



THE
SAMUEL DUBOIS COOK
CENTER ON SOCIAL EQUITY

**Hank & Billye Suber Aaron Young Scholars
Summer Research Institute**

3rd Year Cohort

Research Papers

Summer 2018



Samuel DuBois Cook

The Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity (Cook Center) was named after Dr. Samuel DuBois Cook, a distinguished political scientist, scholar, educator, author, administrator, civil and human rights activist and public servant. Dr. Cook, a professor in the Duke University political science department became the first African-American to hold a regular and/or tenured faculty appointment at a predominantly white southern college or university. He went on to serve 22-and-a-half years as president of Dillard University in New Orleans.

Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity

The Duke University Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity is an interdisciplinary research center within Trinity School of Arts and Sciences that is comprised of faculty and scholars from across Duke and a diverse international group of affiliated universities, research centers and non-governmental organizations. Its mission is to promote equity, across all domains of human interactions, through interdisciplinary research, teaching, partnerships, policy, and practice. The Cook Center seeks to employ the innovative use of new and existing data, develop human capital, incorporate stakeholder voices through civic engagement, create viable collaborations, and engender equity-driven policy and social transformation at the local, national and international levels.

Hank & Billye Suber Aaron Young Scholars Summer Research Institute

The Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity's Hank and Billye Suber Aaron Young Scholars Summer Research Institute is a three-week educational enrichment program that provides middle and high-school students enrolled in Durham Public Schools (DPS) in Durham, North Carolina, with training to enhance their writing, research, and presentation skills. The program is sponsored by the Samuel Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University in partnership with Durham Public Schools (DPS). In keeping with the Samuel DuBois Cook Center's central mission as a community of scholars engaged in the study of the causes and consequences of inequality, participants will explore curriculum related to the economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of inequality.

During the Hank and Billye Suber Aaron Young Scholars Summer Research Institute, students receive instruction from distinguished middle and high-school teachers, university professors, and leaders from community organizations. The program's main focus is on the development of students' research, writing, presentation, and critical-inquiry skills around issues of social justice. Students design and prepare original research presentations, posters, and papers focused on policy issues that affect inequality. Program material is selected by the teaching faculty in collaboration with Cook-Center scholars, focusing on various inequalities and their intersections. Emphasis is placed throughout the program on mentoring students in research, writing, and presentation skills. During the Hank and Billye Suber Aaron Young Scholars Summer Research Institute, students participate in workshops at Duke University's Perkins and Rubenstein Libraries and the Nasher Museum of Art.

Oluwatobi Adio



Oluwatobi Adio is a rising senior at the City of Medicine Academy. She likes to read and binge watch Nigerian movies with her mom. Adio wrote her research to raise awareness on the underlying issues of sexual assault on college campuses.

Kollin Brown



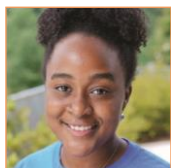
Kollin Brown is a rising senior at Hillside High School, where he held a conference about Social Equity for students in Durham Public Schools. Kollin has done research about housing Inequities. Watching Durham and Chicago firsthand, change over the years through gentrification has inspired him to do research about housing at the Young Scholars Institute. Upon graduation, Kollin plans on attending Morehouse College.

Ayden Lawrence



Ayden Lawrence is a participant in the third year cohort of the Aaron Young Scholar Summer Research Institute and is a rising sophomore at J.D Clements Early College. He is interested in the development of food deserts because they are contributing to the rise of health diseases in communities of color.

Akanke Mason-Hogans



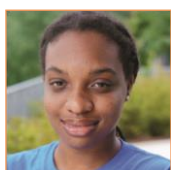
Akanke Mason-Hogans is a rising senior at Josephine Dobbs Clement Early College High School, and is a 3rd year student in the Aaron Young Scholars program. She has a passion for creative expression, social justice, and pepperoni pizza, and hopes to empower others through her research and advocacy. Akanke was inspired to write about the effects of colorism on education after witnessing it firsthand, with hopes that her research will enlighten educators on how to better serve their students in the future.

