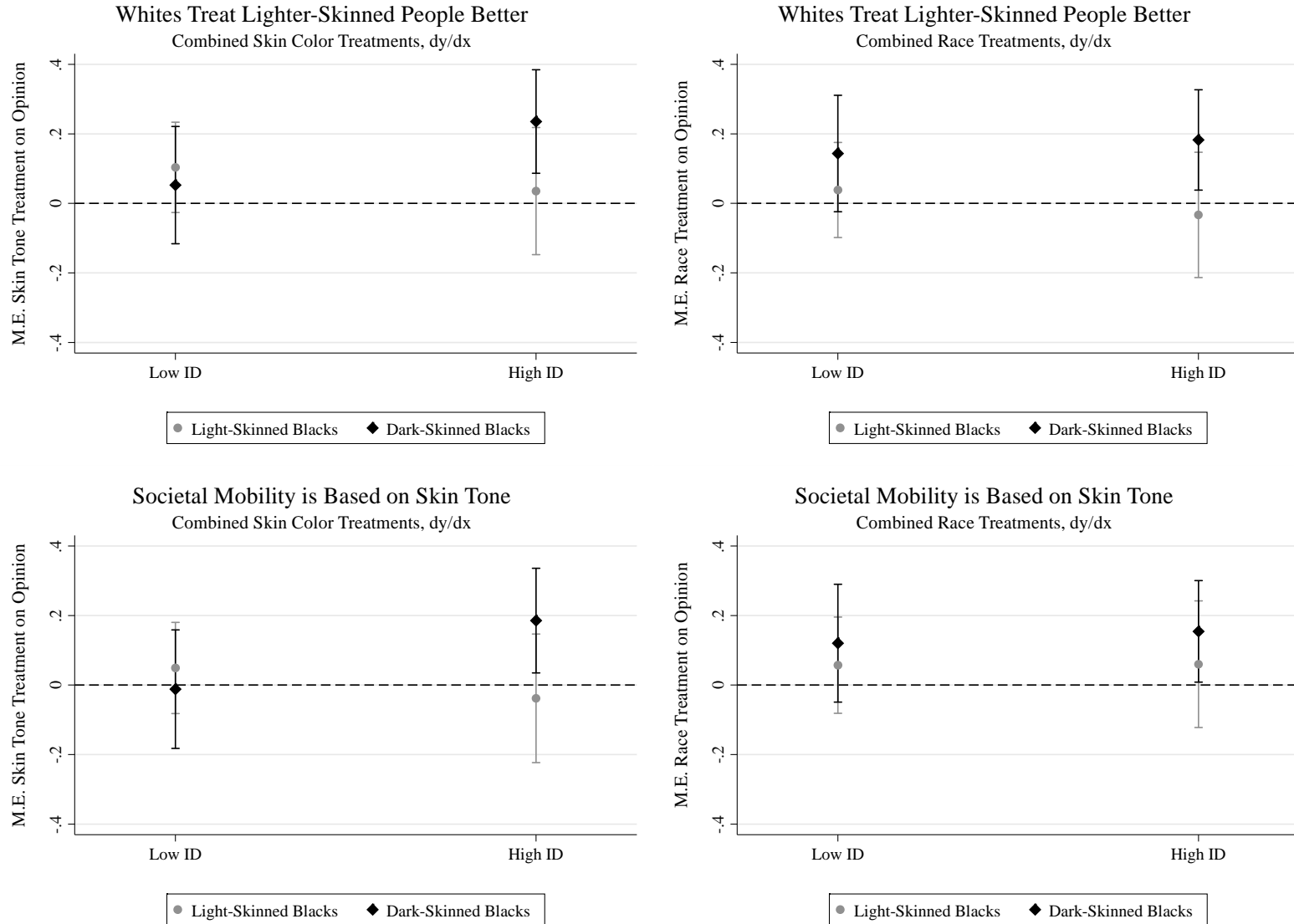
The second subset of color-based items in this survey deals with the trade-offs of discussing skin color vs. race, as well as questions of power in society. These questions involve whether focusing on resolving racism will resolve colorism, if discussing skin color is a distraction from race, if lighter- and darker-skinned people face equal discrimination, as well as if dark-skinned politicians better represent Black people or if dark-skinned individuals need more power in society. I find mixed results on this battery of items with some suggestive evidence of a relationship between two of five of these items and the independent variables of interest (see Tables 6.2B and 6.3B).

On these two items, there is suggestive evidence of an interactive effect of skin tone and skin tone identity in the color inequities treatment—but not the racial inequities treatment—relative to the control. For example, with respect to the importance of getting dark-skinned people in positions of power, strongly identified dark-skinned people are more likely to believe this is very important ($p <$ .11). Similarly, there is some evidence of a similar effect on the question regarding whether resolving racism will resolve colorism ($p < .08$). However, the difference of the treatment groups relative to the control are not significant for either of these items—nor are there any significant differences between the subgroups based on color and level of identity who viewed the treatment. Thus, in contrast to the previous set of items, there is evidence that low-identifying dark-skinned individuals are more likely *to reject* the premise of these items relative to their high-identifying dark-skinned counterparts, while low-identifying light-skinned individuals are more *in favor* of these items than their high-identifying light-skinned counterparts. In short, then, these effects are not particularly substantively meaningful.

As opposed to the first battery of color-based items, then, many of the items in this second battery did not have a significant interaction between the treatment, skin tone, and skin tone identity. Consistent with the previous set of results, viewing the skin tone inequities treatment seems to move participants' views more than the race treatment. Yet again, there are no effects when taking racial identity into account here, providing further evidence that skin color identity works in distinct ways

from racial identity. Thus, I find that the combination of skin color and skin color identity had an effect on responses to the treatments, especially in response to recognizing colorism—although less so on remedies for colorism.

Figure 6.2: Skin Color Treatment Effects by Skin Tone and Skin Tone ID on Two Items

Panels show effect of skin color treatment for each subgroup relative to the equivalent subgroup in the control (with 95% confidence intervals)

Need More Darker-Skinned People in Positions of Power

Focusing on Race Will Resolve Skin Tone Problem
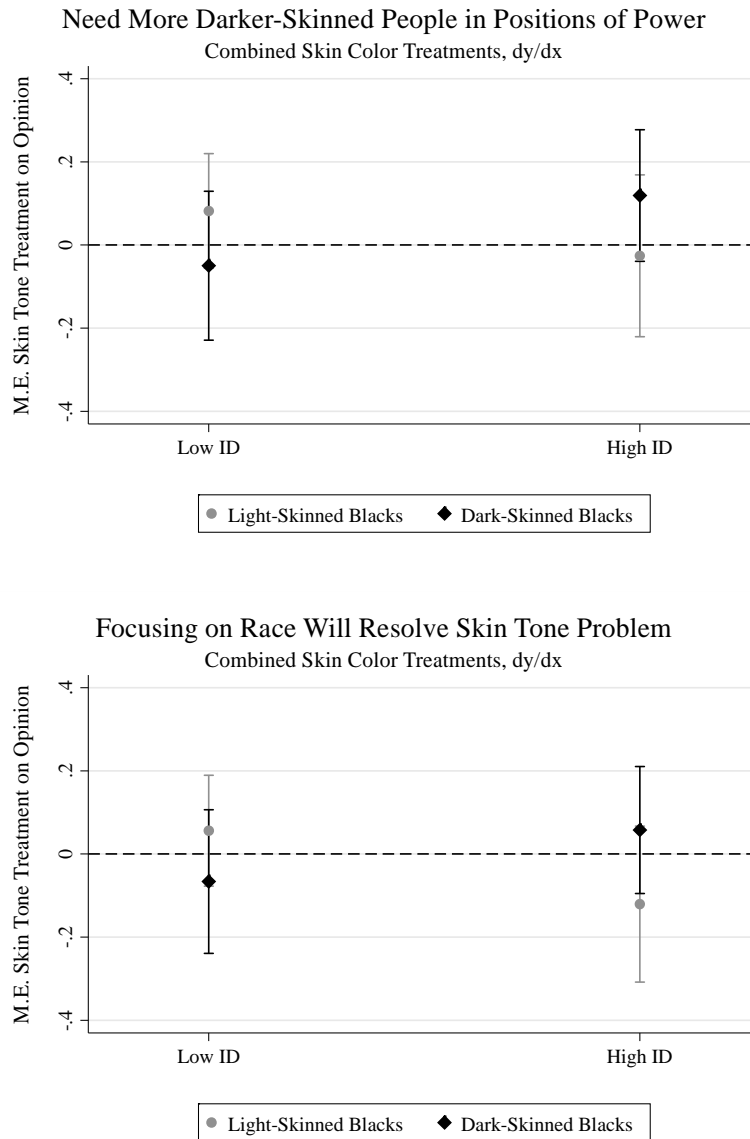
SCALING TOGETHER SKIN TONE AND SKIN TONE IDENTITY

An alternative way of conducting these analyses is to combine the two key independent variables—skin color and skin color identity—such that we can more directly compare how high-identifying light- vs. dark-skinned participants react to the treatments relative to the control group. As evidenced by the initial analyses, it appears that while skin color identity can be activated, it works in distinct ways for those who identify strongly but have lighter or darker skin. To this end, I create a new scaled variable with six categories, crossing skin color (light, dark) and skin color identity (low, medium, high).[71] Put differently, this variable combines the two original variables into one ordinal variable: with light-skinned people who strongly identify with their color at one end and high-identifying dark-skinned people at the other (and weakly identified people in the middle categories).

This helps to provide a more direct answer to one of the original questions from this chapter—do light- and dark-skinned people who strongly identify with their skin color act in similar or distinct ways? We might imagine that dark-skinned people could have different world-views given their double-layered experiences of discrimination based on both race *and* color (**H1**). In contrast, light-skinned people who identify strongly with their skin tone may recognize the effects of colorism in society and may support efforts to reduce these inequities in an effort to advance the racial group's interests (**H2**). Or, perhaps highly identified light-skinned individuals would move in the opposite direction of their highly identified dark-skinned counterparts for the reasons discussed earlier.

When we interact this new combined color and identity variable with exposure to the treatments, what is revealed? Similar to the previous models, there is no significant relationship between the key independent variables for either the traditional policy items (income inequality, affirmative action) or the behavioral measures (sign a petition, protest, volunteer, or talk with family

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[71] Because medium-skinned individuals are not a primary category of interest, I exclude these respondents for the sake of simplicity in creating this combined variable. Thus, this variable has 6 total categories in the following order: high-ID light skin, medium-ID light skin, low-ID light skin, low-ID dark skin, medium-ID dark skin, and high-ID dark skin.

and friends)—but I do find significant results with respect to a number of the color-based items. These results emerge more often after viewing the color-based inequities treatment, but—in contrast to the previous analyses—also after reading about race-based inequities in some cases.

The first item on which there is a significant difference between those who identify strongly with their skin tone but are at opposite ends of the color spectrum is with respect to perceptions of employment opportunities. After exposure to the color inequities treatment, dark-skinned strong identifiers are 21 percentage points more likely than their light-skinned strongly color-identified counterparts to say that dark-skinned Black people have worse job opportunities in the United States ($p < .08$). Light-skinned identifiers do not move their views after viewing the treatment—with both those in the control and color inequities treatment group reporting that this is a problem about half the time (0.50 vs. 0.53, respectively). In contrast, dark-skinned identifiers in the control group believe this happens a little less than half the time (0.44 on a 0 to 1 scale) compared to those in the treatment group who say it happens between half the time and most of the time (0.63; $p < .08$). Thus, in the control group light- and dark-skinned high identifiers do not differ on this dimension. However, after exposure to the treatment, only high-identifying *dark-skinned* individuals—but not their light-skinned counterparts—are more inclined to recognize color-based injustices as a problem with respect to jobs.

