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# Phenotype Discrimination And Its Effect On Mental Health: The Way We Look Matters

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PHENOTYPE DISCRIMINATION AND ITS EFFECT ON MENTAL HEALTH:  
THE WAY WE LOOK MATTERS

by

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A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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Department of Rehabilitation  
in the Graduate School  
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Approved by:

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper explores several texts and articles that extensively report on various types of phenotype discrimination experienced by persons within the United States and in some instances, throughout the Caribbean region. This paper will reveal that phenotype discrimination can have deleterious effects on the mental health of men and women, regardless of social class, geographic location, or economic standing. Moreover, this paper will disclose how disruptive phenotype discrimination is, and how it limits access to education, employment, and housing – many of the areas of life that human beings take for granted. Specifically, however, the author will examine the ways phenotype discrimination can diminish mental health, and will discuss challenges that phenotype discrimination may pose to rehabilitation counselors and discuss potential strategies to reduce the harmful effects of such discrimination in our work with clients.

#### **Demographics**

Phenotype discrimination has been deemed a global issue and while the phrase has only been around for the past few decades, the phenomenon itself has been around for hundreds of years. Phenotype discrimination refers to discrimination experienced based on an overt characteristic such as skin color, gender or having an overt disability (Wilson, 2005). America's population of over 320 million people comprise of several ethnic groups of which Whites make up 77.1%, Blacks account for 13.3% and Hispanics, 17.6% (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The remaining numbers are unevenly distributed between other minority groups. Phenotype discrimination within America has increased in recent years, according to an Associated Press poll conducted in 2012 (AP, 2012). Since 2012, discrimination against minorities has increased, with 51% of Americans expressing explicit anti-black attitudes, compared to 48% in a similar

2008 survey. Anti-Hispanic sentiments by non-Hispanic Whites also rose from 52% a year earlier to 57% in 2012 (Ponds, 2013). However, phenotype discrimination is not only limited to America. The phenomenon has been globally documented, reaching as far as India, and the Caribbean. For the purposes of this paper, the author will be focusing on the increase in phenotype discrimination, with specific reference to skin color, gender and hair texture, which should give rise to further investigation as to the repercussions of these types of discriminations on the lives of people in America and the Caribbean diaspora.

### **Phenotype Discrimination and the Education System in America**

There is growing evidence that phenotype discrimination has impacted the lives of people across a wide spectrum in areas such as education (Coker et al, 2009), housing (Cartee & Ruegger, 1999), employment (Eisenberg, 2010), and fair judicial treatment in America (Cormier, 2012). While there has been some redress with equality of education in the United States, the Brown vs. Board of Education trials having removed desegregation from schools, studies have shown that discrimination has not totally been eliminated in the education system. Cook (2015) reported that phenotype discrimination against blacks were visible in formal education. Data which confirmed inequalities in the treatment of children because of skin color, showed that during 2011 – 2012 over 140,000 kindergarten students repeated the grade, most of whom were blacks (Cook, 2015). In a study that targeted a cross section of over 5000 students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 15 % reported experiencing discrimination related to their skin color, with 80% of the students stating that such discrimination had occurred in the school setting. Of the 80% of students who reported phenotype discrimination, a greater number were blacks and other ethnic groups as opposed to Whites (Coker et. al, 2009). Hence, inequality in the treatment of students related to skin color begins in formal education of blacks and in higher grades at primary schools.

Not only has the primary level of education been influenced by discrimination but there have also been studies that quantify data as to the levels of discrimination on blacks or minority students in higher education as well. Resmovits (2014), in an article entitled “American Schools Are STILL Racists, Government Report Finds”, states that the suspension of black students was triple that of their white peers. According to accumulative data from the U. S. Department of Education Civil Rights recorded by Cook (2015) approximately 34% of students who repeated ninth grade were black students as compared to 4% white students. The writer further reported that compared to their white peers, blacks were three times more likely to repeat grades. The evidence seems to suggest that phenotype or skin color discrimination is not confined to the earlier levels in education, but permeates primary education. Additionally, the author documents that 7% of black students attend schools where 20% of the teachers do not possess the qualifications or the license that is generally required by teachers. The data shows disparity between educational acquisitions between blacks and other minorities and the white race and gives credence to the notion that skin color influences the acquisition of education in many states in America.

### **Phenotype Discrimination and Housing**

Furthermore, residential segregation by color remains an obvious feature of many modern and rural American cities. Although segregation has appeared to have decreased between 1980 and 2000 (Logan, Stults & Farley, 2004), blacks predominantly tend to experience discrimination in the patterns of home placements. The levels of housing discrimination experienced by black renters and homeowners continues to be an ongoing issue (Charles, 2003). For example, discrimination claims collected from a sample filed by Black renters with the Civil Rights Commission of Ohio specify instances where the landlords failed to adequately maintain

housing units, harassed or threatened the tenants and did not enforce the residential association rules (Roscigno, Karafin & Tester, 2007). Reference has also been made to numerous studies (Yinger, 1986; Munnell et al, 1996; Ross & Yinger, 1999; Ross & Yinger, 2002) using experimental audit data, that revealed blacks (and to a lesser extent other minority groups) were denied access to housing because of discrimination. One such study disclosed that blacks experienced “consistent adverse treatment in roughly one in five housing searches” (Pager & Shepherd, 2008, p. 188). The overwhelming evidence reveals disparity in the treatment of black people and other minority groups in accessing housing as opposed to whites, confirms the presence of phenotype discrimination, and alludes to ingrained perceptions that blacks are not worthy of “quality” residence.

