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# SKIN COLOR AND HEALTH: RATIONALE AND MEASUREMENT

**Ellis Monk**

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

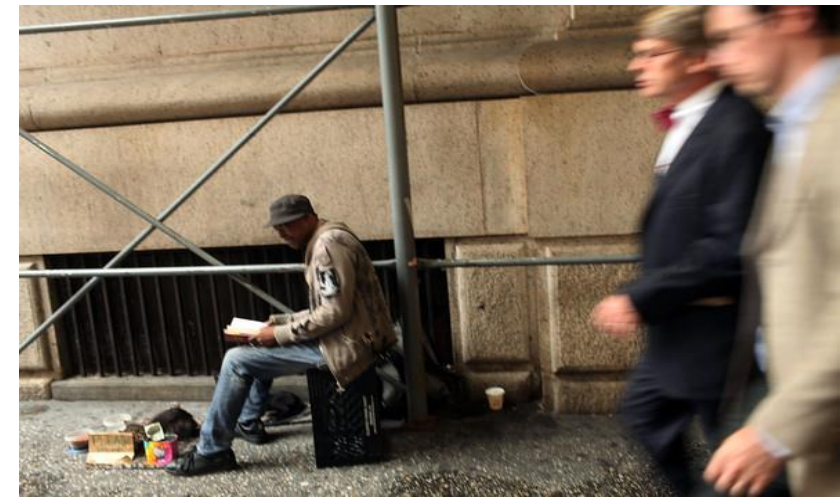
Faculty Associate, Office of Population Research





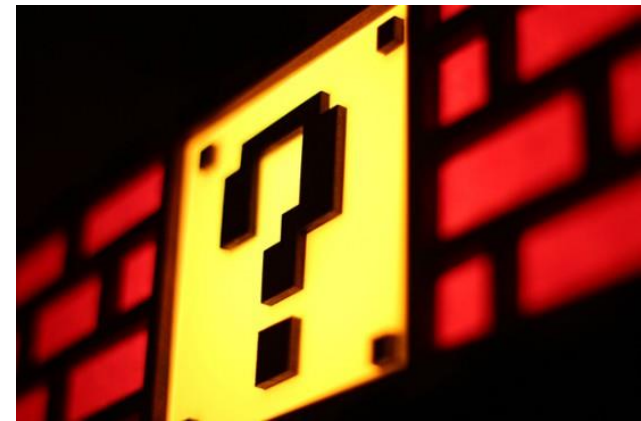
## RACIAL DISPARITIES IN HEALTH

- McCord and Freeman (1990): Black male youths in 1980 were less likely to survive to the age of 65 than male youths in Bangladesh.
- There is a 5 year gap in life expectancy at age 25 between blacks and whites (Williams & Sternthal 2010).

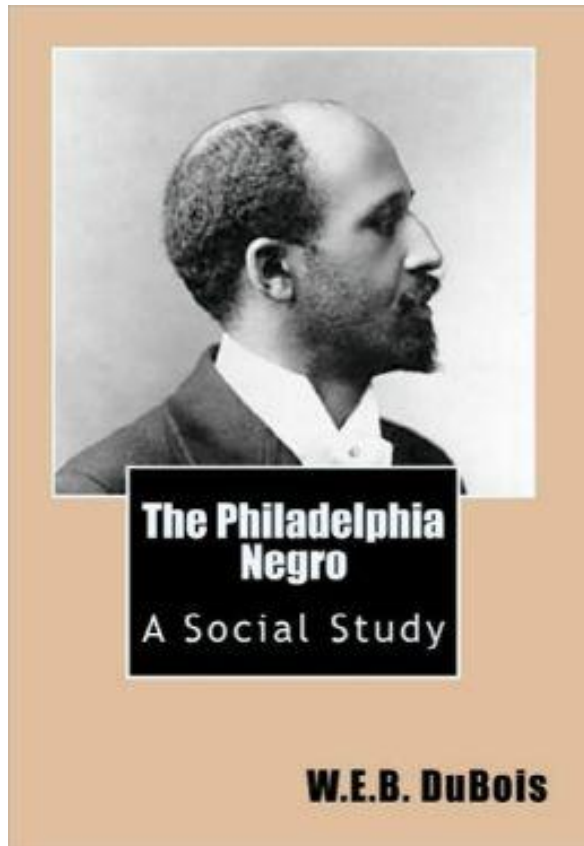


## HEALTH DISPARITIES IN BLACK AND WHITE?

- Health disparities between blacks and whites often remain even after controlling for SES and health behaviors (Das 2013).
- Health disparities *within-race* are often as large or even larger than *between-race* health disparities (Williams & Sternthal 2010).