There is also a similar effect with respect to the item asking whether White people treat light-skinned Black people better than those with dark skin. For the first time, though, there is a significant interactive effect after exposure to both the race *and* color inequities treatments relative to the control. In either case, dark-skinned high identifiers are over 20 percentage points more likely than their light-skinned high identifying counterparts to agree with the notion that Whites' treat light-skinned people better after viewing a treatment ($p < .10$ in the color treatment and $p < .08$ in the race treatment). This is equivalent to dark-skinned high identifiers moving from saying this happens about half the time (0.45) to most of the time after viewing the color treatment (0.69) or race treatment (0.64). In contrast,

light-skinned high identifiers remain largely unmoved—saying this happens about half the time regardless of which condition they were in (0.55 in the control vs. 0.48 in the race treatment or 0.51 color treatment). Thus, dark-skinned strong identifiers appear to be primed by either treatment to recall that Whites treat light-skinned people better. Neither story induces the same reaction among light-skinned strong identifiers, however.

There is a similar effect with respect to whether skin tone determines how far one can make it in society. A gap between strong color identifiers who are light- vs. dark-skinned emerges among those who viewed the color treatment relative to the control group. Dark-skinned individuals are 22 percentage points more supportive of skin color's relation to one's upward mobility than their light-skinned counterparts after viewing the color inequities treatment ($p < .08$). As before, we see a large shift among dark-skinned high identifiers who read the color inequities treatment—moving from saying skin color determines how far you can make it in society about half the time (0.45) to between half the time and most of the time (0.64). In contrast, light-skinned high identifiers are largely unmoved, saying this occurs about half the time in either condition (0.59 in control vs. 0.55 in the color inequities treatment).

The only item in this battery in which there is not a significant effect is with respect to the question about police treatment. Both light-skinned subgroups as well as dark-skinned weak identifiers say that police treat dark-skinned people worse about half the time across each condition. The only slight movement is among high-identifying dark-skinned individuals—who go from saying police treat dark-skinned people worse about half the time in the control (0.60) to most of the time in the treatment (0.73)—though this shift does not reach standard levels of statistical significance ($p < .12$).

Figure 6.3: Treatment Effects with Combined Skin Color and Identity Measure

Figures show effect of skin color treatment for each subgroup relative to the equivalent subgroup in the control (with 95% confidence intervals)
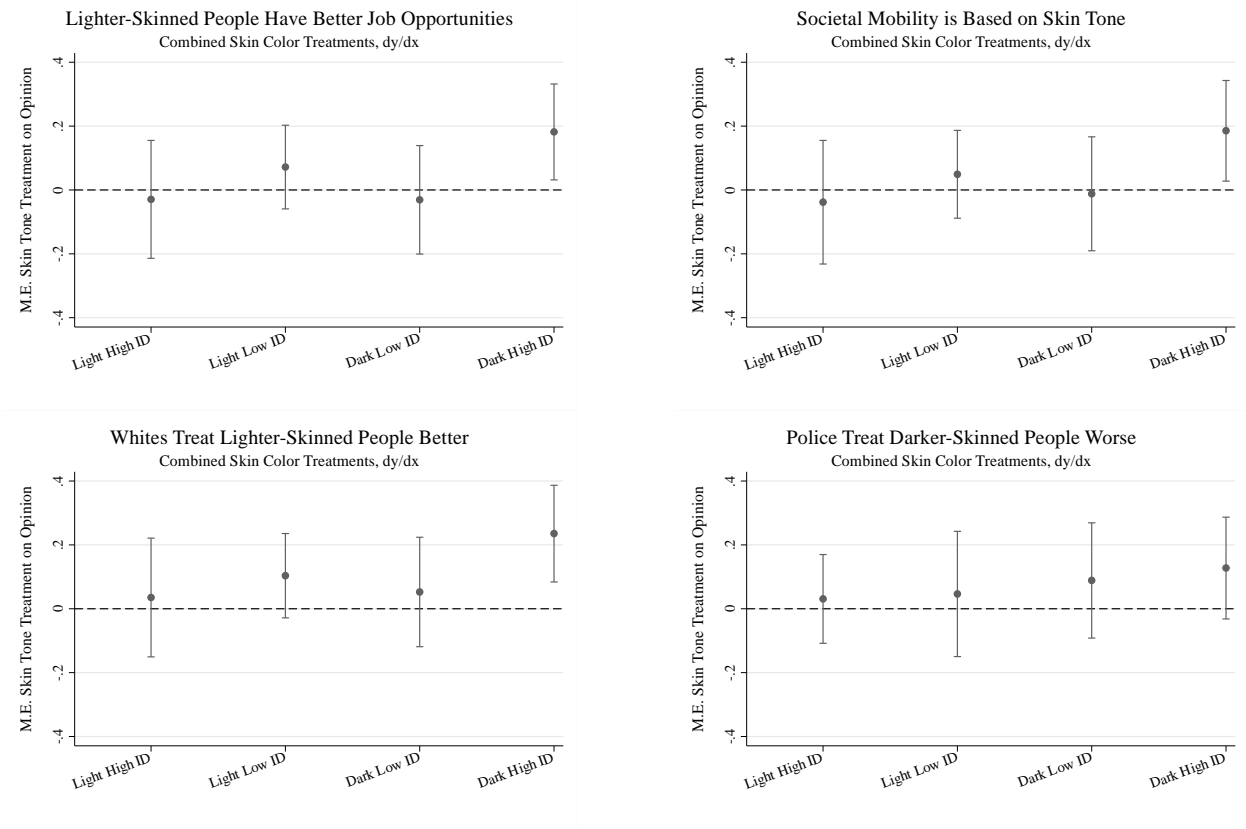
In the second battery of color-centered items, there is a similarly limited set of significant effects as with the initial model estimations. Here, there is a significant treatment effect only on the question asking whether Black people would be better represented in politics if there were more dark-skinned Black politicians. On this item, there is only an effect among those who viewed the race treatment. As with the previous findings, dark-skinned high identifiers are 21 percentage points more likely than their light-skinned high identifying counterparts to agree with this notion about quality of representation being associated with skin tone after viewing the race treatment ($p < .08$). This effect comes largely because of the opposite reactions that the racial inequities treatment induced in high color-identifiers of different skin tones. After viewing the treatment relative to the control, dark skinned high identifiers say that Black people would be better represented by dark-skinned officials

about half the time (0.49 in the control vs. 0.58 in the race treatment). In contrast, highly identified light-skinned respondents push back against this notion after viewing the race treatment: moving from saying this is true about half the time (0.53) down closer to only some of the time (0.41). Interestingly, the effects are more muted for both groups in the color inequities treatment relative to the control.

Figure 6.4: Treatment Effects with Combined Skin Color and Identity Measure

Left panel shows effect of skin color treatment for each subgroup relative to the equivalent subgroup in the control;
Right panel shows effect of race treatment vs. control (with 95% confidence intervals)
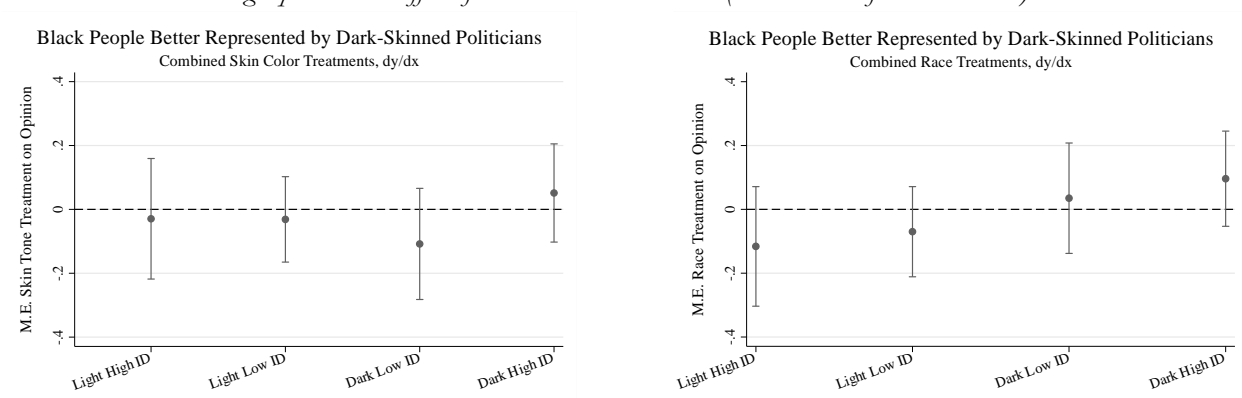
Overall, these analyses have demonstrated the ways in which skin tone and skin tone identity interact with exposure to the treatments. Skin color and color identity remain linked with questions that are directly related to skin tone and treatment in society, as opposed to traditional policy or participation items. Importantly, the evidence highlights that light- and dark-skinned people continue to view the world in distinct ways, even when both groups claim to identify strongly with their color-based identity.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have examined whether viewing a press release discussing color or race-based inequities in society can activate skin color identities. Consistent with findings from the previous

chapter, skin color identity is important in informing one's views—and the interaction of skin color and color identity is also meaningful in many cases. The ways in which skin color and identity interact are most powerful for items that focus on skin color. I demonstrated that neither treatments nor the two primary identity groups (skin color or race) were associated with movement on traditional policies like race-based affirmative action or the government taking steps to reduce income inequality. Similarly, none of the subgroups had a heightened propensity to take action following reading a story about inequities based on either race or skin color in society.

Where large treatment effects were observed was with respect to items that invoked skin tone explicitly. Here, movement was primarily seen amongst those in the color treatment relative to the control *and* among strongly identified dark-skinned individuals specifically. Dark-skinned high identifiers were consistently the most willing to recognize color-based disparities across a myriad of issues. These effects stood as an especially stark contrast to individuals who only weakly identified with their color, regardless of what their skin tone was. This suggests, then, that skin color identity has the potential to be politically important—but only to highly-identified people with dark skin.

Strongly identified light- and dark-skinned individuals appear to respond quite differently to the same information about skin color. This suggests that in contrast to studying other identities, even those of an intersectional nature, the tightly interwoven nature of race and skin color identity results in very nuanced relationships between the two. As I showed in the previous chapter, the correlates of skin color identity are distinct for African Americans with lighter and darker skin. The correlates for those with light skin were holding a stronger racial identity, being male, less formally educated, and having a lower income. This suggests that these individuals may regard their skin color as a point of pride, in part because of the benefits often associated with their lighter skin color. The experimental evidence suggests that light-skinned people who identify strongly with their skin color represent a mishmash of views—they may be somewhat more likely than low-identifiers to believe skin color

matters in society, but referencing these distinctions did not provoke these individuals to respond in ways consistent with their strongly-identified dark-skinned participants. Although dark-skinned people are more likely to strongly identify with their color identity, a non-trivial number of light-skinned people do as well. Better understanding this high-identifying light-skinned subgroup and what motivates them is a valuable area for further exploration.

Overall, this experiment is the first attempt to activate skin color identity. This involved a novel exploration of how skin color identity is distinct from racial identity importance and can be activated in response to a number of politically relevant items. Skin color identity and racial identity work in distinct ways—and skin color identity is most powerful for color-specific issues. This pattern holds across many of the color-based items, whether it be a factual question (e.g., about employment disparities) or more subjective (e.g., if darker-skinned people should be in more positions of power). Indeed, the primary movement as a result of the skin color treatment is among strongly-identified dark-skinned individuals. Identity activation occurred primarily after exposure to information about color-based inequities, but sometimes occurs after reading about race-based inequities as well. This chapter has moved beyond other studies of colorism that rely solely on qualitative or observational data to incorporate an experimental component to our understanding of colorism, skin tone identity activation, and the ways in which one's appearance and identity interact.