### **Phenotype Discrimination and Employment in America**

Additionally, discrimination against blacks in accessing employment has been linked to phenotype discrimination. Employment statistics have revealed some of the most blatant levels of discrimination and while improvement has been noted in the employment of racial minorities, blacks (predominantly) continue to experience discrimination in almost every area of employment. Findings from the analysis of the 2016 Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that African Americans are twice as likely to be unemployed as whites (9.6% vs 4.6%). The jobless rates of African American men were 9.5% whereas the jobless rate for White men was 4.3%. African American women had jobless rates of 8.2%, while the jobless rates for White women were 4.1% respectively (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). The earnings of minority groups continue to remain way below the earnings of Whites, with data showing that the median weekly earnings of full time wage and salaried workers were \$604 for Hispanics and \$641 for Blacks, as compared to \$835 for Whites and \$993 for Asians (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Pager &



Shepherd (2008) affirm that there has been shift in the focus of discriminatory practices in the employment of Blacks from the lack of employment opportunities to wrongful termination of jobs. Tomaskovic-Devey et al. (2005) as cited by Pager & Shepherd (2008) refer to statistical studies which show black men spend far more time searching for employment as compared with white men. In an economic article entitled “Statistics That Hurt: Racial Discrimination still affects Minority”, (based off the research of Fryer, Pager and Spenkuch 2014), the writers documented observations of some 5,200 black and white workers who were seeking jobs. The findings showed a wage gap of approximately 30 – 35% between blacks and whites, with blacks receiving wages that were significantly lower than white employees. Thus, discriminatory practices pertaining to hiring for employment seems to confirm the presence of phenotype discrimination in America as researchers continue to examine its impact the lives of persons of color (particularly blacks).

### **Phenotype Discrimination in the Judicial System**

Consideration must also be given to phenotype discrimination within the American judicial system. The continued debate and criminal justice outcomes involving blacks in most court cases gives credence to this claim. According to Burch (2015) “the effects of skin color appear to operate in the realm of criminal justice” (p. 398). He further refers to studies that suggest “many aspects of phenotypes have been shown to shape criminal justice outcomes for blacks” (p. 398). Affirmation of this claim seems evident in the fact that while Blacks and Hispanics make up 13% and 16% of the American population respectively, they represent 40% and 19% of the U.S. incarcerated population. According to the U.S Census, Blacks are incarcerated five times more than whites and Hispanics are twice more likely to be incarcerated than whites (Sakala, 2014). In light of such disparities across racial lines, there have been

hundreds of studies dedicated to outlining the ways in which blatant discrimination has caused mass incarceration of persons of color.

### **Background of the Problem**

The notion of phenotypical discrimination has existed since time immemorial and researchers continue to expound on its impact on the lives of individuals. According to Maddox (2004), race has been touted as the most popular phenotype of discrimination, and many studies (Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Hunter, 2007; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Monk 2015) have been conducted over the course of the last 80 years relating to phenotype discrimination in America. However, as times have changed, Robinson (2011) indicates that even a phenotype such as hair, can be used as a tool of discrimination, and seen as a type of race unto itself. As recently as 2015, a poll conducted by the New York Times and CBS found that almost 6 in 10 Americans, including heavy majorities of whites and blacks believe that issues relating to race are bad, and 4 in 10 believe the situation is getting worse. The very nature of the existence of phenotype discrimination sets the platform for a greater analysis of why people of color are treated differently to white people, and guides the conversation to what effect does such pervasive types of discrimination eventually have on the mental health of persons who experience discrimination.

### **Phenotype Discrimination and Skin Color**

Discrimination of individuals based on skin color within the black community cannot be trivialized and a full understanding of such phenomena requires a sound knowledge of the underlying historical context. Lighter skinned blacks were usually the offspring of exploited enslaved women, who were raped by their white overseers or plantation masters. Slaves of lighter skin tones could work in the plantation house as housekeepers, or personal servants to

their masters unlike their darker skinned counterparts (Kellogg, 2003). Since biracial slaves tended to have a different hair texture than the coarse natural hair of their fellow slaves, feelings of envy were created among the darker skinned slaves who were forced to work the fields. Lighter skinned blacks who could pass for being white were given more respect, opportunities, and access to better living conditions, which inevitably led to tension within the Black communities (Hughes and Hertel, 1990). Such behaviors reinforced the beliefs that persons who were light-skinned were valued more and had greater privileges than persons whose skin color were dark.

### **Phenotype Discrimination and Gender in America**

Phenotype discrimination, however, has not been restricted to skin color but encompasses gender as well. Gender discrimination has been described as a pervasive tool of oppression that has had far reaching effects on mental health, especially on the gender that is viewed as the minority, or weaker person (Klonoff, Landrine & Campbell, 2000). Twinned with the phenotype of skin color, gender discrimination against minorities remains at an all-time high. Discussions on types of discrimination experienced at work by 219 randomly sampled women has ranged from sexual harassment in the workplace (26% of the group) to the inability to access promotion (10% of the group) as well as on the disparity in income earned according to the gender of the employee (51% of the group) (Bobbit-Zeher, 2011). Patten (2016) contends that the gender wage gap remains distant for members of the female sex as well as members of certain ethnicities. Wolfe (2016) further contributes to the idea of gender discrimination by stating, “Discrimination against women starts at birth. Gender lines are drawn early and exclusions for women continue throughout adulthood”. The author further contends that women were encouraged from early childhood, to pursue educational fields that are stereotypically female

oriented, to go into professions that predominantly focus on care-taking, for example, teaching, nursing, care giving and office administration (Wolfe, 2016). Although Salemi (2017) suggests that over the past decade there has been a distinct movement away from the mindset which promotes gender inequality, the challenge of completely eradicating gender discrimination remains. Generally, the issue of phenotype discrimination directly related to gender inequality has been researched and has implications further investigation of whether gender discrimination will decline as new societal trends emerge.

