# THE URGENT MATTER OF COLORISM: A MISSING LINK IN DEI

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Colorism Healing

Speaking. Training. Consulting.

## Workshop Agenda:

1. Alignment
2. What is Colorism?
3. Colorism in the workforce pipeline
4. Colorism and workplace culture
5. Colorism and organizational strategy
6. Introduction to the I.R.I.S. framework

## The 4-Cs for Constructive Conversations About Colorism:

* Courage
* Consciousness
* Curiosity
* Compassion

## Anti-racist work simply does not work without an intersectional framework, and one of the primary pillars of any antiracist work must be colorism.

## Definition

Colorism is a system of social stratification that marginalizes people with darker skin tones and elevates or privileges people with lighter skin tones.

## A Spectrum of Privilege

Colorism is a spectrum of privilege. This means that at the micro level, it’s very contextual.

## Interracial and Intraracial

An often unrecognized or overlooked aspect of colorism is that it happens both within a particular racial or ethnic group (intraracial) and across different racial and ethnic groups (interracial).

## Historical, Global, Cross Cultural

"The first difference which strikes us is that of colour.... And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white ... preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form… Besides those of colour, figure, and hair, there are other physical distinctions proving a difference of race." -Thomas Jefferson. (2)

## Intersectional

Outcomes of colorism can either be mitigated or exacerbated by other parts of our experiences and identities.

## Monochromatic Diversity

This happens when a group is racially and ethnically diverse, yet all or most members of the group have the same or very similar skin tones.

## The Educational Pipeline

Asian Americans and Latinos with lighter skin tones were significantly more likely to complete high school and transition to college, and those with darker skin tones were 21-26% less likely to attend college and earn a degree. (3)

Lighter skinned Latinx students reach higher levels of schooling on average than their Brown and Black Latinx counterparts due to class privilege, discriminatory practices against dark-skinned Latinx students, and favorable treatment toward students with light skin. Educators perceive dark-skinned Latinx students as less intelligent and have lower expectations for Brown and Black Latinx students. (5)

Dark-skinned black girls were three times more likely to be suspended from school than light skinned black girls for the same infractions. For boys and girls alike, darker skin correlated with higher suspension rates for the same behavior despite comparable grades, home environments and school records. (4)

## Biases in Hiring

Skin tone had greater influence on hiring choices than the applicant’s level of education and years of work experience. (6)

Regardless of education, test scores, and other demographic factors--Lighter skinned African Americans and Latinos were significantly more likely to be seen as intelligent by white interviewers. (7)

In many Latin American countries, top positions in business, academia, and politics are primarily filled with light-skinned people. Darker-skinned professionals experience less occupational prestige, while lighter-skinned employees attain higher status jobs. (8)

## Wage Disparities

As skin tone darkens, the wider the pay gap between white American workers and African American workers, and light-skinned African Americans earned as much as 12-14% more than dark-skinned African Americans. (9)

Light-skinned Latinx employees generally earn more income than dark-skinned Latinx workers and have higher overall socioeconomic status. (10)

Earnings for light-skinned or European Latinx employees exceeded earnings for dark-skinned or Indigenous Latinix employees by nearly 22%. (11)

## EEOC Discrimination Lawsuits

These instances of creating an unsafe and hostile work environment on the basis of color include:

* refusal to place senior employees in rightful positions
* repeatedly being called derogatory names such as “charcoal” by managers and supervisors
* being demoted or reassigned for being “too dark” for the white clientele in a particular neighborhood
* being advised to change skin tone to better fit in being terminated after reporting such treatment.

Outcomes for the companies in these cases have included payouts of as much as $150,000; consent decrees; required training; and systems for reporting, tracking, and addressing complaints. (10)

## Wellness

Colorism negatively impacts morale, productivity, and overall wellness.

Those who experience colorism are reported to face more issues with cardiovascular health, pain-related disorders, sensory dysfunction, and disease overall. (11)

Having darker skin also corresponds with having decreased mental health due to experiences of colorism. (12)

As companies strive to promote wellness, remember colorism as a unique stressor that differentially impacts people even if they're the same race.

## Representation: Quantity & Quality

When it comes to addressing colorism in your branding and marketing assets, it’s not just a matter of whether dark-skinned people are included. It’s just as important to be intentional about HOW they’re included.

This starts with building teams that include meaningful contributions by dark skinned people.

It also requires an intersectional lens on representation. For examples, a common gap is along the axis of gender where assets include representation for dark skinned men while missing representation for dark-skinned women.

