Does Race Still Matter? | July 2013

Moving Toward a New Global Conversation on Race and Colorism

• By Katherine W. Phillips, Ph.D., Paul Calello Professor of Leadership and Ethics, Columbia Business School, and Andrés T. Tapia, President, Diversity Best Practices

Principles for a New Conversation About Race and Colorism

NEW RACE LANGUAGE: Time to Retire the Term Minority?
In 2008, when President Obama was elected for his first term, talk of a post-racial America immediately took hold. If the United States of America—with its brutal history of slavery, Jim Crow, and the KKK—could elect a Black man as president that was surely an indication that racial bias was not playing a role in America anymore, right? While Obama’s election and re-election were surely signs of progress, as we look back at these arguments now in 2013 it is clear to most that we are still waiting for this promised post-racial America to arrive.

As the United States becomes even more diverse (Whites are expected to lose their majority status in the U.S. by 2043), so the argument goes, racial diversity will become so pervasive that perhaps race will not matter anymore. This logic was heard in the claim of one prominent sociologist who said to co-author Katherine Phillips, as she was deciding to make a move to New York City from Chicago, “going to New York will be fruitless for your research because diversity is not as important a topic in New York. They already have diversity.”

He was right with his foundational facts, but quite wrong in his logic. Yes, New York is a very diverse city with a population that is 33.5 percent White, 23 percent Black, 29 percent Latino, and nearly 13 percent Asian, according to 2010 U.S. Census data. But being a diverse place is not the same as being a place where race does not matter. How we wish this were true, but it isn’t.

In 2011, 685,724 New York residents were stopped and questioned by police; 41.6 percent were Black and Latino men between the ages of 14 and 24 who comprise only 4.7 percent of New York City’s total population. Only six percent of all stops resulted in an arrest. Contraband was found in only two percent of all stops, and just one percent led to recovery of an illegal weapon. The data also show that the police are significantly more likely to use force when they stop Blacks and Latinos than when they stop Whites. This means minority targets are more likely to be slammed against walls or spread-eagled while officers go through their belongings. These are not the stats of a post-racial reality.

The prominent sociologist’s idea that research around diversity in New York City would be fruitless is a clear misunderstanding about diversity realities. Diversity is not just about the numbers and representation. It’s about equitable treatment and outcomes.

In this paper, we provide crucial evidence that the Big Apple’s stop-and-frisk racial disparity is not an isolated pattern of very real racial bias. Rather, it’s a bellwether that we are still far from being a post-racial society. Wherever we look—educational attainment, health outcomes, financial stability, leadership representation—we find troubling statistics, some are as bad as during Martin Luther King’s time.

Not only does race still matter in America, the movement towards a global conversation on diversity warrants a clear statement that we would like to make: race still matters around the world. In this report, we will demonstrate how.

In today’s modern society, it’s not enough to point out that race still matters. Even though key markers show how pervasive the legacy of racism is, we can’t remain stuck in a Civil Rights Era discourse. It does make a difference that there is a Black president. It does make a difference that those who have darker skin benefit from more legal protections from discrimination than existed just a generation ago. It does make a difference that we are seeing a rising middle class of those who are of a darker hue. While these markers of progress are not the same as proof points that race does not matter any more, they do demonstrate that the conversation must change.

But we also can’t wrap ourselves around a post-racial discourse just yet. To move diversity and inclusion forward, these new times require the ability to engage in a conversation about race and colorism (a concept we will elaborate on in a moment) in a contemporary way that takes into account these paradoxical realities.

So let us begin with our take on race and colorism in the United States and around the world. We will not just leave readers with the challenges. At the end of our paper, we offer some principles for a new conversation on the topic.
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HOW RACE MATTERS IN AMERICA
What do we mean when we say race matters? We mean that race has an influence on individual outcomes. From the moment a person is born in America, his or her race matters. Race matters at birth, it matters at death. Race matters in the food we eat, and in our health. Race matters in employment, it matters in wealth. Race matters in education and in justice. Race matters in politics; it matters in housing. Race matters in America from the cradle to the grave.

Let’s look, in detail, at some of the ways that race still matters.

Race Still Matters In Employment and Unemployment
There is a persistent discrepancy between the unemployment rates for various racial groups in America. In March 2013, the unemployment rate was 6.7 percent for Whites, but for Blacks and Latinos this rate had risen to 13.3 percent and 9.2 percent, respectively. This is not a new phenomenon as Blacks and Latinos in America have consistently experienced greater unemployment rates than Whites and Asians.