While phenotype discrimination related to gender has been predominantly experienced by women worldwide, it is not confined to women only, as men experience discrimination as well. One notable discriminatory hiring practices against men was evident in the unwillingness of the Ventura Corporation, a wholesale retailer of beauty products, to hire men as sales reps (U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2014). As a result, the Ventura Corporation was required to settle a lawsuit for sex discrimination against men. Moreover, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was sued by a male employee in 2012, who alleged that the physical fitness test to become an agent was biased against men (Wolfe, 2016). There are many articles in the United States that attest to instances of gender discrimination against women (Perry & Gundersen, 2012; Fisher & Naidoo, 2016; Wolfe, 2016). For instance, although women's participation in the workforce showed an increase during the 1970s to 1980s reaching 60% in 2000, there was a drastic decrease to 46.7% in 2010 (Doll, 2011). In a study conducted by McLaughlin, Uggen & Blackstone (2012) it was noted that in the America context, female supervisors were 138% more likely to be subjected to harassment and reporting rates were 73% greater than non-supervisors. Furthermore, the Bureau Labor of Statistics referred to a 2012 study which revealed that female CEOs and directors earned 42% less than their male

counterparts while the Government Accountability Office (GAO) stated that in 2010 women made up 59% of the low-wage workforce. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of literature exploring the discriminatory experiences men face in the workplace based on their gender, which is perhaps indicative of a bias among researchers. Once again, the research reveals that phenotype discrimination affects both men and women, indicative that gender bias has no boundaries, although men may experience this bias on a smaller scale.

### **Phenotype Discrimination in the Caribbean**

However, such treatment has not been confined to the shores of America. In similar fashion, across the Caribbean region, skin color distinctions and its subsequent effects continue to be a source of discrimination for people of varying shades and hues. It is important to note here that in many Caribbean countries such as St. Vincent, Barbados, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic, just to name a few, the proportion of the population that is of African descent is estimated to be at 85 to 95% (Darity, Dietrich & Hamilton, 2005). The subsequent discrimination of persons with darker hues has led to a phenomenon known as colorism, which continues to be an ongoing concern across all islands (Alleyne, 2005). Even hair type (straight, curly, or naturally coarse) has had an influence on the perceptions and definitions of beauty and access to social status (Robles, 2007; Alleyne, 2005). While the Caribbean has been dubbed a “cultural melting pot” because of different races, there are still several dominant ethnicities found in larger countries such as Guyana and Trinidad since these countries consist of African-descended Blacks, Indians, and Portuguese-descended races. Jamaican authors have written several articles about the dangers and effects of discrimination on persons who are denied opportunities for upward mobility because of their status (TriniTrent, 2015). Another notable example can be attributed to Miller (1994), a Jamaican professor, who states that in societies

where there are distinct place structures “blacks are among the subordinate groups in those societies” (p. 130). Feelings of inferiority related to the skin color has also translated into a strong movement towards skin lightening practices by young blacks within the Caribbean. This has been attributed not only to bullying and depression among young people but also the perception that beauty is not associated with “black” but “white”. Edmond (2014) supports this idea by drawing reference to feelings of complexion dissatisfaction by persons of darker skin tone. Such feelings have led to an astronomical rise in the use of harmful bleaching products across the Caribbean, especially in Jamaica, where lighter skin color can be linked to socio-economic advantages. Therefore, the data seems to confirm the idea that phenotype discrimination has affected opportunities for advancement, status and perception of beauty by black people within the Caribbean.

### **Phenotype Discrimination and Gender in the Caribbean**

In similar fashion, phenotype discrimination, with specific reference to gender discrimination, is also visible in the Caribbean region. Despite the clarion call by many Women’s Rights organization for a cessation of such practices, the reality is that there is a glass ceiling which restricts the upper movement of women where it relates to promotion and accomplishments for all professions in general (Paulin, 2003). Most heads of government within the Caribbean are males, and except for five female Prime Ministers who gained power within the last three decades, women have been relegated to secondary roles in schools, churches, and government institutions. Even the women who are more qualified than the men have had to settle for lower paying positions since the overriding beliefs that pervade many countries is that women lack leadership qualities or are unable to accomplish as much their male counterparts

(Theodore, 2013). Clearly, gender inequality must be considered in looking at the way disparities are evident in leadership roles, wages received and opportunities for advancement.

According to various authors, gender discrimination impacts the mental health of women where jobs are concerned (Stansfeld, Head & Marmot, 1998); domestic violence (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Roberts et al. 1998); and income disparities (Patel et al., 1999). This research paper seeks to examine the relationship between phenotype discrimination and its effects on mental health of persons not only in the USA, but also within the Caribbean, focusing mainly on four countries: Jamaica, Hispaniola, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Barbados). Caribbean demographics will be examined to establish the pervasive nature of phenotype discrimination and its impact on the mental health of persons globally.