Sandra Santillan



Sandra Santillan is an Aaron Scholar, Durham native, and rising senior at Hillside High School. Over the course of three summers at the Young Scholars Research Institute, Sandra has researched and worked on issues of gender inequity, mental illness, and incarceration. She has worked alongside her peers, generating research products on issues of inequity. Sandra hopes to continue her research and widen her understanding of social inequities, as well as spreading valuable lessons and finding potential solutions related to her research interests.

Jenny Uba



Jenny Uba is a rising senior at City of Medicine Academy and is a part of the 3rd year cohort in the Aaron Young Scholars Institute Program. Her interest in food disparities was sparked when she learned about the inequities that exist in access to healthy food. Jenny hopes to further her research and expand her knowledge on the food supply chain in order to improve health outcomes in communities of color.

The Achievement Gradient : The Effects of Colorism on Student Achievement in K-12
Education

By: Akanke Mason-Hogans

Abstract

In classrooms in America, dark-skinned students are suffering. Educational institutions act as microcosms of a wider colorist society, and just as darker skinned individuals face everyday inequities, they also face unequal educational experiences. Darker skinned students of color get suspended and expelled at higher rates and perform at a lower level than their lighter complexioned peers. While racism is strongly linked to educational inequalities, colorism additionally affects students' educational experiences through disparate suspension rates, teacher biases, and academic performances in K-12 schools.⁷⁹

Introduction

Background

Across centuries, lighter skin functions as an indicator of comparative wealth, high status, and beauty for virtually all communities. For Africans and African Americans, this preference dates to colonialism in Africa as well as the abuse that stems from slavery.⁸⁰ For Latinos, it stems from the desire to look phenotypically closer to the Spanish conquistadors and further from the slaves brought to Latin America during the African diaspora.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Monk, E. P. "Skin Tone Stratification among Black Americans, 2001-2003." *Social Forces* 92, no. 4 (2014): 1313-337. doi:10.1093/sf/sou007.

⁸⁰ Igor Ryabov "Colorism and Educational Outcomes of Asian Americans: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health." *Social Psychology of Education* 19, no. 2 (June 28, 2016): 303-24. doi:10.1007/s11218-015-9327-5.

⁸¹ *ibid*

In many Asian communities, lighter skin was indicative of an individual belonging to the “leisure class”, or being wealthy enough not to have to work long hours in the sun, thereby avoiding a suntan and maintaining relatively pale skin.⁸² Although there are different causes of skin tone discrimination geographically, a universal condition is individuals with typically European features are viewed as the ideal.

Individuals with lighter skin, small, straight noses, lighter colored eyes, and looser or less coarse hair textures are perceived as superior within their communities in terms of beauty, friendliness, and intellectual aptitude.⁸³ These individuals’ closer proximity to whiteness, while it typically did not grant them full white privilege, allowed them to acquire advantages such as better housing, work, educational opportunity, and in the case of the enslaved, sometimes freedom.⁸⁴ The idea of a superior/inferior dynamic between lighter and darker skinned individuals within the same racial group has been passed down through generations and, unfortunately, many people still believe that proximity to whiteness indicates a person’s aptitude today.⁸⁵

Colorism is a form of racism that produces discrimination within a social group on the basis of skin tone. More often than not, those who face the brunt of colorism are those who bear

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Elmore, Tyhesha Goss. "Colorism in the classroom: An Exploration of Adolescents' Skin Tone, Skin Tone Preferences, Perceptions of Skin Tone Stigma and Identity." (2009).

⁸⁴ Keith, Verna M., and Carla R. Monroe. "Histories of Colorism and Implications for Education." *Theory Into Practice* 55, no. 1 (2015): 4-10. doi:10.1080/00405841.2016.1116847.