Some have argued that this unemployment problem is only really an issue when dealing with higher earning positions, because Blacks and Latinos are less likely to have the required education and training for such jobs. This would suggest then that there should be less employment discrepancy among lower-wage positions. However, racial discrimination in hiring has been demonstrated by economists, psychologists, and sociologists throughout the labor market.

University of Chicago economics professor Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, an economics professor at Harvard University sent resumes in response to advertised job openings in the occupational areas of sales, administrative support, clerical services, and customer services in Boston and Chicago. The resumes represented applicants with common White- and Black-sounding names. The professors found that resumes with White-sounding names were 50 percent more likely to receive callbacks from employers (9.7 percent versus 6.5 percent). In a New York City Hiring Discrimination study

Fear of a Black President
The Atlantic September 2012

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conducted by Devah Pager, a Princeton University sociology professor, and her colleagues, the authors sent testers to apply for 340 real entry-level jobs throughout the city over a period of nine months in 2004. The testers were well-spoken, clean-cut young men between the ages of 22 and 26. Great strides were taken to make sure that the Black, Latino, and White testers were equivalent in their qualifications. Most were college-educated, and the researchers made sure the testers were matched in height (between 5 feet 10 inches and 6 feet), verbal skills, interactional styles (level of eye contact, demeanor, and verbosity), and physical attractiveness. Resumes were randomly varied across testers so that each resume was used by testers from each racial group. In addition, Pager and her colleagues advantage or buffer for hiring. White men with a criminal record fared no worse than Latino and Black men with no criminal background. Thus racial discrimination cannot be explained away with things like poor education and qualifications or incarceration rates among Blacks, as White applicants with known serious criminal convictions were more likely to be given a chance than Black men with the same positive characteristics (e.g., high school education, clean-cut appearance, verbal aptitude, etc.) and no criminal record. Race clearly matters. The persistence of discrimination in hiring can also be seen in the work by John Dovidio, a social psychologist at Yale University, and Samuel Gaertner, director of the social psychology graduate program at University of Delaware, who systematically varied whether the applicant had a criminal record or not.

Testers applied, in tandem, to the same low-wage jobs and the results of the study demonstrated first, that there was racial bias in hiring. The White testers received a callback or job offer 31 percent of the time. The rate was 25.2 percent for Latinos and 15.2 percent for Blacks. Second, employers significantly preferred Latino and White applicants. A Black applicant has to search twice as long as an equally qualified White applicant before receiving a callback or job offer from an employer,” according to the report. And third, being White really does confer an advantage or buffer for hiring. White men with a criminal record fared no worse than Latino and Black men with no criminal background. Thus racial discrimination cannot be explained away with things like poor education and qualifications or incarceration rates among Blacks, as White applicants with known serious criminal convictions were more likely to be given a chance than Black men with the same positive characteristics (e.g., high school education, clean-cut appearance, verbal aptitude, etc.) and no criminal record. Race clearly matters. The persistence of discrimination in hiring can also be seen in the work by John Dovidio, a social psychologist at Yale University, and Samuel Gaertner, director of the social psychology graduate program at University of Delaware, who repeated a series of experiments in 1989, 1999, and again in 2005. The results showed that discrimination against Black job candidates or favoritism towards White ones (especially when there was ambiguity around a candidate’s qualifications) persisted over time. When a candidate’s qualifications for a given job were moderate as opposed to strong, people rated the Black candidate significantly lower than the White candidate with equivalent qualifications. No such difference emerged when the candidates had unequivocally strong qualifications.

Whether talking about low-wage workers or scientists with Ph.Ds, race matters in how people are evaluated and how resources are distributed. Recently released data from the National Institutes of Health examining who received research grants between 2000 to 2006 found that (controlling for research records and affiliations) if Black scientists were given the same chances to win research awards as other racial groups then they would have received 1,071 research project grant awards instead of 585, and 337 R01s (the oldest and most widely used investigator-initiated research project grant) instead of 185.

So it should come as no surprise then that race still matters when it comes to representation in positions of leadership. Only 1.2 percent of CEOs of the Fortune 500 are Black, and Blacks hold only 6 percent of board positions. The representation of Asian and Latino Fortune 500 CEOs is no better or worse at 1.4 percent and 1.2 percent, respectively, and board membership has been reported at approximately 2.43 percent and 3 percent. Research by coauthor Katherine Phillips and her colleagues found that there is a White standard when it comes to leadership such that even when Blacks reach leadership levels they are given less credit for clear organizational success than their White counterparts.