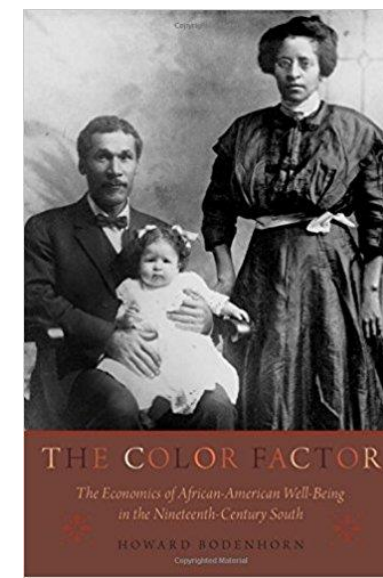
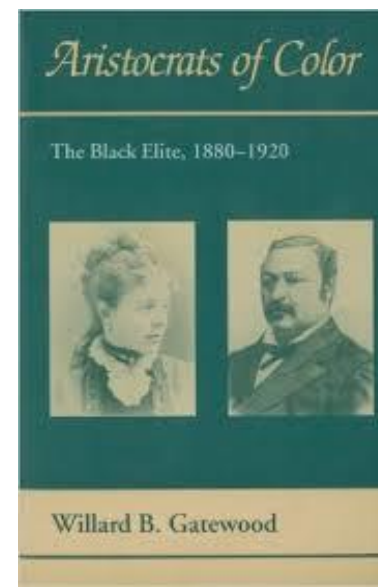


# DU BOIS'S WARNING



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF “COLORISM”

- Skin color related to kinship ties with whites and preferential treatment during slavery (e.g. manumission, education, etc.)
- Light-skinned black elite practiced homogamy and other forms of social closure.
- Multiple gradational categories of race and color recognized for centuries in the United States (e.g. mulatto, quadroon, octoroon).
- One-drop rule institutionalized in the census only in 1930.



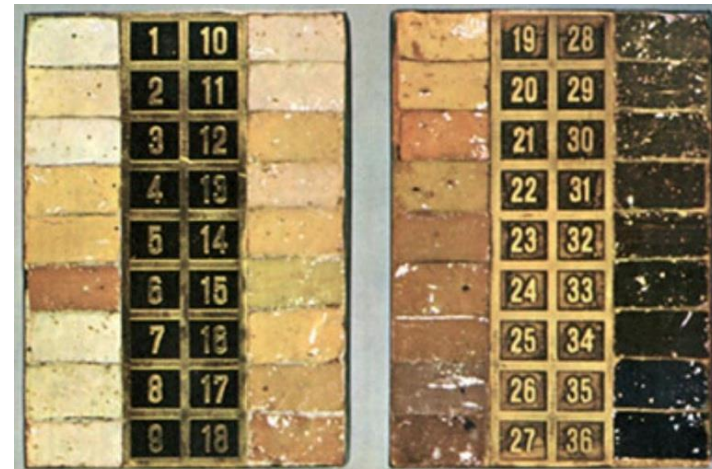
# SOCIAL COGNITION AND THE PERCEPTION OF “RACE”

- Beyond the dichotomous (Rosch & Wittgenstein).
- Skin tone and (proto)typicality.
- A cognitively-plausible micro-foundations of inequality.