Table 6.1A: Regression Estimates for Treatment Main Effects

	Income Inequality	Affirmative Action: Skin Tone	Affirmative Action: Race	Sign Petition	Protest	Volunteer	Talk with Family & Friends
Skin Tone Treatment	0.036	0.055*	0.036	-0.004	-0.070**	-0.004	-0.017
	(0.027)	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.025)	(0.029)
Race Treatment	0.049*	0.019	-0.001	0.050*	-0.048*	0.019	0.023
	(0.027)	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.024)	(0.029)
Constant	0.643***	0.415***	0.570***	0.348***	0.568***	0.736***	0.632***
	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.020)	(0.024)
Observations	1,036	1,027	1,029	1,042	1,042	1,042	1,042
R-squared	0.003	0.004	0.003	0.007	0.006	0.001	0.003

Table 6.1B: Regression Estimates for Treatment Main Effects

	Job Opportunities	Police Treatment	Treatment by Whites	Societal Mobility by Color	Focusing on Race Resolves Colorism	Discussing Color is Divisive	Dark-Skinned Politicians Better Represent People	Dark-Skinned People Need More Power	Lighter and Darker People Face Equal Discrimination
Skin Tone Treatment	0.029	0.027	0.045*	-0.000	-0.012	0.015	0.003	0.014	-0.028
	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.024)
Race Treatment	0.011	0.010	0.018	0.019	-0.001	0.005	0.008	0.011	-0.039
	(0.025)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.024)
Constant	0.488***	0.605***	0.518***	0.510***	0.343***	0.594***	0.445***	0.564***	0.529***
	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.020)
Observations	1,041	1,041	1,041	1,041	1,041	1,041	1,040	1,039	1,041
R-squared	0.001	0.001	0.003	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.002

Note: Control condition is the baseline for comparison.   *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 6.2A: Regression Estimates for Treatment, Skin Tone, and Skin Tone Identity

	Income Inequality	Affirmative Action: Skin Tone	Affirmative Action: Race	Sign Petition	Protest	Volunteer	Talk with Family & Friends
Skin Tone Treatment (vs. Control)	-0.046	0.052	-0.019	-0.025	-0.129*	-0.034	-0.040
	(0.069)	(0.074)	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.072)	(0.062)	(0.073)
Skin Tone Identity (High)	-0.067	0.207**	0.061	0.108	0.004	-0.059	-0.032
	(0.096)	(0.102)	(0.097)	(0.097)	(0.099)	(0.086)	(0.101)
Skin Tone Treatment x High Skin Tone ID	0.034	-0.207	-0.050	-0.111	-0.068	0.069	-0.077
	(0.121)	(0.128)	(0.123)	(0.122)	(0.124)	(0.108)	(0.126)
Dark-Skinned	-0.058	0.058	-0.116	-0.019	-0.090	-0.163**	-0.179*
	(0.093)	(0.099)	(0.094)	(0.094)	(0.096)	(0.083)	(0.097)
Skin Tone Treatment x Dark-Skinned	0.138	-0.007	0.020	0.032	0.061	0.129	0.149
	(0.114)	(0.122)	(0.116)	(0.115)	(0.118)	(0.102)	(0.120)
High Skin Tone ID x Dark-Skinned	0.182	-0.108	-0.002	-0.050	0.057	0.246**	0.236
	(0.137)	(0.146)	(0.139)	(0.139)	(0.141)	(0.123)	(0.144)
Skin Tone Treatment x High Skin Tone ID x Dark-Skinned	-0.101	0.170	0.150	0.147	0.043	-0.232	-0.032
	(0.171)	(0.182)	(0.174)	(0.172)	(0.176)	(0.152)	(0.179)
Race Treatment (vs. Control)	-0.004	-0.003	-0.066	-0.025	-0.182**	-0.113*	-0.027
	(0.073)	(0.078)	(0.074)	(0.074)	(0.076)	(0.066)	(0.077)
Race Treatment x High Skin Tone ID	-0.016	0.030	0.021	-0.042	0.072	0.137	0.018
	(0.121)	(0.130)	(0.124)	(0.123)	(0.125)	(0.109)	(0.128)
Race Treatment x Dark-Skinned	0.110	0.012	0.136	0.120	0.182	0.254**	0.171
	(0.116)	(0.124)	(0.118)	(0.118)	(0.120)	(0.104)	(0.122)
Race Treatment x High Skin tone ID x Dark-Skinned	-0.051	-0.027	-0.059	0.020	-0.109	-0.230	-0.161
	(0.169)	(0.182)	(0.173)	(0.172)	(0.175)	(0.152)	(0.178)
Constant	0.655***	0.381***	0.625***	0.348***	0.643***	0.795***	0.679***
	(0.059)	(0.063)	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.061)	(0.053)	(0.062)
Observations	1,031	1,022	1,024	1,037	1,037	1,037	1,037
R-squared	0.032	0.064	0.032	0.044	0.031	0.043	0.030

Note: Regression estimates include 3-category skin tone and ID variables, but table is truncated to only reflect comparisons between highest and lowest categories. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, ^ p<.15

Table 6.2B: Regression Estimates for Treatment, Skin Tone, and Skin Tone Identity

	Job Opportunities	Police Treatment	Treatment by Whites	Societal Mobility by Color	Focusing on Race Resolves Colorism	Discussing Color is Divisive	Dark-Skinned Politicians Represent Better	Dark-Skinned People Need More Power	Equal Discrimination by Color
Skin Tone Treatment (vs. Control)	0.072	0.031	0.104	0.049	0.056	0.048	-0.031	0.082	-0.018
	(0.064)	(0.069)	(0.066)	(0.067)	(0.068)	(0.075)	(0.069)	(0.070)	(0.061)
Skin Tone Identity (High)	0.137	0.020	0.122	0.204**	0.203**	0.243**	0.092	0.215**	0.155*
	(0.088)	(0.095)	(0.091)	(0.092)	(0.094)	(0.104)	(0.095)	(0.097)	(0.084)
Skin Tone Treatment x High Skin Tone ID	-0.101	0.016	-0.068	-0.087	-0.177	-0.182	0.002	-0.108	0.007
	(0.111)	(0.119)	(0.114)	(0.116)	(0.117)	(0.130)	(0.119)	(0.122)	(0.106)
Dark-Skinned	0.068	-0.080	0.055	0.011	0.087	-0.186*	-0.056	0.035	-0.128
	(0.085)	(0.092)	(0.088)	(0.089)	(0.090)	(0.100)	(0.091)	(0.094)	(0.081)
Skin Tone Treatment x Dark-Skinned	-0.103	0.058	-0.051	-0.061	-0.122	0.143	-0.077	-0.132	0.009
	(0.105)	(0.113)	(0.108)	(0.110)	(0.111)	(0.123)	(0.112)	(0.115)	(0.100)
High Skin Tone ID x Dark-Skinned	-0.154	0.109	-0.115	-0.144	-0.206	0.033	0.015	-0.150	0.005
	(0.126)	(0.135)	(0.130)	(0.132)	(0.134)	(0.148)	(0.135)	(0.138)	(0.120)
Skin Tone Treatment x High Skin Tone ID x Dark-Skinned	0.314**	0.023	0.251^	0.285*	0.301*	-0.085	0.158	0.277^	-0.041
	(0.157)	(0.168)	(0.162)	(0.164)	(0.166)	(0.184)	(0.168)	(0.172)	(0.150)
Race Treatment (vs. Control)	0.019	-0.009	0.039	0.057	-0.067	0.064	-0.070	-0.006	-0.055
	(0.067)	(0.072)	(0.070)	(0.071)	(0.072)	(0.079)	(0.072)	(0.074)	(0.064)
Race Treatment x High Skin Tone ID	-0.076	-0.027	-0.072	0.003	-0.061	-0.262**	-0.046	-0.056	-0.021
	(0.112)	(0.120)	(0.115)	(0.117)	(0.118)	(0.131)	(0.120)	(0.123)	(0.107)
Race Treatment x Dark-Skinned	0.036	0.074	0.105	0.063	0.053	0.064	0.105	0.017	0.147
	(0.107)	(0.115)	(0.110)	(0.111)	(0.113)	(0.125)	(0.114)	(0.117)	(0.102)
Race Treatment x High Skin tone ID x Dark-Skinned	0.143	0.070	0.111	0.031	0.134	0.037	0.107	0.179	-0.123
	(0.156)	(0.168)	(0.161)	(0.163)	(0.165)	(0.184)	(0.168)	(0.172)	(0.149)
Constant	0.393***	0.554***	0.393***	0.384***	0.268***	0.580***	0.438***	0.491***	0.536***
	(0.054)	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.058)	(0.064)	(0.058)	(0.060)	(0.052)
Observations	1,036	1,036	1,036	1,036	1,036	1,036	1,035	1,034	1,036
R-squared	0.062	0.054	0.076	0.103	0.050	0.028	0.074	0.073	0.042

Note: Regression estimates include 3-category skin tone and ID variables, but table is truncated to only reflect comparisons between highest and lowest categories. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, ^ p<.15

Table 6.3A: Regression Estimates for Treatment, Skin Tone, and Racial Identity

	Income Inequality	Affirmative Action: Skin Tone	Affirmative Action: Race	Sign Petition	Protest	Volunteer	Talk with Family & Friends
Skin Tone Treatment (vs. Control)	0.090	0.187	0.024	0.032	-0.140	0.110	0.052
	(0.135)	(0.146)	(0.136)	(0.138)	(0.138)	(0.120)	(0.141)
Racial Identity (High)	0.147	0.295**	0.249*	0.120	0.104	0.253**	0.082
	(0.128)	(0.139)	(0.129)	(0.131)	(0.132)	(0.114)	(0.134)
Skin Tone Treatment x High Race ID	-0.113	-0.206	-0.090	-0.119	-0.039	-0.167	-0.157
	(0.148)	(0.161)	(0.149)	(0.151)	(0.152)	(0.132)	(0.155)
Dark-Skinned	-0.048	0.357**	-0.143	-0.036	-0.107	-0.143	-0.286
	(0.166)	(0.180)	(0.167)	(0.169)	(0.171)	(0.148)	(0.174)
Skin Tone Treatment x Dark-Skinned	0.059	-0.300	-0.054	-0.053	0.154	0.128	0.127
	(0.200)	(0.217)	(0.203)	(0.204)	(0.205)	(0.178)	(0.209)
High Race ID x Dark-Skinned	0.079	-0.362*	0.029	0.017	0.056	0.116	0.275
	(0.180)	(0.196)	(0.181)	(0.184)	(0.185)	(0.160)	(0.189)
Skin Tone Treatment x High Race ID x Dark-Skinned	0.027	0.327	0.179	0.190	-0.066	-0.095	0.008
	(0.218)	(0.237)	(0.221)	(0.222)	(0.224)	(0.194)	(0.228)
Race Treatment (vs. Control)	0.123	0.139	0.043	0.008	-0.145	0.090	0.040
	(0.140)	(0.152)	(0.140)	(0.142)	(0.143)	(0.124)	(0.146)
Race Treatment x High Race ID	-0.137	-0.152	-0.181	-0.044	-0.010	-0.195	-0.054
	(0.153)	(0.166)	(0.154)	(0.156)	(0.157)	(0.136)	(0.160)
Race Treatment x Dark-Skinned	0.067	-0.510**	-0.043	0.142	0.081	0.181	0.189
	(0.229)	(0.249)	(0.231)	(0.234)	(0.235)	(0.204)	(0.240)
Race Treatment x High Race ID x Dark-Skinned	-0.024	0.511*	0.168	-0.054	0.023	-0.033	-0.161
	(0.245)	(0.266)	(0.246)	(0.249)	(0.251)	(0.217)	(0.256)
Constant	0.524***	0.214*	0.476***	0.286**	0.571***	0.571***	0.607***
	(0.118)	(0.128)	(0.118)	(0.120)	(0.121)	(0.104)	(0.123)
Observations	1,032	1,023	1,025	1,038	1,038	1,038	1,038
R-squared	0.038	0.039	0.054	0.038	0.048	0.065	0.045