Race Still Matters in Healthcare and Health Outcomes

Why does race matter in health? Because if you are a person of color in the United States it means that you are automatically a member of a high-risk population more susceptible, compared to Whites, of having or dying from diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, obesity, asthma, or HIV to mention only a partial list. Racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to be treated for pain, and find their pain is underestimated compared to their
## RACE BY THE NUMBERS

### BY 2043,
Whites will no longer be the MAJORITY in the United States.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Only 1.2 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are Black, 1.4 percent are Latino, and 1.2 percent are Asian. 2 3 4</th>
<th>Resumes with White-sounding names are 50% more likely than those with Black-sounding names to receive callbacks from employers.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Light-skinned Blacks have about an 8-percentage-point wage advantage over comparable medium- and dark-skinned workers.6

In 2009, the median net worth of White households was $113,149, $6,325 for Latinos, and $5,677 for Blacks. While people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds lost money between 2005 and 2009, Whites only lost 16 percent of their net worth, while Latinos lost 66 percent, and Blacks 53 percent.8

Nearly 40% of Black and Latino students attend schools where more than 90% of students are non-White.”9

A study of first-year medical students found that they exhibit unconscious bias in favor of White and/or upper-class patients.11

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White counterparts. When first seen in a psychiatric emergency room, Black and Latino teens are three times as likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia instead of affective disorder, the more common diagnosis for their White peers. Obesity is under-diagnosed in triple copy in Blacks with diabetes compared to Whites. And Blacks and Latinos are treated through amputation at a higher rate than Whites, a statistic suggesting interventions that are too little, too late.

Research also shows evidence of bias in healthcare treatment provision, either overt or unconscious. A recent study published by ScienceDaily.com found first-year medical students exhibiting unconscious bias in favor of White and/or upper-class patients. It’s no wonder then that one of the biggest complaints racial minorities state in their dissatisfaction with healthcare is the lack of respect on the part of healthcare providers.

And when it comes to access to affordable care, only now with the Affordable Care Act will a massive disparity begin to be addressed. Of the 46 million to 50 million Americans who are currently uninsured, more than half (55 percent) are people of color. While only 13 percent of Whites are uninsured, 32 percent of Latinos (14.4 million), 21 percent of Blacks (6.9 million), 19 percent of Asians (3.8 million), and 28 percent of Native Americans (700,000) do not have insurance.

**Race Still Matters in the Education of Our Youth**

Across the entire education spectrum, from preschool to high school, race still matters. According to the 2013 Equity and Excellence Commission’s report to the Secretary of the Department of Education, a student’s race and income level largely determine the quality of education received.

“While some young Americans—most of them White and affluent—are getting a truly world-class education, those who attend school in high-poverty neighborhoods are getting an education that more closely approximates school in developing nations,” states the report.

The disparities between White students and students of color and those from poor families threaten to widen as America’s student body becomes increasingly more diverse and fewer White students attend public schools. In 2009, nearly 40 percent of public school students were Black or Latino, representing a seven-point jump in just 10 years. The share of White students attending public schools declined between 1990 and 2010, dropping from 67 percent to 54 percent. And in 11 states—as dissimilar as Wyoming, California, Hawaii, and Mississippi—White students are a minority.

U.S. schools today are as segregated as they were during Martin Luther King’s time. In a 2013 speech at a National Newspaper Publishers Association conference, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, “Today, nearly 40 percent of Black and Hispanic students attend schools where more than 90 percent of students are non-White.”

Not only are Black and Latino students attending racially and ethnically isolated schools, a stunning reality after the long fight for integration, but for the most part, they attend ones that hold the distinction of being labeled as high-poverty schools (where more than 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches). Nearly 40 percent of Blacks and Latinos attend such schools, while only 6 percent of White students do so. These high-poverty schools bear the brunt of academic deficiencies—with fewer resources, the lowest performing teachers, the most run-down facilities—and illustrate a lot that just isn’t working in our public schools.

Therefore, students of color are deprived of the necessary resources to catch up with their White counterparts who reside in more affluent communities. The Equity and Excellence Commission report uses the example of Illinois, where in comparing per-pupil spending between high- and low-poverty school districts poorer districts receive about a third less than their wealthier counterparts. Similar gaps exist across the country between high-poverty and low-poverty schools even within the same district.

Such funding disparities create inequities down the line for nearly every educational measure. Take, for instance, the quality of teachers in a classroom, which directly correlates to academic achievement. Schools with the highest enrollment of Black and Latino students (high-poverty schools) simply do not have the same access to the highest performing teachers as schools with large numbers of White students. These schools have seven percent more inexperienced first- and second-year teachers than schools with greater numbers of White students.