### **Significance of the Issue**

Phenotype discrimination is not restricted by geographical barriers since the effects of slavery has been experienced globally. Continuing research must be conducted to examine the extent to which phenotypical discrimination has affected persons psychologically within the Caribbean region and the USA, and what measures have been taken to deal with this issue. Rehabilitation therapists and professionals encounter people of various ethnicities, nationalities and genders suffering from mental health disabilities quite frequently. Clearly, therapists and counselors must be equipped with the knowledge of how best to treat and help these clients in their rehabilitation process, especially when mental health issues can be attributed to phenotype discrimination. In this context, it would benefit rehabilitation counselors and therapists to have background information to assess whether phenotype discrimination influences their perception of clients. Furthermore, it may enable counselors and therapists to gain deeper insight into the effects of this discrimination on promoting good mental health or worsening negative mental

behaviors by reinforcing stereotypical responses. Miller, Rote & Keith (2013) contend that phenotype discrimination negatively affects the mental health of African Americans; a tenet not confined to only African Americans, but other minority races, and persons from Non-American cultures (Gee, Spencer, Chen, Yip & Takeuchi, 2007). Efforts must be made to target organizations such as the American Psychological Association and the National Council for Rehabilitation Education. The effects of “racial microaggressions” behaviors experienced by persons of certain genders, skin tones and hair types must be discussed to help change the prevailing mindset of persons who trivialize such behaviors. Only then will therapists be able to achieve better outcomes, and reduce the rate of treatment drop outs (Sue et al. 2007). Since Caribbean countries are influenced by American culture and literature (McPherson, 2013), hopefully the solutions will filter to the Caribbean region. Undoubtedly inter-racial marriages will continue to prevail (Batson, Qian & Lichter, 2006); so too will the dominance of one race as opposed to another, dependent on the country of origin. Phenotype discrimination will therefore continue to exist, but strategies must be developed to enable races (Black or White, for the purposes of this paper) to co-exist so that one race is not regarded as superior while the self-esteem of the perceived inferior race continues its downward trend, resulting in serious mental health problems.

Further research on phenotype discrimination will contribute to the prevention of incorrect diagnosis by rehabilitation counselors because of limited knowledge of and inadequate training for treating persons who suffer mental health disorders because of discrimination. Not only so, but also therapists and counselors may gain further insight on the insidious nature of phenotype discrimination since it has almost been accepted as a part of the culture of many



countries. This in turn may lead to further research with the aim of linking many psychological ailments to phenotypical discrimination.

### **Purpose and Objectives of the Paper**

The paper seeks to examine three main types of phenotype discrimination to determine their effects on mental health, and to add to strategies that have been discussed in current literature.

The procedures will involve a review of the existing literature that has been published by persons within the mental health field, as well as information collected from first-hand accounts in some of the Caribbean countries where there is a paucity of literature on the subject. The author will specifically examine phenotype discrimination experienced predominantly by African American and Afro-Caribbean people. Moreover, using the relevant literature the author will discuss the correlation to the negative effects that phenotype discrimination will have on the mental health of 'blacks'. The author will therefore seek to address the following questions:

- What strategies can be used to reduce the rise of discrimination against these phenotypes?
- What can be done by rehabilitation counselors to aid their clients who suffer from any of the three main types of discrimination?
- What treatment options are best suited for multicultural populations like that of persons in the Caribbean?

The author aims to resolve these questions by examining the relevant research and the services that are necessary to ensure some aspect of rehabilitation for clients who are psychologically impacted by discrimination. Another objective is to equip rehabilitation counselors with the additional knowledge and skills to serve clients whose disabilities are in some way linked to the discrimination that they have experienced by others. It is envisioned that such knowledge will translate into the creation of strategies that will aid clients in developing the necessary coping

skills to diffuse stress or assisting them in finding resources to handle micro-aggressive stressors in their everyday lives. Such information can only be beneficial to the process of rehabilitation, and the institution of rehabilitation counseling as an entity. The paper will further examine how this area of research on phenotypical discrimination can better prejudicial behaviors and change opinions that can have a harmful effect on persons who have experienced these types of discrimination. Finally, the opportunity exists for this paper to be used by counselors who are interested in a multicultural perspective of dealing with minority clients and other rehabilitation counselors who want to gain further knowledge on phenotypic discrimination altogether.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Mental Health** – According to the World Health Organization, mental health can be defined as the state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her society.

**Prejudice** – has been defined as a preconceived notion or opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

**Phenotype** – Merriam-Webster defines it as “the physical properties (e.g. hair type, skin color, gender, overt disabilities, etc.) of an organism (individual) resulting from the interaction of its genotype with the environment.” Simply put, **phenotype** can be described as a set of observable characteristics of a person, by which people can be defined and judged as a group (Wilson, Hinojosa & Gines, 2010).

**Phenotype Discrimination-** Phenotype discrimination transpires when people make judgments based on how you look physically or visibly. While judgments can be negative or positive, phenotype discrimination usually involves negative judgments about how you

look on the outside (e.g. skin color, gender, having an overt disability) (Wilson, Hinojosa & Gines, 2010).

**Racial Discrimination** - has been described as the differential treatment of members of minority groups through both institutional arrangements and interpersonal social interactions (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

**Racism** – Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “racism” as the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.