Note: Regression estimates include 3-category skin tone and ID variables, but table is truncated to only reflect comparisons between highest and lowest categories. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, ^ p<.15

Table 6.3B: Regression Estimates for Treatment, Skin Tone, and Racial Identity

	Job Opportunities	Police Treatment	Treatment by Whites	Societal Mobility by Color	Focusing on Race Resolves Colorism	Discussing Color is Divisive	Dark-Skinned Politicians Represent Better	Dark-Skinned People Need More Power	Equal Discrimination by Color
Skin Tone Treatment (vs. Control)	-0.019	0.106	0.099	-0.005	-0.104	-0.005	-0.003	0.154	-0.185
	(0.125)	(0.134)	(0.128)	(0.133)	(0.133)	(0.145)	(0.136)	(0.139)	(0.119)
Racial Identity (High)	0.017	0.200	0.145	0.129	0.066	0.109	0.185	0.285**	0.050
	(0.119)	(0.127)	(0.122)	(0.127)	(0.126)	(0.138)	(0.129)	(0.132)	(0.113)
Skin Tone Treatment x High Race ID	0.049	-0.170	-0.056	-0.003	0.097	-0.073	-0.040	-0.197	0.166
	(0.138)	(0.147)	(0.141)	(0.147)	(0.146)	(0.159)	(0.149)	(0.153)	(0.130)
Dark-Skinned	-0.143	-0.000	-0.036	-0.036	0.036	-0.286	-0.143	0.107	-0.179
	(0.154)	(0.165)	(0.158)	(0.164)	(0.164)	(0.179)	(0.167)	(0.171)	(0.146)
Skin Tone Treatment x Dark-Skinned	0.109	-0.097	0.011	0.017	0.012	0.079	0.075	-0.223	0.209
	(0.186)	(0.198)	(0.190)	(0.198)	(0.197)	(0.215)	(0.201)	(0.206)	(0.176)
High Race ID x Dark-Skinned	0.221	-0.015	0.123	0.014	0.006	0.153	0.112	-0.178	0.057
	(0.167)	(0.179)	(0.171)	(0.178)	(0.178)	(0.194)	(0.181)	(0.186)	(0.159)
Skin Tone Treatment x High Race ID x Dark-Skinned	-0.055	0.277	0.080	0.155	-0.023	0.037	-0.008	0.353	-0.210
	(0.202)	(0.216)	(0.207)	(0.215)	(0.215)	(0.234)	(0.219)	(0.224)	(0.192)
Race Treatment (vs. Control)	-0.069	0.025	0.022	0.033	-0.129	0.069	0.069	0.002	-0.086
	(0.131)	(0.140)	(0.134)	(0.139)	(0.139)	(0.150)	(0.142)	(0.145)	(0.123)
Race Treatment x High Race ID	0.100	-0.031	0.011	0.017	0.052	-0.142	-0.175	-0.038	0.016
	(0.143)	(0.153)	(0.146)	(0.152)	(0.152)	(0.165)	(0.155)	(0.159)	(0.135)
Race Treatment x Dark-Skinned	0.033	-0.103	-0.058	0.045	-0.042	-0.141	-0.098	0.083	0.143
	(0.214)	(0.228)	(0.218)	(0.227)	(0.227)	(0.247)	(0.232)	(0.237)	(0.202)
Race Treatment x High Race ID x Dark-Skinned	-0.050	0.161	0.089	0.003	0.111	0.183	0.248	0.010	-0.078
	(0.228)	(0.243)	(0.233)	(0.242)	(0.242)	(0.263)	(0.247)	(0.252)	(0.215)
Constant	0.429***	0.429***	0.321***	0.357***	0.286**	0.607***	0.321***	0.357***	0.571***
	(0.109)	(0.116)	(0.112)	(0.116)	(0.116)	(0.126)	(0.118)	(0.121)	(0.103)
Observations	1,037	1,037	1,037	1,037	1,037	1,037	1,036	1,035	1,037
R-squared	0.050	0.053	0.085	0.057	0.038	0.043	0.043	0.047	0.045

Note: Regression estimates include 3-category skin tone and ID variables, but table is truncated to only reflect comparisons between highest and lowest categories. *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$, ^ $p<.15$

Table 6.4: Regression Estimates for Experimental Effects using Combined Measure of Skin Tone & Skin Tone Identity

	Job Opportunities	Police Treatment	Treatment by Whites	Societal Mobility by Color	Focusing on Race Resolves Colorism	Discussing Color is Divisive	Dark-Skinned Politicians Better Represent People	Dark-Skinned People Need More Power
Skin Tone Treatment (vs. Control)	-0.029	0.046	0.035	-0.038	-0.121	-0.134	-0.029	-0.026
	(0.094)	(0.100)	(0.095)	(0.099)	(0.098)	(0.105)	(0.096)	(0.100)
Combined Color & Identity Measure	-0.086	0.029	-0.060	-0.134	-0.118	-0.153	-0.041	-0.115
(high= high ID dark skinned)	(0.096)	(0.102)	(0.097)	(0.101)	(0.100)	(0.108)	(0.099)	(0.102)
Skin Tone Treatment x High ID Dark Skinned	0.211*	0.081	0.200*	0.224*	0.178	0.058	0.081	0.145
	(0.121)	(0.129)	(0.122)	(0.127)	(0.126)	(0.135)	(0.124)	(0.128)
Race Treatment (vs. Control)	-0.057	-0.036	-0.033	0.060	-0.128	-0.199*	-0.116	-0.062
	(0.092)	(0.098)	(0.093)	(0.097)	(0.096)	(0.104)	(0.095)	(0.099)
Race Treatment x High ID Dark Skin	0.179	0.144	0.216*	0.094	0.187	0.101	0.212*	0.197
	(0.119)	(0.126)	(0.119)	(0.124)	(0.123)	(0.133)	(0.122)	(0.126)
Constant	0.529***	0.574***	0.515***	0.588***	0.471***	0.824***	0.529***	0.706***
	(0.072)	(0.077)	(0.073)	(0.076)	(0.075)	(0.081)	(0.074)	(0.077)
Observations	540	540	540	540	540	541	540	540
R-squared	0.057	0.061	0.091	0.091	0.053	0.042	0.084	0.087

Note: Regression estimates include 6-category combined skin tone and skin tone identity variable, but table is truncated to only reflect comparisons between high ID dark- vs. light-skinned respondents. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

CHAPTER 7
Where Do We Go From Here?

Race is one of the most powerful organizing features of American politics. In contrast to a focus in mainstream political science of studying minoritized racial groups as monolithic, this project demonstrates the ways in which gradations within racial categories—such as those based on skin tone—are associated with views of politics and power. The evidence provided here has pointed scholars towards an important yet understudied facet of American politics. The legacy of colorism and continuing importance of skin tone in society has potential to manifest itself in multiple ways in the political realm. Using a mixed-methods approach—including novel survey experiments, national and nationally representative survey data, and original in-depth interviews—I demonstrated that race and color inform one's political judgments and behavior in distinct ways in many instances. For example, I highlight the contexts in which skin color is associated with political preferences on redistributive policies, such that skin tone contributes to the well-documented chasm in public opinion between Black and White people. Additionally, perceptions of who benefits from racialized policies vary not just based on race, but also on the lightness or darkness of one's skin. This is an important and novel finding with respect to our understanding of racialized policies, adding an even more nuanced view to traditional studies of racialized policies and the media (e.g., Brader et al. 2008; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Gilens 1996, 1999; Mendelberg 2001).

Additionally, this project provides evidence for not just an awareness of, but a broad concern about skin color disparities in society. Despite a lack of questions related to color-based inequities asked in traditional surveys, I find a high level of recognition of color's importance in society among Black people. However, I consistently find that darker-skinned people are more apt than those with light skin to agree that darker skin is associated with disadvantages with respect to jobs, policing, criminal justice, and more.

One might expect it to be difficult to find effects based on skin tone identity given the overwhelming importance of racial identity to many Black people's sense of self, coupled with a lack of discussion of skin tone in politics or news coverage. And yet, through the development of novel measures of skin tone as a distinct social identity from race, I demonstrate that one's skin tone is meaningful to a sizable portion of the Black community—and especially so for those with dark skin. While racial identity did not vary significantly based on one's skin tone on the whole, levels of race and skin tone identity are more comparable among dark-skinned individuals than for those with light skin. Moreover, the levels of skin tone identity captured in my surveys rival the levels of White identity that have recently taken on renewed relevance in American politics (e.g., Jardina 2019). This signals the importance of more deeply understanding the relevance and influence of skin tone and skin tone identity within the United States, much like work on skin color and colorism in other contexts around the globe (Bonilla-Silva 2004a, 2004b; Canache et al. 2014; Dixon and Telles 2017; Monk 2016; Parameswaran and Cardoza 2009; Telles 2004; Telles and Paschel 2014). In contrast to a popular narrative that skin color is of declining significance today, I find that skin tone identification is actually *stronger* among younger individuals. This suggests that skin tone, or skin tone identity in particular, may be of increasing salience and importance as younger generations age and become more involved in politics.

Furthermore, this study contributes a novel exploration of how skin color identity importance—distinct from racial group importance—relates to policy prescriptions and political mobilization aimed at reducing race- and color-based inequities. After demonstrating that skin color is an identity that can be activated, I illuminate that color-based identity is especially powerful for those who are more stigmatized and hold the identity in higher regard—i.e., darker-skinned people. Building from studies of colorism and group identities across the social sciences—political science, psychology, economics, sociology, and Black studies—my research contributes experimental evidence to a body of literature that has primarily relied on observational and qualitative data.

Of course, this study is equivalent to the beginning of a conversation. A number of relationships have been demonstrated throughout this manuscript—some are potentially surprising, while others not so surprising. Still, a number of unanswered questions and limitations of the current work remain. The limitations of the current work relate to issues of both measurement and research design. Some of the unanswered research questions were present from the outset of this project while others have been unearthed along the way.

One area for further exploration is examining the ways in which skin color identity can be activated and the conditions under which it matters. In the experiment included here, I attempted to activate skin tone identity as distinct from racial identity by exposing subjects to a press release about inequities. As shown in Chapter 6, there was some evidence that skin tone identity and racial identity worked in distinct ways. Still, there were a number of domains in which the treatments did not spur any movement based on either color or racial identity—e.g., behavioral outcomes or traditional policy views. There are a number of potential explanations for this, including the possibility that the treatments could have been designed to more cleanly isolate skin tone itself (rather than drawing a comparison to race). For example, does invoking skin color disparities in a context that only deals with African Americans result in different responses than invoking both race and skin tone disparities?

This question is yet to be answered, but speaks to the importance of investigating the contexts in which skin tone or skin tone identity may be most salient.