Our nation’s funding disparities create other educational inequities, such as enrollment in gifted and talented programs. According to the 2011 National Center for Education Statistics Digest, in 2006 eight percent of White students and 13 percent of Asian students were in public school gifted programs compared to only 3.6 percent of Blacks and 4.2 percent of Latinos. For Black male students, the statistics are even more distressing. Black boys are 2.5 times less likely to be enrolled in gifted and talented programs, even if their prior achievement reflects the ability to succeed.

While students of color are under enrolled in gifted and talented
programs, they are over enrolled in special education programs. Federal data from 2007 shows that about 17 percent of public school students were Black, but represented more than 20 percent of the students classified as needing special education services. Likewise, Latino students represented just over 20 percent of the school population but almost 24 percent of students classified with special needs.

Major discrepancies show up in how students of color, particularly Black students, are treated in school. Black students are suspended and held back more often than other students. In 2006, about 15 percent of Black students were suspended compared to five percent of White students. In 2007, about 16 percent of Black students were retained while only eight percent of Whites were.

This treatment of Black students goes right to the heart of how much race still matters. In an investigation of schools in Wilmington, Del., the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights found that Black students received much harsher discipline, more frequently because of their race, than their White classmates. Similar findings by the U.S. Office of Civil Rights reported that across the country Black students are more than three-and-a-half times more likely to be suspended or expelled than White students.

It’s no wonder that the average freshman graduation rate (AVFG) or the percentage of students who graduate within four years is distressing for students of color. In 2008, the AVFG was about 91 percent for Asian students, 81 percent for White students, 64 percent for Latinos, and 62 percent for Blacks. And these figures represent an improvement from earlier years, but not enough progress to eradicate the legacy of racism embedded in our schoolhouses anytime soon.

No matter how we look at our public schools—school funding, teacher proficiency, treatment of students, course offerings, or graduation rates—students of color bear the brunt of our nation’s ongoing struggle with color, race, and ethnicity.

Race Still Matters for Building Wealth

The privilege of Whites in this domain is so striking that it raises the question of if and how this discrepancy can ever be erased. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2009, the median net worth of White households was $113,149, for Latinos it was only $6,325, and for Blacks the number was $5,677. Everyone lost money between 2005 and 2009, but Whites only lost 16 percent of their net worth, while Latinos lost 66 percent, and Blacks lost 53 percent.

Let’s make this practical by looking at one benefit that is increasingly important to the financial well-being of employees: the 401(k) savings plan. This benefit has become particularly valuable...
as entitlement programs, such as pensions, go away and Social Security turns into Social Insecurity. Even when members of different racial groups earn the same amount of money, investment practices vary dramatically. The 2010 Black Investor Study (conducted by Charles Schwab and Ariel Capital Management, the largest minority-owned investment firm in the United States) reveals a 19-percent gap: only 60 percent of Blacks in households earning more than $50,000 annually invest in stocks or mutual funds, compared to 79 percent of Whites in the same income bracket.

The differences don’t stop there. When co-author Andrés Tapia was the Chief Diversity Officer at Aon Hewitt, he was the catalyst for what ended up being a major study conducted by Aon Hewitt and Ariel on whether race made a difference in whether people saved, how much, and how in their 401(k) plans. The study looked at five behaviors around retirement savings of 3 million employees at 57 Fortune 500 companies and asked which of the following factors would be most influential in affecting the behaviors: income, race, gender, age, or tenure. While the common wisdom assumed the result would be income, the counterintuitive result was that race trumped income as the factor most influencing saving behaviors.

Every single company in the report saw discernable differences between Blacks’ and Whites’ savings behaviors across the board.

Here are the results from one of the companies analyzed: Compared to Whites, Blacks not only under-participated, but their contribution rates were less than half that of Whites. They also invested more conservatively, were three times more likely to take loans through their 401(k) plans, and were 30 percent less likely to use the Internet to manage their retirement money. Clearly, these actions undermine the ability of Blacks to optimize their financial futures.

The other common wisdom contradicted by the study was that the discrepancy between Whites and Blacks could not be attributed to income disparities. While the gap between Blacks and Whites narrowed somewhat when doing the comparison up the income ladder, they did not go away even when comparing individuals earning over $100,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Contribution Rate</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Percentage in Equities</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Usage</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans Outstanding</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hewitt Associates

In doing diversity work globally, one of the most surprising things that Chief Diversity Officers encounter, particularly those who are African American, is how much race seems to be dismissed as an issue in places such as Brazil, Puerto Rico, India, South Korea, etc. where they see obvious racial marginalization of those who are Black or darker skinned.

