SKIN COLOR AND HEALTH: RATIONALE AND MEASUREMENT

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SOCIAL INEQUALITY: A MATTER OF CATEGORIES?

9. What is Person 1’s race? Mark [ ] one or more boxes.

- White
- Black, African Am., or Negro
- American Indian or Alaska Native — Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.
- Asian Indian
- Japanese
- Chinese
- Korean
- Filipino
- Vietnamese
- Native Hawaiian
- Guamanian or Chamorro
- Samoan
- Other Asian — Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.
- Other Pacific Islander — Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.
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

The Philadelphia Negro
A Social Study

W.E.B. DuBois
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

10.2 months

15.4 months

BLACK-WHITE [NHIS]  LIGHT-DARK [NSAL]
SKIN TONE AND ARREST

Arrest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skin Tone</th>
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<td>Blacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
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<td>Very Light</td>
<td>0.24</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Dark</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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</table>
Predicted Probability of Having Been Arrested among African American Men
THE BLACK-WHITE MENTAL HEALTH “PARADOX”? 

Depression

- Blacks: 0.4
- Whites: 0.54
- Very Dark Blacks: 0.52
SKIN TONE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Self-Rated Mental Health

Blacks: 2.17
Whites: 2.27
Very Light: 2.24
Medium: 2.14
Very Dark: 2.26
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

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
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).