⁸⁵ "Race and Colorism in Education." 2016. doi:10.4324/9781315746227.

features that are most distant from Eurocentric standards of attractiveness, like persons with darker complexions in African American communities and monolids in Asian American communities. Unfortunately, many of these individuals resort to altering their appearance via skin lightening creams and other body modification.⁸⁶

Colorism affects people in almost every aspect of life, particularly via their educational experiences. Darker skinned people of color often face a disadvantage when it comes to receiving quality education since educators have biases in the way they see and interact with their students.⁸⁷ Darker skinned students are penalized both in terms of their academic performance and in the ways in which they are punished.⁸⁸

In discussions about inequities in schools, a student's race, gender, and socioeconomic class are all factors that are commonly used to measure whatever disparities exist that have an influence on his or her overall educational experience. However, colorism is frequently overlooked as a cause of educational inequity. Despite the fact that it receives less attention, the little research that has been done on colorism shows a stark difference between the educational outcomes of lighter skinned students and darker skinned students of the same race. For example, dark-skinned black males are 10.3% more likely to drop out of high school than light-skinned black males.⁸⁹ Many dark-skinned students dropout of school because they are pushed out of the

⁸⁶ South African Women of African and Indian Ancestries." Dlova, N.c., S.h. Hamed, J. Tsoka-Gwegweni, and A. Grobler. "Skin Lightening Practices: An Epidemiological Study of

*British Journal of Dermatology*173 (2015): 2-9. doi:10.1111/bjd.13556.

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ The Gray Area: High School Dropout Likelihood among Skin Tone Levels of Black Males.

system.⁹⁰ Steps need to be taken in order to correct the colorist norms in the American education system. In America, every student is supposed to be entitled to an equal and fair education.

However, because of colorist systems of oppression, these students are not afforded

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the same opportunities. Students with darker skin are often traumatized by the abuse they face by their peers, and should not have to endure that same (and likely more traumatizing) abuse from their instructors, who are supposed to help them.

Thesis Statement:

Colorism negatively impacts the discipline and achievement outcomes of students of color. While racism has been frequently linked to educational inequalities, colorism also affects students' educational experiences through disparate suspension rates, teacher biases, and academic performances in K-12 schools.

Research Questions:

- How does colorism impact the discipline and achievement outcomes of students of color in K-12 schools?
 - What is the importance of positive teacher-student interactions to student learning outcomes, and how does colorism impact teacher biases?
 - What role do other forms of discrimination, like classism and educational inequity, play in worsening the effects of colorism?
 - What can be done to lessen the impacts of colorism in the classroom?

⁹⁰ ibid

Terminology

- Colorism, which has many definitions, can be described as the discrimination of individuals within the same race based on skin tone and other phenotypic features related to ethnic origin.
- Academic achievement is something that is difficult to measure. In this paper, concrete measures like GPA, graduation rates, level of educational attainment, and test scores are factors used to define achievement.
- In this paper, discipline refers to how likely a student is to be sent out of the classroom, suspended, or expelled.
- Phenotypic features technically include all observable expressions of genes, but in this paper, the term will refer to features typically associated with ethnic origin (like nose shape, eye color, hair color/texture, skin tone, etc).
- Educational attainment refers to the highest level of formal education a person has attained.
- The color line was a term popularized by W.E.B. DuBois and referred to the discrimination coming from the differentiation (or “line”) between blacks and whites in the twentieth century. Many scholars claim that the color line is blurring, as a result of the increase in multiracial people and other ethnic minorities. When the color line blurs, colorism becomes a bigger issue.

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Methodology/ Literature Review

The conclusions in this essay are drawn from studies of both quantitative and qualitative nature, found from the Duke Library database. The general trends of the psychological effects of

colorism, as well as students' self-perceived experience with colorism were found by an analysis of the most recent National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Other studies were consulted for background information on the history and concept of colorism like "Race and Colorism in Education", "Histories of Colorism and Implications for Education", and "Colorism in the Classroom: An Exploration of Adolescents' Skin Tone, Skin Tone Preferences, Perception of Skin Tone Stigma and Identity".

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In order to obtain statistics about discipline rates as they affect youth of color, specifically black youth, sources such as "The Gray Area: High School Dropout Likelihood Among Skin Tone Levels of Black Males", "The Relationship Between Skin Tone And Suspension for African Americans", and "The Role of Colorism in Explaining African American Females' Suspension Risk" were utilized. In order to find the effect of teacher biases, negative teacher-student interactions, and colorism coming from educators, sources like "Race and Colorism in Education" "Race, Skin Tone, and Educational Achievement", and "Colorism as a Salient Space for Understanding in Teacher Preparation" were consulted. "Race and Colorism in Education" also served to make connections and illustrate the impact of teacher biases and students' interactions with peers on academic performance, as well as overall educational experience.