The reality we see is that the racial discourse of American diversity has not migrated as easily outside the U.S. borders as diversity has gone global. But this does not mean race is not a meaningful issue in these places. In the same way that contemporary American realities require a new conversation around race, global diversity realities require a relevant way to approach exclusion due to skin color.

And skin color, we suggest, is a more useful paradigm than race in engaging in the conversation. Why? Because race is such a constructed reality that it can quickly fall apart in light of new complexities introduced.

Let’s take Brazil, for example. According to the 2010 Brazilian census, the country’s population is nearly 48 percent White, 43 percent mixed race, seven-and-a-half percent Black, and one percent of Asian and Indigenous people. It’s that 43 percent mixed-race number that makes the conversation and the social dynamics around race so different. While the United States was colonized by families, which made racial segregation more likely, Brazil (like other South American countries) was colonized by soldiers, which led to a wildly mixed population as racial lines were crossed through miscegenation. Many Brazilians regard their nation as a ‘racial democracy’ where there is little overt racism. In fact, many Brazilians will bristle at the notion that racism may be at play in their society. Yet, Brazilian Portuguese
has 134 different terms to capture different skin color gradations. If skin color did not matter, why this obsession with a Crayola-like color scheme? Further, the gradations don’t just make for interesting conversation, they make an economic difference: “On average, White and Asian Brazilians earned twice as much as Black or mixed-race Brazilians…. Black Brazilians are much more likely to be poor and rarely reach the top levels of business or politics.”

This reality of the importance of skin color can be seen across Latin America where there is a word, *mestizaje*, which means racial and cultural mixture. It is a word that is intended to transcend the Black/White racial dichotomy and captures the idea that there is a vast spectrum of skin color from darker-skinned *morentos* (“little darkies”/moor) to lighter-skinned *gueritos* (“little blondies”). Just like in the United States, lighter skin is viewed more positively in these cultures. In an effort to lighten the skin and become whiter, people engage in three types of whitening behaviors:

Intergenerational whitening occurs when a Black person and a White person have a child. The child is considered whiter than the Black parent. In contrast to the United States, where the understood racial construct is that if one has one drop of Black blood they are considered Black, in Brazil, one drop of White blood makes one White.

Social whitening occurs when a person is born Black, but through an increase in class status is considered White or whiter in some situations.

Cultural whitening is when a person is born non-White, yet acculturates to the dominant culture and becomes White or whiter in some situations.

Billboards advertising the cream use slogans such as “Lighten Your Life.” In India, the sales of whitening creams outstrip those of Coca-Cola and tea. The Indian whitening cream market is expanding at a rate of nearly 18 percent a year. AC Nielsen, India’s largest research agency, predicted that the market would expand upwards of 25 percent in 2010 making the market worth an estimated $432M. It is reported that 50 percent of women in Taiwan whiten their skin and that four out of 10 women in Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, and South Korea use a skin-whitening cream, according to a survey by Synovate. More than 60 global companies compete for a share of Asia’s estimated $18 billion dollar skin-whitening market. This big business is only expected to get bigger.

Although more popular among women, men also use the cream in an effort to become more attractive. In one advertisement for Fair & Handsome, the male model points a strong finger saying, “Hey you! Stop being so dark.”
The further one gets away from being White, the less positive are the groups’ outcomes in that country. The striking reality is that not only does race still matter, but how close you are to Whiteness matters.

**Colorism in the United States**
Looking at this difficult issue of discrimination based on melanin through the prism of colorism rather than race not only can be helpful in addressing exclusion issues based on skin color, it can give us a new way to think about the racial discourse in the United States.

Whether in Corporate America with our norms of professionalism, or in politics, housing, the courtroom, or in the doctor’s office, there is a privilege associated with Whiteness that may be just as or more consequential as the disdain some have for darker skin or being Black. As long as people continue to lighten the things they feel positive toward and darken the things they feel negative toward all around the world it will be nearly impossible to make race not matter.

According to the 1995 report by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission titled “Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation’s Human Capital”: Though it is mostly covert, our society has developed an extremely sophisticated, and often denied, acceptability index based on gradations in skin color. It is not as simple a system as the Black/White/Colored classifications that were used in South Africa. It is not legally permissible, but it persists just beneath the surface and it can be and is used as a basis for decision making, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously. It is applied to African Americans, to American Indians, to Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, and to Hispanic Americans, groups that are described in a color shorthand of black, red, yellow, and brown, respectively.33

Whiteness is the standard in
With rapidly changing demographics in many places, minorities are now majorities. As a result, the term minority is simply not as meaningful or even accurate any more and will only become more and more obsolete. Other reasons to consider retiring this Diversity 1.0 term is that minority also has a semantic connotation of less than.