## “RACE,” SKIN TONE, AND INEQUALITY.

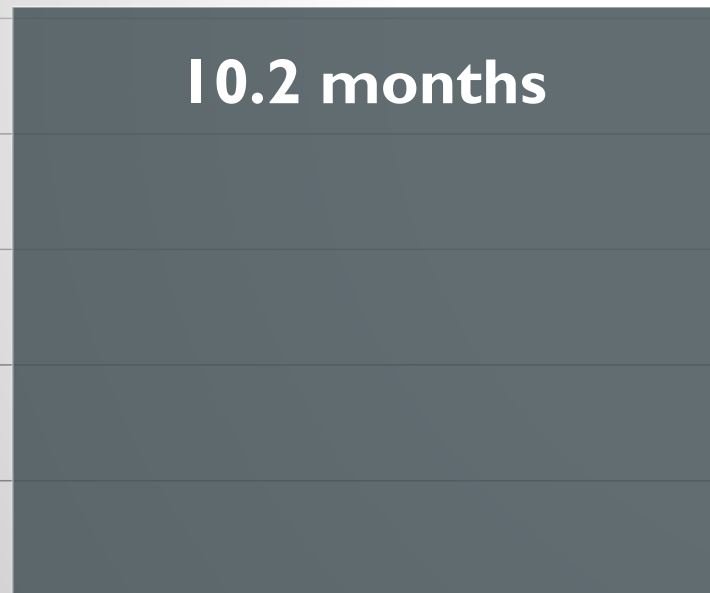
There is as much socioeconomic and health inequality along the color continuum among African Americans as there is between African Americans and whites as a whole (Monk 2014, 2015).