We also know more broadly that the source of information matters. In the case of skin tone, do certain types of sources provoke a stronger (or weaker) reaction to information about colorism? For example, what about a message about colorism being delivered by a politician rather than a news story, from a popular media figure rather than a researcher, or even a vignette or quote from a "regular," hard working American that references skin tone disparities they have faced? Understanding the useful source cues and contexts in which color matters will be a vitally important step towards better understanding the ways in which skin tone identity operates. Similarly, would placing the discussion of colorism in a global context empower Black Americans (or Black people around the world) to feel that colorism is a broader issue worth fighting against?

How does discussion of colorism and its perceived importance vary based on who is acknowledging colorism? As noted earlier in the manuscript, many of my interview participants were intrigued and surprised that a White person was interested in discussing colorism. While these conversations were rich and in some cases appeared to be less awkward for the White interviewer than the Black interviewer, the style and substance of the conversations are likely to vary based on the race of the interviewer. Future work expanding on these race of interviewer effects would be quite valuable. This could also be explored in an experimental context. For example, what if a news story or vignette describes White people acknowledging not just racism but colorism in the United States and are noted as speaking out against it? Would Black respondents react positively or negatively to this news? Would this information influence perceptions that colorism is more or less important? In short, expanding the study of skin tone identity activation to better reflect real world contexts in which colorism is likely to be discussed, debated, or observed is an important next step for this literature.

Second, future work should more thoroughly explore the subset of individuals who are both light-skinned *and* identify strongly with their skin tone. My current work reveals this group to be a mix of two potentially opposing groups: those who recognize color-based disparities as problematic and are open to discussing resolutions, and those inclined to argue colorism is simply a distraction from racism. Additional interviews with a larger number of Black people may be useful in providing more insight into this phenomenon. Future survey work could also include better measurement of skin tone identity *and* more open-ended items that provide a better sense of what people are thinking as they say their skin tone is important to their identity. This will be especially valuable towards making sense of the mixed evidence pertaining to this particular subgroup of individuals in the experiment presented here. What does it mean to be highly identified with one's light skin tone but subsequently neither support nor strongly oppose potential remedies for colorism?

Third, this project highlights a number of questions surrounding the measurement of skin color in the social sciences more broadly. While this is work is being taken up more centrally in other recent work (e.g., Ostfeld and Yadon 2020), it is a challenge to our understanding of how skin color matters writ large. Different studies across several disciplines use vastly different measures of skin color (e.g., self-assessed, interviewer-assessed, machine-assessed), most of which have never been validated or triangulated. Even across studies that use a single type of measure (e.g., self-assessed only), there is variation in how color is assessed—e.g., Likert scales vs. visual scales. What, then, is the appropriate conclusion to draw when one study finds no relationship between skin color and public opinion using one measure and another study using a distinct measure does?

In this dissertation, I rely on a mix of interviewer- and self-assessed measures of color. Some of the strong effects found based on interviewer assessments—e.g., that darker skin is associated with greater support for redistributive policies—are not replicated amongst my original data collection efforts that rely on self-assessments. Could this discrepancy be due to the convenience samples I use

differing from larger nationally representative samples that can afford to use interviewers? Could these differences be due not to the sample, but to the differing modes of skin tone measurement—given that interviewer- vs. self-assessed measures likely capture two related but distinct things? For example, my interviews provide additional evidence that the perception of skin tone from an interviewer is distinct from one's own self-perception (see Chapter 3). Or could there be another explanation not related to either the sample or measurement—e.g., that the racial group is more politically cohesive given greater perceived threat to the group under the Trump administration? It is difficult to know the answer given that rarely do studies include a measure of skin tone let alone two measures—as well as the fact that measures of skin tone have slowly been evolving over time, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Moving forward, these types of methodological questions will continue to be important for scholars to consider seriously when designing and analyzing data. This is not to say that there is one measure that acts as a silver bullet. To the contrary, it is likely that different *types* of measurements each have distinct value. For example, how one perceives oneself provides important insight into views of the self and potentially one's world views (e.g., Ostfeld and Yadon 2018), while interviewer assessments may be associated with how one may be perceived and treated in society. Of course, both of these human assessments of skin tone are likely influenced by other factors than one's physiological coloring, including features, hair, accents, and other contextual factors. For some research questions, the combination of these various factors that inform human assessments can be valuable. For other questions, relying on a machine rating that ignores these additional factors may be ideal. Future work, then, must continue to take the issue of measurement seriously and weigh these considerations.

Finally, as a distinct measurement issue, future work may benefit from further development of the skin color identity items used here, especially creation of a larger battery of items that tap into affective group attachment in a variety of ways. As it stands, my evidence for identity is based on a combination of qualitative interviews and a limited number of survey items, but the patterns of identity

replicate across multiple separate surveys and samples of African Americans. Of course, identity is more multi-faceted and nuanced than can be captured in only two items, and some recent work has begun to assess more thoroughly how color is relevant to the self-concept (Harvey, Tennial, and Hudson Banks 2017). A fruitful avenue for future research would be expanding the set of items that tap into skin tone identity through both the cognitive and affective dimensions. The items used here present a promising start that provides insight into the ways in which skin tone is important to one's identity, but there remains room for significant advancement in our understanding of skin tone identity through more comprehensive measures.

Together, the findings presented throughout this manuscript highlight the value of examining race in a more fine-grained manner to fully understand the contours of the American racial landscape. My work complements the existing literature to show that skin color has important implications for issues like policing, wealth inequality, inter-group relations, and political representation. This project serves to challenge the prevailing norm of theorizing about African Americans as a homogenous group. My project demonstrates the dynamic politics of African Americans—based on both their own views *and* how Whites perceive them—related to the understudied facet of skin tone. I build on literature across the social sciences demonstrating different stereotypes, opportunities, and experiences based on skin tone to extend our understanding of skin tone's importance to the political realm. This complements a growing body of work showcasing the diverse perspectives and experiences of Black people in the United States (e.g., Bunyasi and Smith 2019; Carter 2019; Cohen 1999; Greer 2013; Laird 2017; Philpot 2017; Smith 2014; Tate 1994; White et al. 2014).

This project identifies the value of studying race in a more nuanced fashion. Being careful to distinguish the influence of race and color—as related yet distinct concepts—is crucial to advancing the study of our social and political world, as well as real-world inequities and policymaking. If our research aims to help inform policymakers about inequalities in society, we need to take care to ensure

our analyses do not mask deeply-rooted inequities (like skin tone), as being due to other types of inequities (such as those based on race or class). To reduce inequities, policy-makers and politicians need to have access to evidence that it is not simply race but other factors such as skin tone that contribute to pervasive inequality. Policy-makers within the United States can turn to programs designed to mitigate the adverse effects of colorism in Latin America as examples of policies that may (or may not) be effective.

In addition, evidence that darker skin within racial groups corresponds to greater discrimination by Whites suggests that studying inequality *within* as well as *across* racial groups paints a fuller picture of inequities. Likewise, darker skin tone appears to magnify the extent to which racial stereotypes are applied. This also highlights an avenue for fruitful future research—i.e., re-examining prior work based on racial stereotypes with an eye towards taking into account more fine-grained manifestations of race such as color and/or gender. These types of explorations will continue to help paint a clearer picture of the ways in which the intersections of race and color influence one's experiences or opportunities in society while also providing useful information to those who can take action against such inequities.

Of course, a focus on the heterogeneity within groups is not without controversy and thus requires an acknowledgement of legitimate, historically-based concerns. Indeed, some concern with the study of skin tone is related to its potential historical roots in eugenics-based arguments. These types of arguments have suggested that the oppression and disadvantage faced by various groups— be it based on race or sex—is an appropriate reflection of the deservingness or ability of such groups. For example, craniometry was used to rank people by the shape and size of their skull during the 1800s, with these measures argued as mapping onto ability or deservingness. Skin color was also historically used in similar ways. "Blue vein societies" and "brown paper bag tests" were used as measures of one's status and deservingness to access a number of spaces, from businesses to churches

to schools (Bond and Cash 1992; Drake and Cayton 1945; Gatewood 1990; Herring, Keith, and Horton 2004; Kuryla and Jaynes 2005; Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1993). This history must be recognized and scholars should tread carefully in doing such work given lasting traumas built around a historical memory and subsequent distrust of scientific communities among non-Whites (Corbie-Smith, Thomas, and George 2002; Gamble 1993; Swanson and Ward 1995; Wasserman, Flannery, and Clair 2007). In particular, scholars interested in studying the nuances of race—including skin tone, phenotype, hair, or other related attributes—should take great care in considering first the ethics of the work and subsequently their measurement strategies and research goals before moving forward.

Additionally, some have rightfully noted the potential political costs associated with highlighting intra-racial divisions and disparities (e.g., Crenshaw 1990; Hochschild 2006; Monk 2014). There is concern that shining a spotlight on color-based inequities may increase political divisions within the broader group, which may be especially straining for non-White groups who often have less political power. As a result, some have viewed efforts to highlight different types of inequities as potentially zero sum—i.e., highlighting intra-group disparities may serve to decrease progress towards fighting inter-group disparities (Dawson 2001; Hochschild 2006; Monk 2014). Indeed, some argue that racial classification systems serve not only to reinforce unequal racial hierarchies, but also to minimize the extent to which within-group disparities can be uncovered (Hochschild and Weaver 2007; Monk 2014). Thus, the reinforcement of racial boundaries has the potential to create a double-edged sword whereby a stronger sense of Black unity develops in response to racial discrimination, but so too do efforts towards "*suppressing and repressing* critical vectors of inequality (e.g., skin shade)" (Monk 2014, p. 1332). While these concerns and trade-offs are unavoidable, research focusing on the complexities of group dynamics—be it skin tone, gender, or class—provides a lens through which we can understand how the world operates. Only once we have this information can we decide where it may (or may not) be valuable to emphasize intra-group variation.

As a final reflection, it is worth considering what relevance, if any, this research has for our understanding of other groups, other identities, and American politics writ large. For those who may not care specifically about race or skin tone as a case, it is valuable to consider the ways in which this work may be transported across topics. First, this type of work signals the value (and challenges) of studying intersectionality. While this work focuses on skin tone within the broader race category, this has implications for thinking about other groups based on gender, partisanship, religion, or sexuality given the reality that people hold multiple identities at once. Providing insight on the nuanced experiences and views of group members based on differing experiences and backgrounds can be important to our understanding of the political and social world. Second, this work presents an attempt to study one identity that is closely intertwined with another identity. This presents challenges to measurement and requires creative research designs. The efforts in this project were attempts to move our understanding of skin tone identity forward, but are also imperfect in various ways. Still, these attempts may be of value to others interested in understanding properties and attributes of nested identities within a political context—e.g., assessing the ways in which race and class are intertwined, or one's gender identity intertwined with their masculinity/femininity, or combinations of race, ethnicity, and/or religiosity across global contexts.

Third, some of the richest data in this dissertation comes simply from listening to people. While a rich literature has emphasized the value of qualitative work (N. Brown 2014; Cohen 1999; Cramer 2016; Harris-Lacewell 2006; Hochschild 1981; Lane 1962), much of the contemporary work in American public opinion builds from a foundation that people know very little about politics. While it may be true that the average person does not do well at naming Supreme Court justices, if you allow people to speak in their own words about topics that matter to them, they are likely to have interesting things to say. Thus, *talking and listening to real people* has tremendous value for understanding public

opinion, particularly those aimed at gaining insight into people's perspectives without the narrowly confined nature of a typical academic survey.