So if not minority, then what? Increasingly we have been seeing the alternative term people of color. The upside of using this term is that it has a more affirming connotation in that it is about an attribute people in this group have (color) versus what they don’t have (majority status).

The term people of color also serves as a helpful shorthand way to group Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans rather than having to spell out all groups every time they are mentioned. Non-White accomplishes the same shorthand, but again, in a less-than way that uses White as the standard.

But people of color is not a perfect term. There are Latinos who are White racially and look White physically, though culturally they may be very different than the White mainstream. Also, some individuals who would fall into this construction do not want to be defined by calling attention to color.

This is why we suggest the phrase traditionally underrepresented group as an additional term to use because this gets past the absoluteness of minority to the real issue that people in these groups are underrepresented in various roles in relation to their availability in the talent pool. This is, after all, what’s at the heart of much diversity and inclusion work. This term also allows for global application without the risk of minority or people of color not being applicable to the local social conditions. But every society has traditionally underrepresented groups.

There is one other sociolinguistic structure to consider. And this is to think more in terms of cultural identities rather than skin color or marginalized status identities. Terms such as African American, Afro Caribbean, African, Asian American, Vietnamese, Hispanic American, Dominican, etc., place people closer to their cultural identity and allows for the fact that there can be many different skin shades and even races within an ethnic group. For example, Afro Latinos.

This construct sets things up for us to consider referring to Whites as European Americans, a term that captures the duality of having European descendants while still acknowledging their American-ness. When European Americans first hear this approach there is often hesitation, even resistance. Part of this is based on the legitimate observation that there is great diversity among Whites: European American can mean Irish, British, German, Polish, etc. But the same can be said for any of the other terms that mainstream society uses more easily, such as African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, Native American. These terms also cast a wide categorization that encompasses a great deal of diversity.

But the great advantage of these more culture-centric terms is that they capture sociological realities. The term European American also includes Whites as a complex cultural group that can begin to engage the other cultural groups in a conversation of shared and different values, as well as shared and different interpretations of these values. As European Americans increasingly experience the phenomenon of being the minority in some places, their self awareness that they indeed have a worldview that needs to be engaged and that needs to engage other worldviews will become even more critical.

So, when should we continue to use the color terms of Black and White or the many shades in between? When the point being made is about race and colorism, such as the argument in this paper that race still matters in understanding social and economic inequities. Otherwise, the other terms shared here can serve us well when doing the work of exploring and describing the ways in which people are similar or different from each other in how they view the world.
corporate America—style of dress, hair, clothing, skin tone, all manners of appearance. People tend to be evaluated more positively the closer they are to Whiteness. The consequences of the obsession found around the world for the value of Whiteness cannot be underestimated. In almost every aspect of our lives, skin color and race influence outcomes. Case in point: in 2010, Dominican retired baseball player Sammy Sosa made headlines after using a skin-bleaching cream to achieve a noticeably lighter skin tone. The skin tone change raised questions about Sammy's health and whether he was ashamed of his original darker skin tone.

Other Black celebrities have also been accused of lightening their skin, based on a difference in skin tone across a variety of photographs. Singers Beyoncé and India Arie were both questioned when pictures on their album covers depicted their skin tone as lighter than normal. In these cases, the difference was likely attributed to photographic lighting and post production. However, the fact that these singers approved these altered representations reflects society’s preference for those who are lighter.

So as we come full circle with our understanding of how and why race matters we should return to the arena of politics and our current president, Barack Obama. President Obama is racially mixed—his mother was White and his father Black. To some, he may appear light-skinned, but to others not so much. In fact, the way people see President Obama is shaped by political views.

Eugene Caruso, a social psychologist at the University of Chicago, and his colleagues conducted three studies, polling people about their political views first and then showing them various photographs to judge. In the first experiment, participants saw an unknown political candidate who either shared or opposed their views. In the second two experiments, images of Barack Obama from the 2008 presidential campaign were shown to participants. In all three cases, people who agreed with the politician’s views were more likely to pick lighter-skinned images of the politician; people who disagreed were more likely to pick darker-skinned images. The researchers found that people basically darken those with whom they disagree, and lighten those with whom they agree.

Skin color, therefore, is not Black or White. The way we see others is filtered through our favoritism towards Whiteness and the gradations throughout make a difference in many people’s attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others.