**Stigmatization** – Stigmatization is a degrading and debasing attitude of the society that discredits a person or a group because of an attribute (such as an illness, deformity, color, nationality, etc.). It causes an individual to be mentally classified by others in an undesirable rejected stereotype rather than in an accepted, normal one.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies dating back as far as the early 1960s gave some insight into mental health issues associated with phenotype discrimination. Drake and Clayton (1962) contend “skin color distinctions within the community were as prevalent as they were outside of it” (p. 495). As recently as 2015, books and articles (Mroczkowski & Sanchez, 2015; Bernard, Lige, Willis, Sosoo & Neblett, 2017) further reinforced that phenotype discrimination results in stereotyping, prejudice, and specific discriminatory practices that can negatively affect mental health. Research also indicates that in America, in a study done on the minority ethnicities and the racial discrimination they receive, across a multitude of spectrums, 58% of African Americans experience the most racial discrimination, followed by 39% of Asian Americans and 35% of Hispanic Americans (Chou, Asnaani & Hoffman, 2012). Historical research suggested that phenotype discrimination has been used predominantly as a means of oppression for persons from minority backgrounds. Being darker complexioned lowered a black man’s odds of being employed by 52% after controlling for age, schooling and criminal record. (Johnson et al, 1995). However, phenotype discrimination transcends geographical boundaries since in the Caribbean region, in islands such as Dominican Republic, Trinidad, and Jamaica where the population is clearly defined along racial lines, there is evidence of some form of racism linked to skin color, hair texture or gender. In a comparative study conducted by Williams et al (2007) the rates of African American males who experienced mental health issues were 30.5% as compared to Caribbean black males (27.7%) who suffered from some form of mental health issues. Additionally, Paradies (2006) sought to establish a relationship between racism and health by examining 138 studies, 91% of which focused on adults. The findings revealed that there was

association between racism and negative health outcomes such as psychological distress, depression and stress anxiety. Hence, phenotype discrimination is more corrosive than it appears since it undermines the self-worth of the black race and contributes to mental health issues ranging from stress to depression and other debilitating health issues.

Phenotype discrimination, specifically racial discrimination implies that a person is defined by the color of his or her skin and subtly suggests that the darker the skin tone the lower that person is perceived. Approximately 40% of blacks say that their race or ethnicity has made it harder for them to succeed in life (Patten, 2016). A test was conducted which examined six dependent variables; lifetime mood disorders; lifetime anxiety disorders; any lifetime disorder; number of lifetime disorders and depressive symptoms as measured by the Center for Epidemiological Scale of Depression (CES-D); and serious psychological distress. The test assessed the influence of every day racial and non-racial discrimination, and the findings revealed that racial and non-racial discrimination affected older African Americans. The overarching consequences of racial discrimination included bouts of depression, anxiety and mood disorders, and serious psychological distress (Mouzon, Taylor, Keith, Nicklett & Chatters, 2017). Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, and Link (2013) speak extensively about the relationship between stigmatization and mental health issues. This research paper sets the platform for in-depth discussion on the impact of phenotype discrimination on the mental health of persons within America and the Caribbean and will specifically examine skin color, hair texture and gender as overt phenotypes.

## **Phenotype Discrimination in America**

### **Discrimination based on Skin Color**

Skin color has been and continues to be one of the major criteria by which African

Americans are stratified (Berry, 1988). The stratification ranges from research findings on educational achievement, marital selection, and social status to criminal justice and mental health.

**Education.** Research substantiates that African Americans record high school graduation rates of less than 60% and perform significantly poorer on standardized testing instruments (Freedle, 2003; Helms, 2002). In similar fashion, new data from the US Department of Education (2012) show that 75% of white students who held a Bachelor degree had a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher as compared to 55% black American students. The statistics further reveal that two out of every five white students graduate but less than one in every five black graduate students obtain a GPA greater than 3.5.

**Marital Status.** Phenotype discrimination also affects marital selection and social status. In a study undertaken by Matthews (2013) on the relationship between skin color and social outcomes for black women, the writer revealed that 64% of the women interviewed responded that having a dark skin tone made it difficult for women to find a spouse while 73% mentioned that it was easy to find a job if the person was light-skinned. The fact that 77% of the women stated that dark-skinned was viewed as unattractive seemingly point to a relationship between phenotype discrimination and self-esteem. Matthews (2013) further posits “The high confidence perceived in women of light complexions is likely associated with the belief that women with light skin are privileged, in that they hold a more elevated status in society” (p. 58).

**Criminal Justice.** The criminal justice system was also affected by phenotype discrimination. While persons of color represent a small percentage of the overall American population, startling figures were revealed by the USN & WR Bureau of Justice 2010. Federal Inmates per 100,000 residents show there were 4,347 black men, 1,775 Hispanics as compared to

678 male whites incarcerated. Imprisoned black women were at 260, Hispanics women imprisoned were at 133 as compared to 91 white women (Cook, 2010). Lamb & Weinberger (1998) has linked mental health issues of African Americans with the incarceration rate where 10 – 15% of the prisoners suffer from severe mental health illnesses while Lanier (1993) notes that since it is difficult for imprisoned offenders to provide financially for their families, the strain of separation may lead to depression. In summary, it can be theorized that skin color discrimination affects not only marital selection and status but the justice system and mental health.

**Housing.** Reference has also been made to numerous studies (Henricks, 2015; Hunt, Wise, Jipguep, Cozier, & Rosenberg, 2007; Cartee & Ruegger, 1999). Of particular interest, information from a study conducted in 28 metropolitan areas using a paired testing method by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and released in 2016 showed that discrimination in access to housing was still practiced against American Blacks. Findings revealed that African home buyers learned about the availability of 17% fewer homes than whites and were shown 18% fewer properties. The persons renting homes advertised 11% fewer homes as available and blacks were shown 4% housing units less than whites. Additionally, Pager & Shepherd (2008) contend that discrimination was evident when information about housing was withheld deliberately with the intention of preventing blacks from accessing housing in certain neighborhoods and Blacks experienced ‘consistent adverse treatment in roughly one in five housing searches’ (p.188). This overt phenotype discrimination where blacks were denied the opportunities to access comfortable housing that are similar to that as whites, may lead to the assumption that discrimination exists in America where it pertains to housing accommodation for blacks.