Many sources were consulted for this essay, but the following is a review of relevant literature that has already been done on the topic. One of the sources that was used to acquire background knowledge was "Colorism and Educational Outcomes of Asian Americans: Evidence From the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health." In this source, Ryabov studied the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which is a questionnaire made to

record information on developing adolescents. This source gave background in terms of the historical context for colorism, as well as information on the levels of educational attainment among Asian Americans across skin tone. “Race, Skin Tone, and Educational Achievement” is a book that references factors like teachers expectations of students based on their phenotypic characteristics (and introduces something called the pygmalion effect) and emphasizes the importance of positive teacher-student interactions. “The Relationship Between Skin Tone and

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School Suspension for African Americans” and “The Role of Colorism in Explaining African American Females’ Suspensions Risk” provided concrete evidence that those individuals born with darker skin suffer a lesser educational experience due to the prejudices of those in charge (instructors, administrators, etc).

Data Analysis

As aforementioned, colorist attitudes are so deeply ingrained in our society that they influence everyone in almost every aspect of life. Those with darker skin encounter a deficit because most are perceived as less attractive and intelligent and even as sub-human.⁹¹ This creates a potent disadvantage in the school environment. This paper will explore the evidence of an unfair educational experience received by darker skinned students across races, and will also explore possible equitable solutions.

Instructor Bias:

⁹¹ Elmore, Tyhesha Goss. "Colorism in the classroom: An Exploration of Adolescents' Skin Tone, Skin Tone Preferences, Perceptions of Skin Tone Stigma and Identity." (2009).

Educators are people, and like virtually everyone else in our global society, have internalized some form of colorism.⁹² That has an impact on their students. Because of Europeanized standards of beauty, those who have darker skin are typically viewed by others as less attractive, because they do not fit the ideal of what is typically referred to by popular society.⁹³ Research shows that teachers also use a student's perceived attractiveness to determine their aptitude.⁹⁴ Teachers expect their "more attractive" students to achieve more academically and be

more well behaved than their "unattractive" students, who they see as "less intelligent, loud, ill-mannered, and disagreeable".⁹⁵ Students who are perceived in a negative way by their teachers are less likely to succeed in their academic endeavors.⁹⁶ If instructors have negative perceptions of their students, it shows in their students' performance.

Because of self-fulfilling prophecies, it's important for instructors to recognize and work against any implicit biases they may have in order to avoid gaps in student achievement. There is a phenomenon called the Pygmalion effect that deals with self-fulfilling prophecies in education.

⁹² Keith, Verna M., and Carla R. Monroe. "Histories of Colorism and Implications for Education." *Theory Into Practice* 55, no. 1 (2015): 4-10. doi:10.1080/00405841.2016.1116847.

⁹³ Thompson, Maxine S., and Steve McDonald. "Race, Skin Tone, and Educational Achievement." *Sociological Perspectives* 59, no. 1 (July 17, 2015): 91-111. doi:10.1177/0731121415580026.

⁹⁴ "Race and Colorism in Education." 2016. doi:10.4324/9781315746227.

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ If an instructor holds positive attitudes and high expectations of a student, the student is more likely to perform on a higher level.⁹⁸

However, if the opposite is true and an instructor has negative attitudes and low expectations of a student, the student will not perform at their highest potential.⁹⁹ That is why it is imperative that educators have strong expectations about their students' abilities; it is also imperative that they do not allow those expectations to be biased by students with darker skin tones have lower grade point averages, across race.

Educators may believe that darker skin is indicative of lower academic aptitude.¹⁰⁰ These biases, whether overt or covert, whether conscious or subconscious, must be recognized and addressed on a large level in order to rectify the position that dark skinned students are in now.

⁹⁷ Thompson, Maxine S., and Steve Mcdonald. "Race, Skin Tone, and Educational Achievement." *Sociological Perspectives*59, no. 1 (July 17, 2015): 91-111. doi:10.1177/0731121415580026.