These attitudes translate into systemic inequalities. The stigma of skin color can be seen among Blacks in America and helps explain some of the wage gap between Whites and Blacks—lighter skinned Blacks are treated more favorably. Seven academic surveys with either national or widely representative samples have measured skin tone along with other relevant variables. All of these surveys point to the same consistent conclusion—that skin color is linked with economic standing and material well-being.

Based on data from the National Survey of Black Americans and the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality, Arthur Goldsmith, of Washington and Lee University, and his colleagues, after controlling for family and neighborhood characteristics such as parent education, financial status, quality of schools in neighborhood, etc., found that there was an estimated interracial wage gap between White and dark-skinned Black workers of 11 percent and between White and medium-skinned Black employees of 11.2 percent. In contrast, Whites only earned 3.1 percent more than light-skinned Blacks, a statistically insignificant difference. Light-skinned Blacks had about an 8-percentage-point wage advantage over comparable medium- and dark-skinned workers. However, the authors were not able to show that this difference was significant. This data was collected between 1992 and 1994. There has been no comprehensive update of this study, but a more recent study published in 2009 showed that people are more willing to recommend and
hire a lighter-skinned as opposed to darker-skinned Black job applicant. This work and the work by people like Verna Keith, Cedric Herrng, Margaret Hunter, and Jennifer Hoschchild indicate that skin color matters in the economic outcomes of Blacks in the United States.

Similar support for the role of colorism can be found in data from the criminal justice system. One such study found that of the nearly 70,000 male felons incarcerated in Georgia from 1995 to 2002, those with dark skin received sentences that were significantly longer than that of Whites, but lighter-skinned Blacks received sentences that were statistically indistinguishable from Whites. Lighter-skinned Blacks received sentences that were on average 3-and-a-half months longer than Whites, medium-skinned Blacks received sentences about a year longer and darker-skinned Blacks received sentences that were a full year-and-a-half longer than that of Whites. Jennifer Eberhardt, from Stanford University’s psychology department, and her colleagues further demonstrated that Black defendants in capital cases with a White victim are twice as likely to receive the death penalty if they have dark skin and more Afrocentric facial features than if they do not. Skin color here is literally a matter of life and death.

As we can see, colorism—addressing marginalization due to skin color and gradations of color—can begin to offer a more helpful way of keeping the various issues separate enough to surface root causes for entrenched societal and corporate exclusion. For example, colorism can offer a helpful new way to explore issues that challenge the current diversity construct that puts African Americans in one category and Latinos in another. In this scenario, in which category does an Afro Latino belong? Race and ethnicity conflate and become hard to distinguish. Colorism, however, helps to surface the issue that tends to weigh more heavily on societal needs to label and rank people’s value hierarchically. Skin tone gradations become a most visible way to do so. By viewing issues through an understanding of colorism, we can see that exclusion is not as much based on whether one is Black or Latino, but rather on how dark or light one is.

A CLOSING STORY

If you need one more proof point that color still matters not just with adults, but also with today’s youngest generation that is growing up with unprecedented diversity, consider this story.

One evening in November of 2012, just weeks before co-author Katherine Phillips gave her presentation on how race matters to the Diversity Best Practices audience, she received a call from her four-year-old daughter’s teacher saying there was something she needed to speak with her about. The teacher proceeded to tell Phillips about how she had found her daughter, Amali, crying on the playground. When confronted, Amali told the teacher that one of the other kids had pushed her down and said she didn’t want to be her friend, ever. The little girl who pushed Amali explained that she couldn’t play with Amali because Amali’s skin was dark.

Little children are a microcosm of the larger world. We would like to believe that little kids cannot possibly hold the same kind of racist and bigoted attitudes against Black people that are held by some adults in America. You can hold on to that belief if you wish. The only thing that you need to accept to understand how something like this could happen to a Black child in 2012 is that most of us have an association engraved in our minds that White is good and Black is bad. Lighter colors are pure and fresh and darker colors are dirty and heavy. White people are rich and good and Black people is poor and bad. These sometimes unconscious associations are engrained into our ways of understanding the world from when we are very little children. The White child who pushed Amali down was acting on a belief that darker skin is not as good as lighter skin. Even darker skin children can buy into this belief.