Fourth, although this project focuses explicitly on African Americans given their unique racial history and positioning in American society, there is reason to believe that skin tone is also politically meaningful across racial groups. Of course, skin tone has important histories across various communities of color (e.g., Latinos and Asian Americans), with potential political implications in terms of intra-group views and dynamics. It would be valuable for future work to explore the ways in which skin tone or skin tone identity may operate in similar or distinct ways within these groups. Moreover, although skin tone is not as prominently discussed in the White community, the literature on colorism highlights the implicit and explicit ways in which White people give preference to those with lighter skin over those with darker skin (Burch 2015; Goldsmith, Hamilton, and Darity 2007; Hannon 2015; Lerman, McCabe, and Sadin 2015; Terkildsen 1993; Weaver 2012). The dynamics of skin tone within the White community are not well-developed, however, and would present a fruitful area for future research.

Finally, this examination of skin tone provides important insight into how race functions in American society. Black people face a number of disadvantages in society relative to their White counterparts. Black people are more frequently stopped by police, receive harsher criminal sentencing, receive worse medical care, live shorter lives, make less money, and hold on a fraction of the wealth that their White counterparts have. Still, these same statements remain factual when looking intra-racially based on skin tone: darker-skinned Black people are more frequently stopped by police, receive harsher criminal sentencing, receive worse medical care, live shorter lives, and make less money than either their lighter-skinned Black or White counterparts. This project exposes a domain in American life that carries great meaning but has largely been overlooked with respect to the study of politics. This has important implications for our understanding of two broad domains in political science: (1)

political behavior—e.g., with respect to political preferences, racial stereotypes, political coalitions, and media depictions of racial groups; and, (2) political institutions as it relates to political representation and legislative agendas. The findings throughout this dissertation suggest a necessary shift to our lens of analysis to more fully understand the American racial hierarchy. In addition, the theoretical underpinnings and all research components included here can be adapted to study potentially similar dynamics across groups and contexts.

Going back to our nation's founding, skin color has been an important tool of social division and yet has avoided a deep examination with respect to thinking about American politics. Although these issues present potentially thorny complications to our traditional understandings of race and racial groups, they are vital to understanding issues of power and inequity. Failing to recognize and engage with the importance of skin color and color-based discrimination has the potential to amplify the power of color in society rather than diminishing it. As many scholars have noted, even with changing demographics in the United States, there is an understanding that while the racial hierarchy may shift, it is unlikely that Black people will gain position in the racial hierarchy (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Jardina 2019). The evidence presented here, in combination with work on colorism across disciplines, suggests there is an even smaller chance of improvement for dark-skinned Black people specifically.

If we, as political and social scientists, aim to better understand the world around us with respect to race, identity, and experiences, we should not limit our investigations to studying groups in a monolithic fashion. Moreover, we should not rely too heavily on a single mode of inquiry, especially one based on convenience or ease of data collection. Indeed, being able to triangulate across multiple methods reveals both subtle and potent implications of skin tone on the lives of many Black Americans.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1
Question Wording from Chapter 4 Survey Items

2001-2003 National Survey of American Life (NSAL)

1. [Racial group attachment:] Being a Black person is a large part of how I think of myself
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Somewhat Agree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Strongly Disagree

2. [Linked fate:] What happens in my life is largely the result of what happens to other Black people in this country
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Somewhat Agree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Strongly Disagree

3. [Racial group attachment:] I do not feel strongly tied to other Black people
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Somewhat Agree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Strongly Disagree

4. [Affirmative Action:] I would not mind giving special preferences in hiring and job promotions to Blacks.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Somewhat Agree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Strongly Disagree

5. [Government Should Guarantee Jobs:] The government should provide a job for everyone who wants one.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Somewhat Agree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Strongly Disagree

6. [Rich Should Pay Higher Taxes:] People with high incomes should pay a larger share of their income taxes than those with low incomes.
    a. Strongly Agree
    b. Somewhat Agree
    c. Somewhat Disagree
    d. Strongly Disagree

7. [Reparations:] The government should give reparations (compensation, payback) to African Americans for historical injustices and slavery.
    a. Strongly Agree
    b. Somewhat Agree
    c. Somewhat Disagree
    d. Strongly Disagree

8. [Government Should Help Blacks:] The government should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of Blacks living in the United States.
    a. Strongly Agree
    b. Somewhat Agree
    c. Somewhat Disagree
    d. Strongly Disagree

9. [Voted in State/Local Election in Past Year:] Did you vote in any state or local election during the last year?
    a. Yes
    b. No

10. [Worked for a Political Party or Campaign:] Have you ever worked for a political party or campaigned for a political candidate?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. [Contacted Public Official:] Have you ever called or written a public official about a concern or a problem?
    a. Yes
    b. No

12. [Vote in 2000 Presidential Election:] Did you vote in the last presidential election?
    a. Yes
    b. No

    c. [If yes:] Who did you vote for?
        i. Al Gore
        ii. George Bush
        iii. Independent Candidate
        iv. Other

2012 American National Election Study (ANES) Time Series

1. [Know Someone Who Lost a Job:] During the past 12 months, has anyone in your family or a close personal friend lost a job, or has no one in your family and no close personal friend lost a job in the past 12 months?
    a. Someone lost a job
    b. No one lost a job

2. [Linked Fate:] Do you think that what happens generally to black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?
    a. Yes
    b. No

    c. [If yes:] Will it affect you [a lot, some, or not very much / not very much, some, or a lot]?
        i. A lot
        ii. Some
        iii. Not very much

3. [Racial Group Importance:] How important is being Black or African-American to your identity?
    a. Extremely Important
    b. Very Important
    c. Moderately Important
    d. A Little Important
    e. Not at All Important

4. [Welfare Spending:] Thinking about public expenditure on welfare benefits, should there be – ([much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now / much less than now, somewhat less than now, the same as now, somewhat more than now, or much more than now])?
    a. Much more than now
    b. Somewhat more than now
    c. The same as now
    d. Somewhat less than now
    e. Much less than now

5. [Government Services:] Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?
    a. 1 Government Should Provide Many Fewer Services; Reduce Spending a Lot
    b. 2
    c. 3
    d. 4
    e. 5
    f. 6
    g. 7 Government Should Provide Many More Services; Increase Spending a Lot

6. [Affirmative Action in the Workplace:] Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose allowing companies to increase the number of black workers by considering race along with other factors when choosing employees?
    a. Favor
    b. Oppose
    c. Neither favor nor oppose

    d. [If Favor:] Do you favor that [a great deal, a moderate amount, or a little / a little, a moderate amount, or a great deal]?
        i. A Great Deal
        ii. A Moderate Amount
        iii. A Little

    e. [If Oppose:] Do you oppose that [a great deal, a moderate amount, or a little / a little, a moderate amount, or a great deal]?
        i. A Great Deal
        ii. A Moderate Amount
        iii. A Little

7. [Income Inequality:] Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels."
    a. Agree strongly
    b. Agree somewhat
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Disagree somewhat
    e. Disagree strongly

8. [Death Penalty:] Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?
    a. Favor
    b. Oppose

    c. [Branch question:] Do you [favor / oppose] the death penalty for persons convicted of murder strongly or not strongly?
        i. Strongly
        ii. Not Strongly

9. [Spending on Police:] Thinking about public expenditure on police and law enforcement, should there be – ([much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now / much less than now, somewhat less than now, the same as now, somewhat more than now, or much more than now])?
    a. Much more than now
    b. Somewhat more than now
    c. The same as now
    d. Somewhat less than now
    e. Much less than now

10. [Immigrants Take Jobs:] Now I'd like to ask you about immigration in recent years. How likely is it that recent immigration levels will take jobs away from people already here –

[extremely likely, very likely, somewhat likely, or not at all likely /not at all likely, somewhat likely, very likely, or extremely likely]?
   a. Extremely Likely
   b. Very Likely
   c. Somewhat Likely
   d. Not at All Likely

11. [Presidential Vote 2012:] For whom did R vote for President in 2012?
   a. Barack Obama
   b. Mitt Romney
   c. Other

12. [Democratic Presidential Candidate FT:] How would you rate: Barack Obama
   a. 0-100

13. [Republican Presidential Candidate FT:] How would you rate: Mitt Romney
   a. 0-100

14. [Republican Party FT:] How would you rate: the Republican Party
   a. 0-100

15. [Democratic Party FT:] How would you rate: the Democratic Party
   a. 0-100

2016 American National Election Study (ANES) Pilot

1. [Participated in a Protest:] During the past 4 years, have you joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration, or have you not done this in the past 4 years?
   a. Have done this in past 4 years
   b. Have not done this in the past 4 years

2016 American National Election Study (ANES) Time Series

1. [Linked Fate:] Do you think that what happens generally to black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?
   a. Yes
   b. No

   c. [If yes:] Will it affect you [a lot, some, or not very much / not very much, some, or a lot]?
        i. A lot
        ii. Some
        iii. Not very much

2. [Racial Group Importance:] How important is being Black or African-American to your identity?
    a. Extremely Important
    b. Very Important
    c. Moderately Important
    d. A Little Important
    e. Not at All Important

3. [Participated in a Protest:] During the past 12 months, have you joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration, or have you not done this in the past 12 months?
    a. Have done this in past 12 months
    b. Have not done this in the past 12 months

4. [Signed a Petition:] During the past 12 months, have you signed a petition on the Internet or on paper about a political or social issue, or have you not done this in the past 12 months?
    a. Have done this in past 12 months
    b. Have not done this in the past 12 months

5. [Donated to Religious Organization:] During the past 12 months, have you ever given money to a religious organization, or have you not done this in the past 12 months?
    a. Have done this in past 12 months
    b. Have not done this in the past 12 months

6. [Donated to Social/Political Organization:] Not counting a religious organization, during the past 12 months, have you given money to any other organization concerned with a political or social issue, or have you not done this in the past 12 months?
    a. Have done this in past 12 months
    b. Have not done this in the past 12 months

7. [Posted on Social Media about Politics:] During the past 12 months, have you ever posted a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue, or have you never done this in the past 12 months?
    a. Have done this in past 12 months
    b. Have not done this in the past 12 months

8. [Presidential Vote 2016:] For whom did R vote for President in 2016?
    b. Hillary Clinton
    c. Donald Trump
    d. Gary Johnson
    e. Jill Stein
    f. Other

9. [Democratic Presidential Candidate FT:] How would you rate: Hillary Clinton
    g. 0-100

10. [Republican Presidential Candidate FT:] How would you rate: Donald Trump

      h.   0-100

11. [Previous President FT:] How would you rate: Barack Obama
      a.   0-100

12. [Republican Party FT:] How would you rate: the Republican Party
      i.   0-100

13. [Democratic Party FT:] How would you rate: the Democratic Party
      j.   0-100

2016 YouGov (see Appendix 2 for full questionnaire)

1. [Police Arrest:] Please tell us if the following things have ever happened to you or if they have never happened: You were arrested.
      a. Has Happened
      b. Has Never Happened

2. [Linked Fate:] Do you think that what happens generally to **Black people** in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?
      a. Yes
      b. No

      c. [If yes:] Will it affect you [a lot, some, or not very much / not very much, some, or a lot]?
         i. A lot
        ii. Some
       iii. Not very much

3. [Linked Fate with Dark-Skinned People:] Do you think that what happens generally to **dark skinned Black people** in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?
      d. Yes
      e. No

      f. [If yes:] Will it affect you [a lot, some, or not very much / not very much, some, or a lot]?
         i. A lot
        ii. Some
       iii. Not very much