## **Skin color & Criminal Judgment**

**Men.** However, phenotype discrimination in America by skin tone is not limited to housing. The findings of a study conducted by Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns and Johnson (2006) suggest that the phenotypic features associated with persons of color can impact capital sentencing outcomes for African American (black) men. Defendants possessing more “Afrocentric” features were 60% more likely to be sentenced to death, as compared to a defendant possessing less Afrocentric features 20% (Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns & Johnson, 2006). It was further revealed that African American men were more than likely to be sentenced because of stereotyping based on skin color or hair. In a report entitled *Race and Wrongful Conviction*, authors Gross, Possley & Stephens (2017) shared statistics revealing that African Americans who are convicted of murder are 50% more likely to be innocent of the crime of which they are accused. A glaring example of stereotype profiling with negative connotation for African Americans was evident in the accusation and subsequent trial in 1984 of Ulysses Charles, a black Trinidadian immigrant with “dreadlocks” who was convicted of raping three white women in Boston. Although, the reports clearly showed that Charles was not the perpetrator he was wrongfully convicted and spent 20 years in prison. Information from the Bureau of Justice (2009) substantiate that Black male defendants are six and a half times more likely than their male white counterparts to be found guilty and sentenced to serve prison time. It is clear that a myriad of discriminatory practices related to skin color and documented by researchers have been and continue to be perpetrated against African Americans by the justice system.

**Women.** Statistics in 2005 revealed that black women were 3 times more likely to be incarcerated as white women. Further statistics collected in 2007 confirmed that Black women



represent 30% of all women incarcerated under State or Federal Jurisdiction (Research and Advocacy Reform, 2007) Furthermore, Viglione, Hannon, and DeFina (2011) conducted a study on women's phenotypic variation looking at phenotypic preferences for lighter skinned women within the prison system. North Carolina correctional officers' ratings of female prisoners' skin tone upon admission to prison were analyzed for maximum consecutive length of prison term, maximum incarceration date, and actual time served to examine systematic prison sentence leniency. Skin tone was negatively correlated with prison time such that lighter-skinned female inmates received more lenient prison time and lower maximum consecutive sentence length compared to their dark skin inmates. With regard to prison sentences, the authors' results indicate that women deemed to have light skin are sentenced to approximately 12% less time behind bars than their darker skinned counterparts. The results also show that having light skin reduces the actual time served by approximately 11%. These findings revealed the advantages of lighter skin color for African American women facing incarceration. The research therefore corroborates phenotype discrimination in the outcomes of criminal court judgment and its impact on persons of color.

### **Discrimination based on Gender**

Historically, women have always been viewed as the weaker sex, in need of protection from the world and its maladies, whereas men have been seen as the protectors, stronger and more able to work and provide (Albee & Perry, 1998). Kessler-Harris (2001) hypothesizes that firing women from the workplace implied that their place should be in the home taking care of the children while the husband worked. Once women were married the assumption was that they would receive 50% allowance from their husbands. Reports from an Analysis of US Equal Opportunity Commission Charges (Fiscal Years 2011 – 2015) showed that the archaic stereotype

views still exist regarding pregnant women in the workplace. There were nearly three in 10 charges for pregnancy discriminatory practices (28.6%) filed by black women. Black women between the ages 16 to 54 comprised only 14% of women in the workforce. Gender discrimination, as an example of phenotype discrimination, can lead to feelings of depression and anxiety (Perry, Harp & Oser, 2013). A study was undertaken by Woods-Gisombé and Lobel (2008) of some 189 women to ascertain the relationship between race and gender and stress in African American women. The findings revealed that 99.9% of the women experienced some form of race-related stress, while 91.6% had experienced gender-related stress. A further study was carried out on 204 women by Perry, Harp and Oser (2013) designed to determine the impact of discrimination on the well-being and mental health of American women. The study revealed that increasing discrimination was a predictor to stress and other health problems (OR = 1.58,  $p < .01$ ). While gender discrimination is predominantly linked to the discrimination of women in the workplace, it is important to note that men also face discrimination.

**Women & Employment.** Studies have indicated that gender discrimination occurs in many forms including hiring, wages (Patten, 2016), performance evaluations (American Bar Association, 2006) and even sexual harassment (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). For their part, about 27% of women their gender has made it hard for them to succeed in life, compared with just 7% of men (Pew Research Center, 2016). The female experience of gender discrimination is mainly influenced by the assumptions and outdated stereotypical beliefs that limit the equality experienced by women in the workplace, especially in the areas of promotion and wages. This occurs even though women comprise only 2% of the CEO's in the U.S's Fortune 500 companies, 17% of the House of Representatives, 16% of US Senators, 16% are Governors and 24% are State Legislators (Taylor et al., 2008). These assumptions are predominantly made by men in

power, who have the position to hire or fire women in the workplace. As a result, the economic fate of women most often hinge on whether or not the person who hires her has a more modern view on the roles of women. For example, women who advance on the corporate ladder are viewed as having gained their position via sexual favors, nepotism, and through the use of affirmative action, as opposed to the use of knowledge and capabilities (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011).