Amali’s story illustrates that skin color still matters now and it will continue to matter when these four year olds become adults. As much as it’s a throwback to another era, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s address “A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations,” delivered at the St. Louis Freedom Rally in 1957, was prophetic then, and is prophetic today:

“And so we’ve come a long, long way since 1896. And my friends I’ve been talking now for about fifteen or twenty minutes and I wish I could stop here. It would be beautiful to stop here. But I’ve tried to tell you about how far we’ve come, and it would be fine if every speaker in America could stop right there. But if we stopped here we would be the victims of a dangerous optimism. If we stopped we would be the victims of an illusion wrapped in superficiality. If we stopped here we would be the victims of an optimism, which makes for deadening complacency and stagnant passivity. In order to tell the truth we must move on. See, not only have we come a long, long way, but truth impels us to tell the truth we must move on. Which leaves us with a final moment-of-truth question: today, how ready are we to admit that race still matters?”
Principles for a New Conversation About RACE and COLORISM

If you want to raise the issue in your organization of whether race still matters and avoid getting caught in a déjà vu throw back to an outmoded debate, consider the following principles for a fresh, contemporary, and constructive conversation:

1. **Determine whether you actually want to have a new conversation around race and colorism.** This is indeed a choice. It’s a lot easier in some ways to allow the denial that race matters. But for diversity practitioners intent on surfacing exclusion, we believe we have been silent about this for too long. But you need to seriously consider how ready is your workplace to have a real conversation about colorism? How ready are people to even consider admitting that they notice color? A good place to start is with the groups of color themselves. (See Mini Learning Session on page 15.)

2. **Escape the trap of an either-or conversation; shift it to a both-and.** The debate should not be are we post racial or not or whether we have made progress in race relations or not. Rather the discussion needs to acknowledge that both progress has been made and we still have a long way to go. This approach will help diffuse a fruitless “Tastes great!” “Less filling!” polarized debate. It also increases the chances of a more honest and open dialogue that explores mutual interests and needs.

3. **Get all participants grounded in the new concepts and language around race and colorism presented in this paper before you engage in problem solving.** To avoid falling back into the old conversation, it’s key that participants have new paradigms and vocabulary. Until they do, their minds, mouths, and ears can only think, say, and hear according to the well-worn grooves of yesteryear.

4. **Make it a global issue.** Coming to the realization that color matters all over the world is the first step in the process. Acknowledging this will help participants see the universality of colorism, which helps reduce defensiveness. It also helps move global diversity work forward. People need to be aware of the influence of color on their own experiences and evaluations. Ask people what they notice about race and color in other countries and their own.

5. **Allow biography to trump sociology.** Be yourself! Bring your full self to work! Be authentic! These refrains are often repeated in our workplaces in an effort to create a more inclusive environment. But how can we make this actionable in the race and colorism conversation? Rather than focusing on the sociology of racial power dynamics, share your biographies. This is a helpful way to avoid being color blind, or playing the race card. Whether you are African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, Native American, or European American, how has the family and community you were born into and the life experiences you have had shaped how you view and understand the world?

Recent research has shown that racial differences can be a barrier to developing close relationships in the workplace. These five steps can go a long way to help overcome race and color barriers in your organization as employees become more authentic with each other. This in turn creates the necessary environment for more structural changes.
MINI LEARNING SESSION:
One Thing You Can Do Right Now
to Engage in a New Conversation
About Race and Colorism

- Ask the different racial and ethnic employee resource groups in your organization if race and colorism are issues they would like to explore either within their own ERG or other ERGs.

- Share this paper as a pre-read to the discussion. We deliberately used data to make a compelling argument that race and colorism still are quite prevalent in today’s society.

During the discussion, use any or all of the following visual aids:

- Images of billboards advertising skin whitening creams

- Pictures of Sammy Sosa with lighter and darker skin tones (http://rollingout.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Sammy-Sosa-Skin-Lightening.jpg)

- The nine-minute trailer for the documentary “Dark Girls” (http://officialdarkgirlsmovie.com/)


Ask the following questions:

- What is your reaction to what you saw or heard?

- How do you experience or witness colorism in society? In your community? At work?

- How do you want to address the issue of colorism within your ERG?

- How do you want to address the issue of colorism within your organization?
ENDNOTES


8 Ibid.


Diversity Best Practices, a division of Working Mother Media, is the preeminent membership organization for diversity thought leaders to share best practices and develop innovative solutions for culture change. Through research, benchmarking, publications and events, Diversity Best Practices provides members with valuable resources, information, and strategies on how to create, implement, grow, and measure first-in-class diversity programs.

Diversity Best Practices’ services help companies clarify opportunities and implications of their current diversity strategy, identify and enhance critical diversity leadership competencies, create and implement a system-wide focus on diversity and inclusion, and gain the executive-level support needed to ensure the company is successful.

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