# “Race,” Color, and Education in the U.S.

**Age: 25-44**



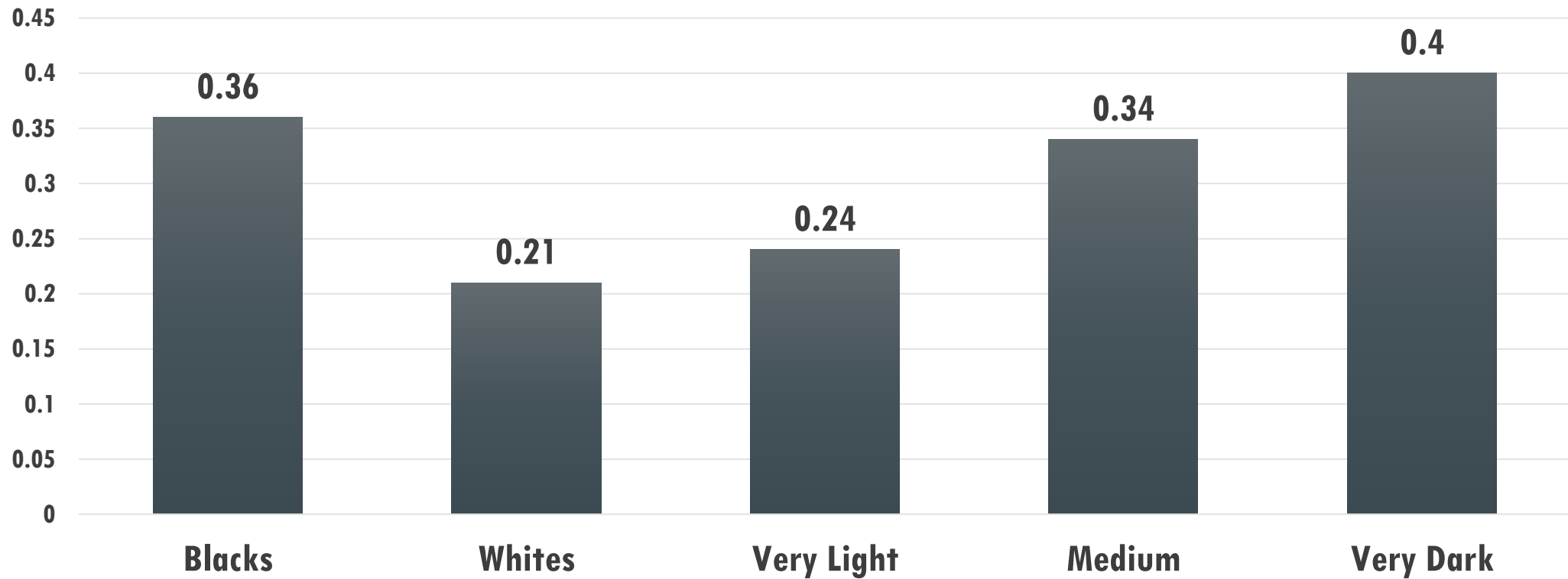
**BLACK-WHITE [NHIS]**



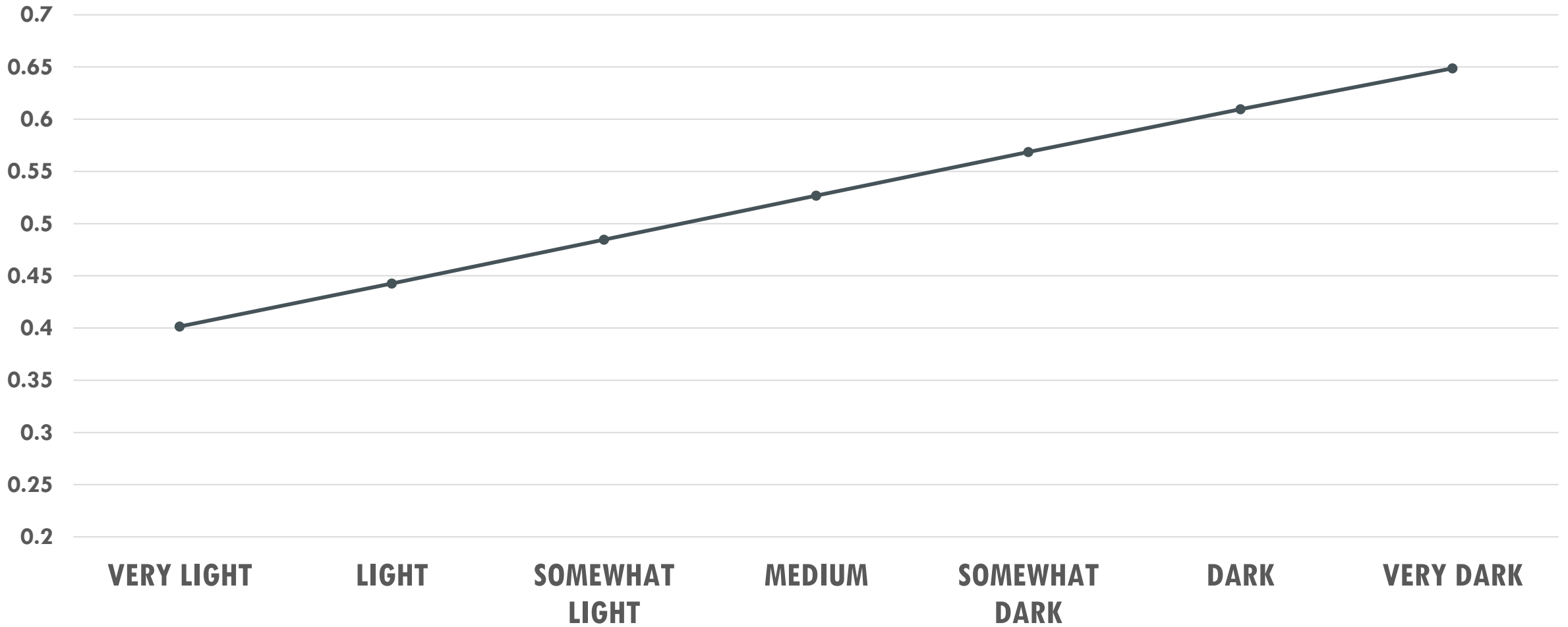
**LIGHT-DARK [NSAL]**

# SKIN TONE AND ARREST