While it cannot be denied that women have made strides in the workforce, it was found that women "...CEO's in privately held firms made 46% less than their male counterparts, after adjusting for age and education" (Eisenberg, 2010, p. 111). The Institute for Women's Policy Research released statistics for 2015 that declared that while women represented almost 50% of the workforce, they still made 80 cents to every dollar earned by men, a gender wage of 20%. However, for women of color, (Hispanics and Black women) it will take even longer for there to be wage equality. Hispanic women in the United States will have to wait until the year 2248, while Black women will have to wait until the year 2124 for equal pay (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2017). While women may be predominantly the sole or co-breadwinners in most of American families with children, the stark reality of gender discrimination is evident in unequal or unfair pay and has far reaching effects on everyone within the family.

Another incident that cements the claims of gender discrimination against women is related to allegations made against Wal-Mart, a multi-billion store, for discrimination against women. The allegations seem to vindicate the concept of the glass ceiling where the employment of women is concerned. For example, one of the allegations states that male workers were promoted and paid more than their female counterparts, even though the female workers had more seniority. In addition, claims were made that approximately three quarters of

the hourly supervisors are women, however only 33% of store managers are females (Biskupic, 2011). Such allegations however, must be examined with caution since they are not necessarily indicative of Wal-Mart's practices, but may be confined to a few store locations within the Wal-Mart Corporation. The underlying assumption is that gender discrimination against women exists within many established organizations.

**Men & Employment.** Conversely, gender discrimination against men, while not investigated and reported as extensively as with women, still exists. Incidents of unwanted female sexual advances have often times led to the male being fired from his workplace, if the person who is rejected, for instance, is the manager or someone in a higher position (Calvasina, Calvasina & Calvasina, 2011). A notable example of gender discrimination against a male occurred in 2006, when James Stevens, a supermarket worker with 25 years' experience was sexually harassed by a female manager on numerous occasions. Although the claimant made several complaints to the company, no action was taken and eventually, the male worker was fired. This wrongful termination led Mr. Stevens to level a lawsuit against the company, Vons. Mr. Stevens later won the case and was awarded 2.4 million dollars (James Stevens vs. Vons, 2009). It is therefore safe to say that gender discrimination can be enacted against both genders in the workplace.

### **Discrimination based on Hair Texture/Type**

Even hair type has been used as a basis for discrimination. Just as variations in skin tone results in discriminatory practice, the texture and length of hair among minority females are used as fodder for discrimination within their specific populations (Robinson-Moore, 2008). In fact, as recently as September 2016, the Federal Court of the United States ruled that it was acceptable for employers to prohibit dreadlocks, after an African American woman had

her offer of employment rescinded because of her refusal to cut her hair. The dreadlocked hairstyle (which is seen as a hair type and has a very specific texture) is predominantly worn by persons of the black community, and is now its own phenotype of discrimination following this historic ruling. Undoubtedly, the research supports claims that hair style and texture is one of the means by which persons are discriminated.

Several esteemed Professors of Education speaking on the phenotype of hair, alluded to the strong ties that intersect skin color, hair, and mental health. Okazawa-Rey and Robinson (1987) state, “Such symptoms of the black female's self-hatred as hair-straightening and skin-lightening, despite the pain involved, achieve little degree of true success in approximating the white ideal of beauty” (p. 13). Research in Kenya focused on 245 black women who used relaxers to “manage” their hair so that they could look “beautiful”. One hundred and thirty-four women (67%) had problems with the relaxers used (at least once); the injuries included severe hair loss, lesions and burns (Etemesi 2007). In 2009, Chris Rock, a renowned African American actor and comedian, made a documentary called *Good Hair*, to illustrate the connection between hair valuation and beauty standards. Comparable to skin color, black hair texture is graded and given a value ranging from good (which is closer to the European standards of having ‘straight’ hair) to bad (the extreme opposite – tightly coiled and kinky hair). Simply put, black females with the predominantly kinky textured hair, are seen as “less than” or ranked lower on the beauty spectrum (Robinson, 2011). As stated by Robinson (2011):

“Centuries of slavery combined with a lack of collective African identity has caused U.S. Blacks, descendants of African slaves, to dislike their own blackness (Azibo, 1989; D. M. Taylor, 2002). This color complex is ‘a psychological fixation’ (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992, p. 2) that causes African

Americans to devalue physical characteristics, particularly skin color and hair texture, reflective of African ancestry.” (p. 359)

Holcomb-McCoy and Moore-Thomas’ (2001) study of black adolescent females found that the girls with physical features most unlike those of white girls —especially relating to hair and skin color—were often marginalized from others at school and other social places, resulting in lowered achievement levels and higher high school dropout rates for darker-skinned black females. As a result, women with kinkier hair textures tend to have higher issues relating to self-esteem and self-worth, especially when Eurocentric standards of beauty dominate the media and are used as the ideal.

The popular online newspaper, the *Washington Post* gave more insight into how deep discrimination against hair was in the psyche of the American people. In one of the articles, writer Vanessa Williams (2012) discussed the furor created in 2012 when US Olympic Gymnast Gabby Douglas performed at the Olympics with her hair not styled and perfectly in place. Interestingly, sharp criticism was voiced by persons, especially within the black community, who were displeased that that the gymnast “had not tamed her frizzy edges”. In responding to the criticism, Douglas who is black said, “When they talk about my hair...really criticizing me, for me it was really hurtful,” (Rogers, 2016). As a complement to the statistical data, this anecdotal record, too, verifies the link between phenotype discrimination and hair texture as part of the larger picture of discrimination in America.

However, a study conducted by Johnson & Bankhead (2013) focused on the experiences of Black women with natural hair. The study aimed to garner understanding of how hair esteem related to self-esteem and discriminatory experiences. The researchers received over 520 responses, and from data analysis, it was found that when it came to Black women and the reactions they received wearing their natural hair, family members gave the

most negative responses (48%), followed by strangers (28%), then friends (25%).