## Racial & Ethnic Profiling

Though racial and ethnic profiling have been discussed for decades, most people overlook the fact that we rely, in large part, on skin tone, and other physical traits like hair, to assume race in the first place. Racial profiling first requires the perception of race. Therefore, having a complexion, hair texture, and facial features strongly associated with the targeted group greatly increases the likelihood of racial profiling. (13)

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## The I.R.I.S. Framework

**Individual**- personal bias and mental health

**Relational**- interactions between individuals or small groups

**Institutional**- policies, procedures, norms, or culture within a larger entity

**Societal**- far-reaching patterns across the larger society

**Awareness**- Know about and understand colorism

**Assessment**- Reflect, audit, examine status quo

**Attitudes**- Decondition, unlearn, reprogram beliefs and biases

**Actions**- Adjust behaviors, activities, and work

These do not have a particular order! You can set the cycle of change into motion by pushing on any of these levers.

## Individual

Reporter: "Do you consider yourself a militant?"

Malcolm X: (chuckles) "I consider myself Malcolm."

## Individual Awareness & Analysis

Expand awareness of colorism and awareness of self.

* How are you positioned within colorism?
* How have you been complicit in colorism?
* What's your track record for addressing colorism?
* What are your present needs around colorism?
* What present opportunities do you have to address colorism in your personal life?
* What are your core values and strongest desires?

## Dr. Webb’s Example Values

**Be Brave.** I choose to consistently show up and do the work, even when it’s risky or scary.

**Be of Service.** I am here to help the people.

**Be Smart.** I aim to provide distilled research and deeper insight into the complexity of colorism.

**Be Sarah.** I intend to live and speak with integrity, honesty, sincerity, and authenticity.

**Be in Love.** Love is the source of who I am and the heart of all I do.

## Individual Attitudes

Shifting Attitudes: Input produces Output.

* What messaging about skin tone have you been exposed to?
* From what sources?
* How can you increase or decrease your exposure to certain messages to help reprogram your unconscious biases around skin tone?

New *attitudes* lead to new *actions*!

## Individual Actions

### How to Choose an Action:

* Responds to the need/opportunity you identified
* Leverages your key skills or resources
* Aligns with your core values
* Points toward your future vision
* Do you need additional skills, knowledge, resources, or inner work to execute this plan?

## Individual Actions

Track Progress & Results (Awareness & Analysis):

* periodic check-ins (weekly, quarterly, etc.)
* surveys, scales, and percentages
* qualitative feedback, self/others, journaling

## How the Cycle Continues: New Actions lead to New Attitudes and New Awareness.

## Your Plan to Launch an Individual Cycle of Change

### Sample Action Plan:

1. **Zone**- I am stepping into my individual zone of influence.
2. **Alignment**- I am grounded in my core values of creativity and courage.
3. **Lever**- I am launching a cycle of change through attitudes.
   1. I will increase input of messages that affirm dark-skinned women with natural hair in artwork, journalism, tv/movies, and social settings.
4. **Assessment**- I will track my progress every week using journaling.

## **Your Individual Action Plan:**

### **Zone**

I am stepping into my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ zone of influence.

### **Alignment**

I am grounded in my core value(s) of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

### **Lever**

I am launching a cycle of change through \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Describe the steps here:

### **Assessment**

I will track my progress every \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ using \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

## Institutional & Societal

“The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.” -James Baldwin

## Institutional & Societal Awareness & Analysis

* Describe the status quo.
* Map the people involved and their roles.
* What are past or current initiatives?
* What’s the Re-Vision?
* What’s been your role?
* How are you positioned within this institution?
* What are current channels for change?
* What are current resources and opportunities?
* Allies and accomplices?
* Specific sources of the problem?

## Institutional & Societal Attitudes

* Is it individual attitudes of one or a few people?
* Is it an institutional narrative? (audit organizational copy, content, policies, etc.)
* Is it an org-wide culture?
* How is architecture and technology involved?

## Institutional & Societal Actions

### Sample Action Plan

1. **Zone**- I am stepping into my institutional zone of influence.
2. **Alignment**- I am grounded in my core values of integrity and creativity.
3. **Lever**- I am launching a cycle of change through analysis.
   1. I will audit my company’s stock photography archive to measure quantity and quality of representation of dark-skinned people. I will recruit and accomplice to help me. I will present the initial results to my team and make a case for a training on colorism.
4. **Assessment**- I will track our progress for improving representation in our stock photography every quarter using audits.

## **Your Institutional/Societal Action Plan:**

### **Zone**

I am stepping into my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ zone of influence.

### **Alignment**

I am grounded in my core value(s) of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

### **Lever**

I am launching a cycle of change through \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Describe the steps here:

### **Assessment**

I will track my progress every \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ using \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.