⁹⁸ Thompson, Maxine S., and Steve Mcdonald. "Race, Skin Tone, and Educational Achievement." *Sociological Perspectives*59, no. 1 (July 17, 2015): 91-111. doi:10.1177/0731121415580026.

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ "Race and Colorism in Education." 2016. doi:10.4324/9781315746227.

There are pushes for an incorporation of anti-racism trainings, gender equity trainings, and some trainings to help with LGBTQ students in teacher education.¹⁰¹ However, there is not enough discussion about the possible incorporation of anti-colorist training in American schools. Trainings like those proposed in “Colorism in Education” are necessary in rectifying damage done by colorism in schools.¹⁰²

Academic Performance:

The self-perceptions, peer perceptions, and teacher perceptions of darker skinned students of color all ultimately impact a student’s academic performance. There is already research to determine how positive teacher-student interactions have a positive impact on academic performance, how negative teacher-student interactions have a negative impact on academic performance, and how teacher biases against their darker-skinned pupils have a negative impact on their academic performance.¹⁰³ However, how strong is the impact of the social interactions of students on their academic performance (again, in this paper, performance is measured by a student’s GPA, test scores, educational attainment levels, and graduation rates of a population)? The general consensus in the research community is that adolescents with darker complexions often suffer from bullying and teasing from their peers (and sometimes even their parents), and because of the way they are devalued in society, those with darker skin are more likely to suffer from poor self-esteem and a negative self-image.¹⁰⁴ We know that darker skinned students of

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ "Race and Colorism in Education." 2016. doi:10.4324/9781315746227.

¹⁰⁴ Elmore, Tyhesha Goss. "Colorism in the classroom: An Exploration of Adolescents' Skin Tone, Skin Tone Preferences, Perceptions of Skin Tone Stigma and Identity." (2009).

color suffer from lower self-esteem than their lighter classmates, and we know that students with

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low self-esteem are more likely to perform at a lower level, so why is there so little research on the impact of colorism on student learning outcomes and overall academic performance?¹⁰⁵ There must be a correlation. If a student does not feel supported, he/she will not be able to perform at his/her highest potential.

Darker skinned students consistently have lower GPAs and test scores, as well as higher dropout rates.¹⁰⁶ According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, Asian American students with darker skin have higher high school dropout rates than lighter skin Asian Americans, and they also have lower overall levels of educational attainment.¹⁰⁷ The same trend is true when studying a group of darker Latino American students and lighter (or white) Latino American students, and is also present in the African American community.¹⁰⁸ Across race, darker skinned students have lower performance levels- lower GPAs, lower test scores, and lower graduation rates.¹⁰⁹ This could be because the teachers have biases against dark skin, causing students to be evaluated harsher, punished more severely, and more likely to be kicked

¹⁰⁵ Hunter, Margaret. "Colorism in the Classroom: How Skin Tone Stratifies African American and Latina/o Students." *Theory Into Practice* 55, no. 1 (2015): 54-61. doi:10.1080/00405841.2016.1119019.

¹⁰⁶ Keith, Verna M., and Carla R. Monroe. "Histories of Colorism and Implications for Education." *Theory Into Practice* 55, no. 1 (2015): 4-10. doi:10.1080/00405841.2016.1116847.

¹⁰⁷ Ryabov, Igor. "Colorism and Educational Outcomes of Asian Americans: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health." *Social Psychology of Education* 19, no. 2 (June 28, 2016): 303-24. doi:10.1007/s11218-015-9327-5.

¹⁰⁸ Ryabov, Igor. "Colorism and Educational Outcomes of Asian Americans: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health." *Social Psychology of Education* 19, no. 2 (June 28, 2016): 303-24. doi:10.1007/s11218-015-9327-5.

¹⁰⁹ Keith, Verna M., and Carla R. Monroe. "Histories of Colorism and Implications for Education." *Theory Into Practice* 55, no. 1 (2015): 4-10. doi:10.1080/00405841.2016.1116847.

out of the classroom and miss instructional time, making them more susceptible to the faults of the educational system.¹¹⁰ Additionally, darker skinned people are more likely to have low incomes and be disadvantaged in terms of jobs and housing, so there are a variety of factors that could

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influence their performance.¹¹¹ If someone is distracted by a tough personal life, they are less likely to make school a priority and perform at their highest potential. The weight of discrimination faced by these students contributes to an even larger gap in achievement.