4. [Linked Fate with Light-Skinned People:] Do you think that what happens generally to **light skinned Black people** in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?
   g. Yes
   h. No

   i. [If yes:] Will it affect you [a lot, some, or not very much / not very much, some, or a lot]?
      i. A lot
      ii. Some
      iii. Not very much

2018 Lucid (see Appendix 3 for full questionnaire)

1. [Balancing Race vs. Skin Color:] Do you think the government should respond to inequalities based on race and skin color?
   a. Yes
   b. No

   c. [If yes:] How do you think the government should prioritize responding to inequalities based on race and skin color?
      i. Focus completely on race
      ii. Focus more on race
      iii. Focus equally on race and skin color
      iv. Focus more on skin color
      v. Focus completely on skin color

2. [Police Treat Dark-Skinned People Worse:] How often do you think that black people with darker skin receive harsher treatment by police compared to those with lighter skin?
   a. Always
   b. Most of the time
   c. About half of the time
   d. Some of the time
   e. Never

3. [Lighter-Skinned People Given Better Job Opportunities:] How often do you think that black people with lighter skin are given better employment opportunities in our society than those with darker skin?
   a. Always
   b. Most of the time
   c. About half of the time
   d. Some of the time
   e. Never

4. [Lighter-Skinned People Treated Better by Whites:] How often do you think that black people with lighter skin are treated better than those with darker skin by white people in our society?

    a. Always
    b. Most of the time
    c. About half of the time
    d. Some of the time
    e. Never

5. [Skin Tone Influences Social Mobility:] How often does skin tone play a part in determining how far someone can make it in society?
    a. Always
    b. Most of the time
    c. About half of the time
    d. Some of the time
    e. Never

APPENDIX 2
Items from 2016 YouGov Survey

[Intro screen:] **A Study of Americans' Political Attitudes**

In this study, we are interested in understanding what you think about issues and groups that are currently in the news. This study should take approximately 20 minutes for you to complete. All of your responses will be kept anonymous.

Please indicate your racial identification (check all that apply):
- White
- Hispanic
- Black, African American
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

As you know, human beings display a wide variety of physical characteristics. One of these is skin color. Displayed above is a skin color scale that ranges from 1 (representing the lightest possible skin color) to 10 (representing the darkest possible skin color). The 10 shades of skin color are represented by a hand of identical form, but differing in color. Please indicate which hand depicted below above comes closest to your skin color. [Massey-Martin Skin Color Scale]

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?
- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Other party {Specify}

{If R considers self a Democrat/Republican} Would you call yourself a strong or a not very strong Democrat/Republican?

- Strong
- Not very strong

{ If R's party Identification is independent, no preference, other, etc.}: Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

- Closer to Republican
- Neither
- Closer to Democratic

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Using the seven-point scale below, on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative, please indicate where you would place yourself on this scale.

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

How important is being black to your identity?

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Moderately important
- A little important
- Not at all important

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose allowing companies to increase the number of black workers by considering race along with other factors when choosing employees?

- Favor
- Oppose
- Neither favor nor oppose

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose allowing universities to increase the number of black students studying at their schools by considering race along with other factors when choosing students?

- Favor
- Oppose
- Neither favor nor oppose

Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels."

- Agree strongly
- Agree somewhat
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree somewhat
- Disagree strongly

Thinking about public expenditure on welfare benefits, should there be – much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now ?

- Much more than now
- Somewhat more than now
- The same as now
- Somewhat less than now
- Much less than now

Do you support, oppose, or neither support or oppose the Black Lives Matter movement?

- Support strongly
- Support not very strongly
- Neither support nor oppose
- Oppose not very strongly
- Oppose strongly

How important is it that Blacks have control over the economy in mostly Black communities?

- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Somewhat important
- Very important
- Extremely important

How important is it that Blacks have control over the government in mostly Black communities?

- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Somewhat important
- Very important
- Extremely important

How often do you think the Democratic Party represents the interests of African Americans [always, most of the time, about half the time, some of the time, or never / never, some of the time, about half the time, most of the time, or always]?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Some of the time
- Never

How often do you think the Republican Party represents the interests of African Americans [always, most of the time, about half the time, some of the time, or never / never, some of the time, about half the time, most of the time, or always]?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Some of the time
- Never

Do you strongly approve, approve, disapprove or strongly disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?

- Strongly Approve
- Approve
- Disapprove
- Strongly Disapprove

Please tell us if the following things have ever happened to you or if they have never happened: You were arrested.

- Has Happened
- Has Never Happened

Do you think that what happens generally to Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?

- Yes
- No

- [If yes:] Will it affect you [a lot, some, or not very much / not very much, some, or a lot]?
  - A lot
  - Some
  - Not very much

Do you think that what happens generally to dark skinned Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?

- Yes
- No

- [If yes:] Will it affect you [a lot, some, or not very much / not very much, some, or a lot]?
  - A lot
  - Some
  - Not very much

Do you think that what happens generally to light skinned Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?

- Yes
- No

- [If yes:] Will it affect you [a lot, some, or not very much / not very much, some, or a lot]?
  - A lot
  - Some
  - Not very much

Do you think that as Blacks gain more influence in politics, Whites will have less influence, more influence, or about the same amount of influence in politics?

- Less influence
- More influence
- About the same amount of influence

Do you think that as light-skinned Blacks gain more influence in politics, other Blacks will have less influence, more influence, or about the same amount of influence in politics?

- Less influence
- More influence
- About the same amount of influence

Do you think that as dark-skinned Blacks gain more influence in politics, other Blacks will have less influence, more influence, or about the same amount of influence in politics?

- Less influence
- More influence
- About the same amount of influence

APPENDIX 3
Items from 2018 Lucid Survey

[Intro Screen:] **Current Issues Opinion Survey**

Thank you for participating in this study. This study aims to identify the thoughts and opinions that people in the United States hold about a variety of topics.   It should take approximately 20 minutes for you to complete this survey. This survey is part of a study being conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, and all answers will remain completely confidential. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. There are no right or wrong answers

Please indicate your racial identification (check all that apply)
o   White, non-Hispanic (1)
o   Hispanic (2)
o   Black, African American (3)
o   Asian (4)
o   American Indian or Alaska Native (5)
o   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)

How important is being black to your identity?
o   Extremely important (1)
o   Very important (2)
o   Moderately important (3)
o   Slightly important (4)
o   Not at all important (5)

Please indicate your gender identity
o   Male (1)
o   Female (2)

How important is your gender to your identity?
o   Extremely important (1)
o   Very important (2)
o   Moderately important (3)
o   Slightly important (4)
o   Not at all important (5)

As you know, human beings display a wide variety of physical characteristics. One of these is skin color. Displayed above is a skin color scale that ranges from 1 (representing the lightest possible skin color) to 10 (representing the darkest possible skin color). The 10 shades of skin color are represented by a hand of identical form, but differing in color. Please indicate which hand depicted above comes closest to your skin color. [Yadon-Ostfeld Skin Color Scale]

How important is your skin tone to your identity?
o   Extremely important (1)
o   Very important (2)
o   Moderately important (3)
o   Slightly important (4)
o   Not at all important (5)

As you know, human beings display a wide variety of physical characteristics. One of these is eye color. Displayed above is an eye color scale that ranges from 1 (representing the lightest possible eye color) to 10 (representing the darkest possible eye color). The 10 shades of eye color are represented by an eye of identical form, but differing in color. Please indicate which eye depicted above comes closest to your eye color. [Author Created Eye Color Scale]

When you go outside for more than 1 hour on a warm, sunny day, how often do you wear sunscreen?
o   Always (1)
o   Often (2)
o   Sometimes (3)
o   Rarely (4)
o   Never (5)
o   Do not go out on sunny days (7)

In general, would you say your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?
o   Excellent (1)
o   Very Good (2)
o   Good (3)
o   Fair (4)
o   Poor (5)

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?
o   Democrat (1)
o   Republican (2)
o   Independent (3)

{If R considers self a Democrat/Republican} Would you call yourself a strong or a not very strong Democrat/Republican?

- Strong (1)
- Not very strong (2)

{ If R's party Identification is independent, no preference, other, etc.}: Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

- Closer to Republican (1)
- Neither (2)
- Closer to Democratic (3)

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Using the seven-point scale below, on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative, please indicate where you would place yourself on this scale.

o   Extremely liberal (1)
o   Liberal (2)
o   Slightly liberal (3)
o   Moderate; middle of the road (4)
o   Slightly conservative (5)
o   Conservative (6)
o   Extremely conservative (7)

What is your current marital status?

o   Single (4)
o   Domestic Partnership (5)
o   Married (6)
o   Separated (7)
o   Divorced (8)
o   Widowed (9)

Now you be will asked questions related to different issues in society. We're interested in your opinions on each of these issues, so please read each question carefully. There are no right or wrong answers.

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

o   Favor a great deal (1)
o   Favor a moderate amount (2)
o   Favor a little (3)
o   Neither favor nor oppose (4)
o   Oppose a little (5)
o   Oppose a moderate amount (6)
o   Oppose a great deal (7)

Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels."
o   Agree strongly (1)
o   Agree somewhat (2)
o   Neither agree nor disagree (3)
o   Disagree somewhat (4)
o   Disagree strongly (5)

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?
o   Always (1)
o   Most of the time (2)
o   Some of the time (3)
o   Almost never (4)

Race-based inequalities exist in the United States with respect to education, employment, wealth, criminal justice interactions, and more. These inequalities leave black people worse off than white people in our society. Do you favor or oppose efforts to reduce discrimination in our society against black people?
o   Favor a great deal (1)
o   Favor a moderate amount (2)
o   Favor a little   (3)
o   Neither favor nor oppose (4)
o   Oppose a little (5)
o   Oppose a moderate amount (6)
o   Oppose a great deal (7)

Skin color-based inequalities exist in the United States with respect to education, employment, wealth, criminal justice interactions, and more. These inequalities leave darker-skinned black people worse off than light-skinned black people in our society. Do you favor or oppose efforts to reduce discrimination in our society against darker-skinned black people?
o   Favor a great deal (1)
o   Favor a moderate amount (2)
o   Favor a little   (3)
o   Neither favor nor oppose (4)
o   Oppose a little (5)
o   Oppose a moderate amount (6)
o   Oppose a great deal (7)

Do you think the government should respond to inequalities based on race and skin color?
o   Yes (1)
o   No (2)

How do you think the government should prioritize responding to inequalities based on race and skin color?

o   Focus completely on race (1)
o   Focus more on race (2)
o   Focus equally on race and skin color (3)
o   Focus more on skin color (4)
o   Focus completely on skin color (5)

How often do you think that black people with darker skin receive harsher treatment by police compared to those with lighter skin?

o   Always
o   Most of the time
o   About half of the time
o   Some of the time
o   Never

How often do you think that black people with lighter skin are given better employment opportunities in our society than those with darker skin?

o   Always
o   Most of the time
o   About half of the time
o   Some of the time
o   Never

How often do you think that black people with lighter skin are treated better than those with darker skin by white people in our society?

o   Always
o   Most of the time
o   About half of the time
o   Some of the time
o   Never

How often does skin tone play a part in determining how far someone can make it in society?

o   Always
o   Most of the time
o   About half of the time
o   Some of the time
o   Never

APPENDIX 4
Materials and Question Wording from 2019 AmeriSpeak Experiment

Control Condition

Second Annual SciCon: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and People in Weird Costumes

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
by Eric Smith
January 7, 2019

A businessman wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase in downtown Pittsburgh was passed by a group of Star Wars storm troopers. A few moments later across the street, a woman pushing her baby in a stroller casually walked by Batman standing on the edge of the sidewalk.