## Arrest

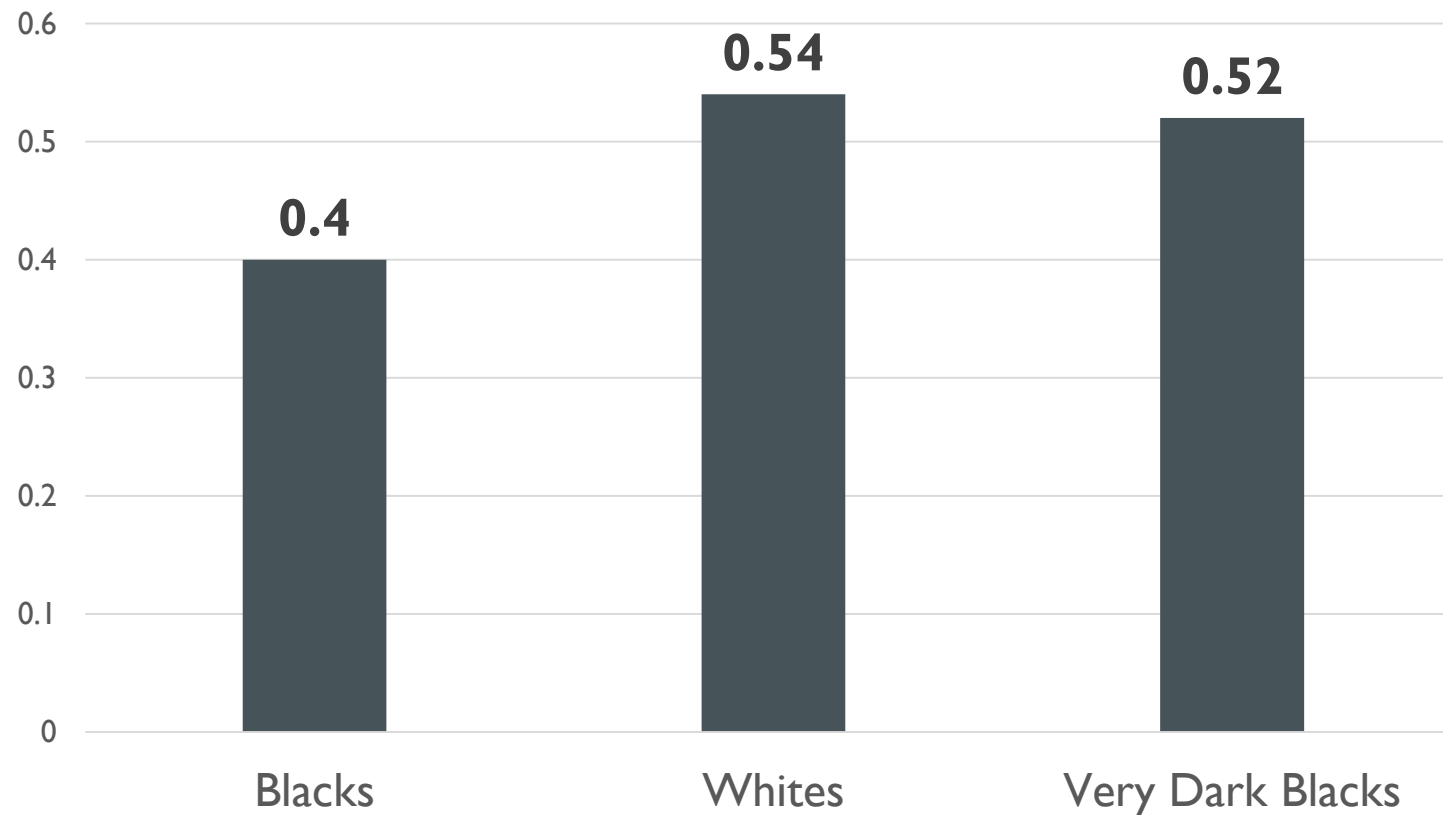


# Predicted Probability of Having Been Arrested among African American Men



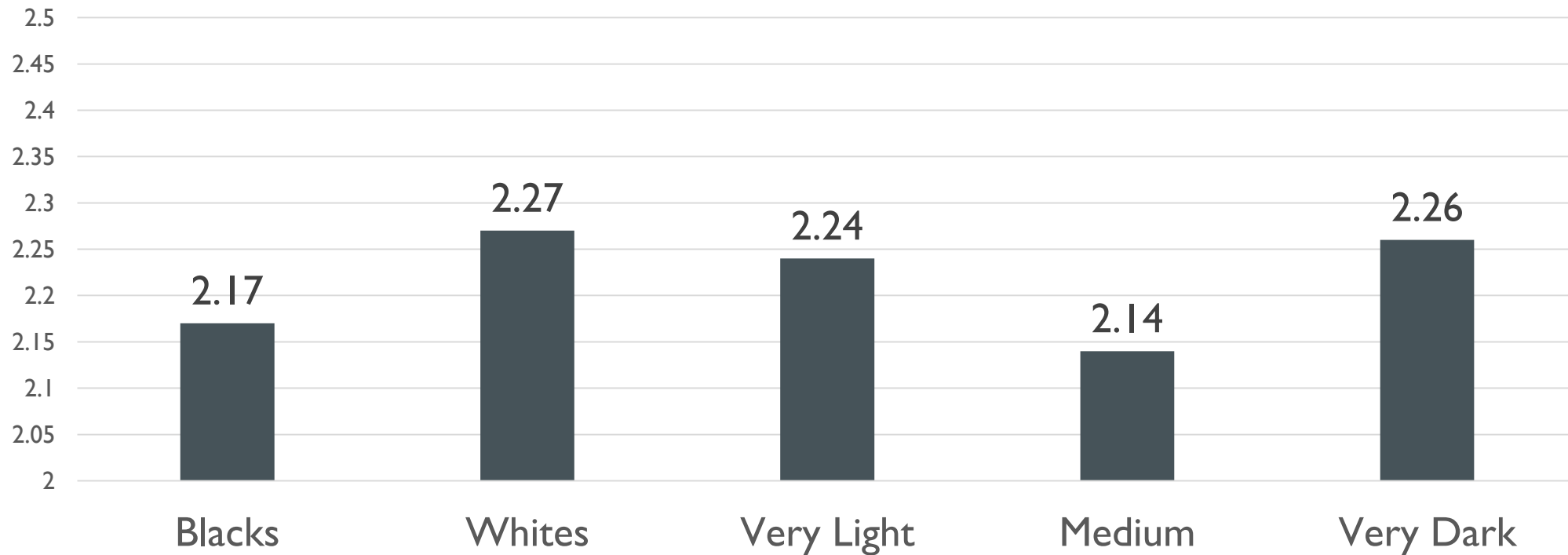
# THE BLACK-WHITE MENTAL HEALTH “PARADOX”?