Discipline Outcomes:

Many educators, especially non-black ones, have a tendency to equate dark skin with aggressiveness, and are harsher with their discipline of their dark-skinned students.¹¹² If an instructor holds bias against a group of students because they perceive them to be less intelligent, poorly behaved, and loud, then they will see those students as disruptions, and will be more likely to send them out of the classroom when it is not necessary.¹¹³ Rather than deal with the behavioral issue and treat the student like a pupil, the teacher would rather treat the student like a nuisance.¹¹⁴ When students are sent out of the classroom unnecessarily, it causes them to miss out

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹¹ Williams Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Pushed Out, Over Policed, and Under Protected." *African American Policies Forum*, 2017.

¹¹² "Race and Colorism in Education." 2016. doi:10.4324/9781315746227.

¹¹³ *Ibid*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*

on instructional time. The same is true for suspension and expulsion rates. Dark skinned black females are three times more likely to be suspended than their light skinned classmates.¹¹⁵

Dark skinned black males are 10.3% more likely to be suspended than their light skinned classmates (who are actually less likely to get suspended than their white classmates).¹¹⁶ If a teacher shows significant bias towards one student (or type of student), then those who are not a

¹¹⁵ Blake, Jamilia J., Verna M. Keith, Wen Luo, Huong Le, and Phia Salter. "The Role of Colorism in Explaining African American Females' Suspension Risk." *School Psychology Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (September 26, 2017): 118-30. doi:10.1037/spq0000173.

¹¹⁶ Tripp, Yariv. "The Gray Area: High School Dropout Likelihood among Skin Tone Levels of Black Males." *Econometrics Letters* 2, no. 2 (2015): 1. doi:10.5455/elet.2015.2.2.1.

part of that population will be at a deficit when it comes to evaluations.¹¹⁷ Not only classroom teachers hold colorist biases, but those administrators who decide if someone is suspended or expelled are also affected by this perception that white is the ideal. There is a problem with the disparate discipline of darker skinned students that can only be solved with anti-colorism training for educators.

The skewed perception of dark-skinned students leads educators to suspend and expel them at alarming rates.¹¹⁸ There is no evidence that darker skinned students are more badly behaved than lighter skinned students, nor is there any evidence that they are more delinquent in the activities they participate in. The issue does not lie within the students, but it lies within the educators who decide their fate. When a student is suspended, expelled, or sent out of the classroom, they miss valuable instructional time. It's important to note that, because the majority of teachers are white females, colorism is not just an intra-racial phenomenon. Colorist ideologies are present in all communities, and nonblack educators are equally as susceptible to perpetuate the inequality.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Because of colorism, darker skinned students incur a deficit in terms of their teacher relationships, academic performance, and discipline outcomes in schools. Darker skinned people, whether they are African American, Latino, or Asian American, face lesser academic outcomes

¹¹⁷ "Race and Colorism in Education." 2016. doi:10.4324/9781315746227.

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Ibid

than their lighter skinned counterparts.¹²⁰ They are consistently punished more harshly and more

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often, not favored by teachers, and perform lower academically in terms of GPA and graduation rates. Educational inequality is just one of many penalties faced by darker skinned individuals in a colorist society. Since colorism creates obstacles for children obtaining a fair and high quality educational experience, steps should be taken to rectify it. Trainings for anti-colorism should be implemented for all educators, so that instructors can be aware of any implicit biases they may have and work against them to provide an equitable situation for all students.¹²¹ This solution would be anti-colorism training for educators to become aware of their biases and work against them.

¹²⁰ Ryabov, Igor. "Colorism and Educational Outcomes of Asian Americans: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health." *Social Psychology of Education* 19, no. 2 (June 28, 2016): 303-24. doi:10.1007/s11218-015-9327-5.

¹²¹ "Race and Colorism in Education." 2016. doi:10.4324/9781315746227.

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