While this may sound out of the ordinary, it is just a normal day when a big science fiction convention like the MidAtlantic SciCon is in town. You can find an even bigger group of people dressed in increasingly elaborate costumes inside the convention. A quick stroll through the main entry of the MidAtlantic SciCon reveals hundreds of different characters from Star Wars, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, and superheroes from the Marvel and DC Universe. You can spot the couples in coordinated costumes—like Superman and Wonder Woman—and the groups of friends with themed costumes.

Photo: David L. Lawrence Convention Center

The MidAtlantic SciCon is the region's largest science fiction and fantasy convention. The 2nd annual convention opened last Friday at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh. Each year the convention gains more attention and attracts more participants.

This year, opening day attracted over 6,400 attendees, according to Paul Comeau, the convention's director of publicity and public relations. Comeau was confident that this year's attendance would eclipse last year's total of nearly 8,000 people. MidAtlantic SciCon has continued to attract science fiction enthusiasts from Pennsylvania, and increasingly from neighboring areas, since it was founded in 2012.

The increasing size also means more events being scheduled to meet growing demand. This year, more than 200 panels and workshops were scheduled, including "Animal People: The Drawing of Anthropomorphics," and "In an Age Before Atlantis: Sword and Sorcery Literary Influences in Gaming."

CSRP

● **CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF RACE AND POLICY**

New Research Shows Class-Based Disparities are Primarily Driven by Race

Press Release
January 7, 2019

New studies highlight how class-based inequalities stem primarily from racial discrimination. The Center for the Study of Race and Policy (CSRP) in Washington D.C. found dramatic differences when comparing Black people to White people across a number of domains.

These differences based on race range from gaping income disparities, to vast differences in education levels, as well as shorter lives due to both worse health outcomes and criminal sentencing disparities. For example, Black people are twice as likely to receive the death penalty for comparable crimes, have 5 years less formal education, make about $3 less per hour worked, and have less than half the wealth of Whites, regardless of class. Surprisingly, the extensive research on this topic by the Center for the Study of Race and Policy dating back to early 2015 reveals that these differences remain even after taking into account levels of education, work experience, family background, and other important factors. These disparities should be especially alarming given their relationship to job and educational opportunities, various life experiences, and overall quality of life.

Photo: Center for the Study of Race and Policy

The reports reveal that, on average, lower-class Whites have better outcomes than even the most affluent Blacks.

The research by the CSRP suggests that focusing on class alone is not enough to resolve inequalities stemming from race. "Most politicians aren't talking about how much worse off Black people are than White people," says the lead researcher at CSRP and activist, Darnell Williams. "We must acknowledge disparities based on race are real and are very harmful."

Only time will tell how politicians and other activists take up these disparities based on race given the CSRP's troubling findings.

CSRP

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF RACE AND POLICY

New Research Shows Race-Based Disparities are Primarily Driven by Skin Tone

Press Release
January 7, 2019

New studies highlight how race-based inequalities stem primarily from skin tone-based discrimination. The Center for the Study of Race and Policy (CSRP) in Washington D.C. found dramatic differences when comparing dark-skinned Black people to both light-skinned Blacks *and* Whites across a number of domains.

These differences based on skin tone range from gaping income disparities, to vast differences in education levels, as well as shorter lives due to both worse health outcomes and criminal sentencing disparities. For example, darker-skinned Black people are twice as likely to receive the death penalty for comparable crimes, have 5 years less formal education, make about $3 less per hour worked, and have less than half the wealth of lighter-skinned Blacks and Whites. Surprisingly, the extensive research on this topic by the Center for the Study of Race and Policy dating back to early 2015 reveals that these differences remain even after taking into account levels of education, work experience, family background, and other important factors. These disparities should be especially alarming given their relationship to job and educational opportunities, various life experiences, and overall quality of life

Photo: Center for the Study of Race and Policy

The reports reveal that, on average, lighter-skinned Blacks have more similar outcomes to Whites, while darker-skinned Blacks face the most disadvantages.

The research by the CSRP suggests that focusing on race alone is not enough to resolve inequalities stemming from skin tone. "Most politicians aren't talking about how much worse off dark-skinned Black people are than lighter-skinned Black or White people," says the lead researcher at CSRP and activist, Darnell Williams. "We must acknowledge disparities based on skin tone are real and are very harmful."

Only time will tell how politicians and other activists take up these disparities based on skin tone given the CSRP's troubling findings.

CSRP

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF RACE AND POLICY

Call to Action: New Research Shows Class-Based Remedies Won't Solve The Race Problem

Press Release
January 7, 2019

New studies highlight how class-based inequalities stem primarily from racial discrimination. The Center for the Study of Race and Policy (CSRP) in Washington D.C. found dramatic differences when comparing Black people to White people across a number of domains.

For example, Black people are twice as likely to receive the death penalty for comparable crimes, have 5 years less formal education, make about $3 less per hour worked, and have less than half the wealth of Whites, regardless of class.

The reports reveal that, on average, lower-class Whites have better outcomes than even the most affluent Blacks.

The research by the CSRP suggests that focusing on class alone is not enough to resolve inequalities stemming from race. "Most politicians aren't talking about how much worse off Black people are than White people," says the lead researcher at CSRP and activist, Darnell Williams. "We must acknowledge disparities based on race are real and are very harmful."

Photo: Center for the Study of Race and Policy

The CSRP recommends several immediate steps to be taken: "First, we should be in the streets protesting, in the voting booth, and in town-hall meetings telling politicians we won't accept these gaping disparities. Second, we need to follow in Brazil's footsteps and use targeted job opportunities and college admissions based not just on class, but on race. Third, the government should issue Baby Bonds at birth. Children from the poorest families would get $50,000 when they turn 18, while those from wealthy families get only $500. Together, these actions would raise awareness and drastically reduce disadvantages faced by Black people."

Only time will tell how politicians and other activists take up these disparities based on race and the CSRP's proposed solutions.

CSRP
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF RACE AND POLICY

<u>Call to Action</u>: New Research Shows Race-Based Remedies Won't Solve The Skin Tone Problem

Press Release
January 7, 2019

New studies highlight how race-based inequalities stem primarily from skin tone-based discrimination.The Center for the Study of Race and Policy (CSRP) in Washington D.C. found dramatic differences when comparing dark-skinned Black people to both light-skinned Blacks *and* Whites across a number of domains.

For example, darker-skinned Black people are twice as likely to receive the death penalty for comparable crimes, have 5 years less formal education, make about $3 less per hour worked, and have less than half the wealth of lighter-skinned Blacks and Whites.

The reports reveal that, on average, lighter-skinned Blacks have more similar outcomes to Whites, while darker-skinned Blacks face the most disadvantages.

The research by the CSRP suggests that focusing on race alone is not enough to resolve inequalities stemming from skin tone. "Most politicians aren't talking about how much worse off dark-skinned Black people are than lighter-skinned Black or White people," says the lead researcher at CSRP and activist, Darnell Williams. "We must acknowledge disparities based on skin tone are real and are very harmful."

Photo: Center for the Study of Race and Policy

The CSRP recommends several immediate steps to be taken: "First, we should be in the streets protesting, in the voting booth, and in town-hall meetings telling politicians we won't accept these gaping disparities. Second, we need to follow in Brazil's footsteps and use targeted job opportunities and college admissions based not just on race, but on the darkness of your skin. Third, the government should issue Baby Bonds at birth. Children from the poorest families would get $50,000 when they turn 18, while those from wealthy families get only $500. Together, these actions would raise awareness and drastically reduce disadvantages faced by dark-skinned Black people."

Only time will tell how politicians and other activists take up these disparities based on skin tone and the CSRP's proposed solutions.

Survey Instrument from 2019 AmeriSpeak Experiment

Key Independent Variables:

As you know, human beings display a wide variety of physical characteristics. One of these is skin color. Displayed below is a skin color scale that ranges from 1 (representing the lightest possible skin color) to 10 (representing the darkest possible skin color). The 10 shades of skin color are represented by a hand of identical form, but differing in color. Please indicate which hand depicted below comes closest to your skin color. [Yadon-Ostfeld Skin Color Scale]

Compared to most Black people, how would you describe your skin tone?
1. Very light
2. Light
3. Medium
4. Dark
5. Very dark

How important is your skin tone to your identity? [*note: direction of response options was randomized*]
1. Extremely important
2. Very important
3. Moderately important
4. A little important
5. Not at all important

If someone said something bad about [light / medium / dark skinned] people, how likely is it that you would feel almost as if they said something bad about you? [*note: direction of response options was randomized*]
1. Extremely likely
2. Very likely
3. Moderately likely
4. Slightly likely
5. Not at all likely

How important is being Black to your identity? [*note: direction of response options was randomized*]
1. Extremely important
2. Very important
3. Moderately important
4. A little important
5. Not at all important

Key Dependent Variables:
[*note: direction of response options was randomized*]

Now we would like to ask you a series of questions related to different groups and different issues in society. We want to know your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers.

[Q7.] The difference in incomes between the richest and poorest households in the United States has grown in the past few decades. Do you favor or oppose the government trying to make this income difference smaller?
1. Favor a great deal
2. Favor moderately
3. Favor a little
4. Neither favor nor oppose
5. Oppose a little
6. Oppose moderately
7. Oppose a great deal

[Q7_1.] Do you favor or oppose allowing companies to increase the number of darker-skinned Black workers by considering *skin tone* along with other factors when choosing employees?
1. Favor a great deal
2. Favor moderately
3. Favor a little
4. Neither favor nor oppose
5. Oppose a little
6. Oppose moderately
7. Oppose a great deal

[Q7_2.] Do you favor or oppose allowing companies to increase the number of Black workers by considering *race* along with other factors when choosing employees?
1. Favor a great deal
2. Favor moderately
3. Favor a little
4. Neither favor nor oppose
5. Oppose a little
6. Oppose moderately
7. Oppose a great deal

[Q8.] **Please tell us how likely you are to engage in the following activities to express your opinion about inequalities in society.**

RANDOMIZE GRID ITEMS:
1. Joining a protest, march, demonstration, or rally
2. Volunteering for an organization
3. Talking about these issues with family or friends
4. Signing a petition that will be sent to your political representatives

RESPONSE OPTIONS [*note: direction of response options was randomized*]
1. Extremely likely
2. Very likely

3.   Moderately likely
4.   A little likely
5.   Not at all likely

[Q9.] **Next, please tell us how often you believe the following statements are true.**

RANDOMIZE GRID ITEMS:
1.   Black people with lighter skin are given better employment opportunities in our society than those with darker skin.
2.   Black people with darker skin receive harsher treatment by police compared to those with lighter skin.
3.   Black people with lighter skin are treated better than those with darker skin by White people in our society.
4.   Skin tone plays a part in determining how far someone can make it in society.
5.   Focusing on issues related to racial discrimination will automatically resolve any issues related to skin tone discrimination.

RESPONSE OPTIONS [*note: direction of response options was randomized*]
1.   Always
2.   Most of the time
3.   About half of the time
4.   Some of the time
5.   Never

[Q10.] **Next, please tell us how often you believe the following statements are true.**

RANDOMIZE GRID ITEMS:
1.   Talking about skin tone is just a way to divide Black people and keep us from talking about the bigger issue of race.
2.   Black people would be better represented in politics if more dark-skinned Black people were elected.
3.   We need to get more dark-skinned Black people into positions of power in society.
4.   Light-skinned Black people experience just as much discrimination and hardship in society as dark-skinned Black people.

RESPONSE OPTIONS [*note: direction of response options was randomized*]
1.   Always
2.   Most of the time
3.   About half of the time
4.   Some of the time
5.   Never

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