## Depression



# SKIN TONE AND MENTAL HEALTH

## Self-Rated Mental Health



# LATIN AMERICANIZATION AND THE “BROWNING” OF AMERICA





# MEASURING SKIN TONE: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH



# THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF SKIN TONE

## Measures:

- Spectrophotometers (“objective”)
- Interviewer-rated skin tone with or without palettes (“objective/subjective”)
- Self-rated skin tone (“subjective”)



# MACHINE SCORES

Machines measure melanin reflectance typically from the upper and/or inner arm.

Examples:

CARDIA (Spectrophotometer – Photovolt 577)

Derma-Spectrometer

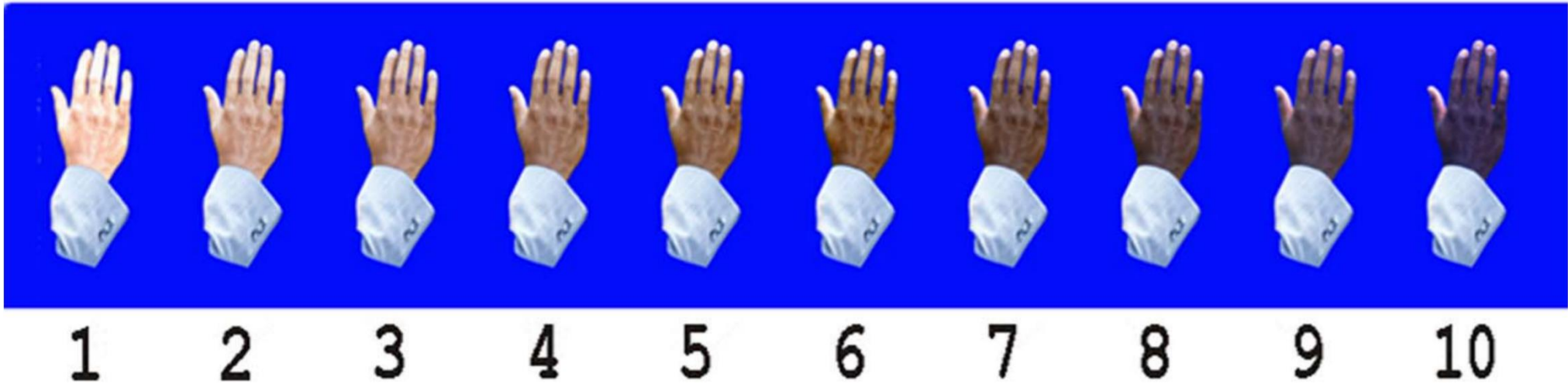


# PERLA SKIN COLOR PALETTE (TELLES)



# MASSEY-MARTIN SKIN COLOR SCALE

## Scale of Skin Color Darkness



## SKIN TONE [NATIONAL SURVEY OF AMERICAN LIFE]

Measures:

- (1) Self-reported skin tone (e.g. Monk 2015).
- (2) Race-matched interviewer ratings without a palette.

Socially significant categories of color (e.g. light, medium, dark, etc.).

Evidence shows interviewer ratings be more important than machine scores for predicting social stress and health (e.g. Gravlee 2005).

THANK YOU

Ellis Monk

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

Faculty Associate, Office of Population Research

[emonk@princeton.edu](mailto:emonk@princeton.edu)



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