Furthermore, when the participants were asked the degree to which they felt discriminated against on account of wearing their hair naturally, only 3.2% of the respondents indicated that they felt very much discriminated against (Johnson & Bankhead, 2013). In this case, the findings contradicted the pervasive belief that phenotype discrimination according to hair type and texture is a universal experience by Black women with natural hair.

### **Phenotype discrimination in the Caribbean**

#### **Discrimination based on Skin color**

Within the Caribbean communities, skin color and hair type have become the dominant phenotypes used for discrimination (Alleyne, 2005; Buchanan, 2013; Robles, 2007). The concept of discrimination based on skin tone within the Caribbean is one that has evolved over hundreds of years, a phenomenon having been experienced by many but unable to be properly explained until the term ‘colorism’ was coined by an author known as Alice Walker in 1982. The definition of racism or discrimination could not quite encapsulate the discrimination persons of darker skin tone experienced by persons of lighter skin tone and vice versa. The term colorism, in the context of the Caribbean gives a more holistic view of skin color discrimination as a sub-category of phenotype discrimination. Nevertheless, it may be argued that colorism and discrimination which may be used interchangeably, is prevalent within the Caribbean region, albeit on a smaller scale when compared to America.

**Jamaica.** The racial, cultural and religious diversity of West Indian populations has caused many ethnic groups to emerge. About 91% of the Jamaica population is blacks with 6.2% being mixed and other races such as Whites, Chinese or East Indians accounting for less than 1% (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2011). Charles (2010) used a group of teenagers (31)

who had bleached their skin to determine whether it was accredited to the lack of self-esteem as opposed to another group (23) that did not do so. Just over 45% of those who bleached their skin gave the “need to lighten their skin color” as the overriding reason. The embracing of the ideology that “white is better” within the Jamaica context, has led to discrimination based on skin.

Farlane (2006) posits, “The images of lighter-skinned people seen on music videos and on advertisement boards promote the message that lighter-skin is more beautiful and desirable to the opposite sex, and a prerequisite for access to the ‘good life’” (p. 44-45). Print media, television, and digital advertisements also laud persons of fairer skin tones (Edmond, 2014). Literature further suggests that there are many tangible advantages to being fair-skinned as opposed to dark-skinned in Jamaica including but not limited to better jobs in the work-force, social acceptance, higher social status and marriage (Robinson, 2011). Light skinned complexion has become a symbol of position within society detailing one’s social class. The belief has become so ingrained in Jamaican society that author Browne- Glaude (2007) noted “people refuse to have children with someone whose complexion is as dark as or darker than theirs. They are, in fact, lightening their lineage, bleaching generation next, if you will” (p. 45). Interestingly, the Jamaica’s Gleaner Newspaper (April, 2016) in an article entitled: Broken-Class, Colour and Gender Discrimination Hurting our Youths, the writer shared 32 findings from a Youth Survey which revealed that the major areas of discrimination were class (68%), sexual orientation (59%), disabilities (57%), and political affiliation. However, in a society where skin color plays a very important role in self-perception and the way others are viewed for life choices such as partnership and having children, having darker skin can be very



burdensome. Such behavior, therefore signifies the presence of color discrimination, a category of phenotype discrimination found within the Caribbean.

**Barbados.** In the smaller Caribbean island of Barbados, with a population of over 226,000 people, approximately 6100 of those persons are white (Barbados Statistical Service, 2010). This suggests that approximately 2.6 % of the population is white. However, black Barbadian nationals complain of discrimination at the hands of the white minorities. Beckles (2004) postulates, “an economically dominant white minority,” representing two percent of the population “...controls over 75 percent of the private productive capital in the country” (p. 154-55). In an article of the Barbados newspaper titled “Racism still alive and well” in March of 2015, resident Charles Holder noted that while no data was available, and persons did not speak or research its existence, racism was subtly imbedded in the Barbados culture. He pointed out that he believed the services blacks received compared to whites were subpar, and not only so, but also the police force reacted quite differently to crimes committed against white persons as opposed to the predominantly black persons on the island. Similar to America, the Caribbean too, experiences phenotype discrimination related to skin color although its location is thousands of miles away.

### **Discrimination based on Gender**

**Women.** Traditionally, the socialization process within the Caribbean has promoted the ideology that males should occupy the dominant role within the households while the females were to be passive and subservient, learning skills that were appreciated by the menfolk (Wilson-Mitchell, Bennett & Stennett, 2014). Accordingly, many parents help to foster this attitude by employing the child-rearing concept described in the Caribbean as “tie the heifer, loose the bull”. In the Caribbean context, the parents “closely monitor their daughters but allow their sons

greater freedom and independence with regard to sexual activity” Browne (1995). This idea of female inferiority and male superiority is not confined to only one island, but this thread runs throughout the entire Caribbean region. The ideology that men are not confined by societal norms but can behave as the strutting rooster (satirical song by Dave Martin and the Trade Winds in the 1970s), whereas the women are expected to remain nurturing, and faithful family women is a testament to gender inequality in the Caribbean.

**Employment.** While the traditionally held perception of women has evolved over time (Lindsey, 2016; Perry, Harp & Oser, 2013), there is still significant evidence of phenotype discrimination as it pertains to gender bias against women in workplaces within the Caribbean. The perception that women should occupy inferior positions in the workplace in America is also held in Caribbean countries. Reddock & Bobb-Smith (2008) in presenting employment information about Trinidad and Tobago between women’s and men’s workforce participation between 1996 – 2000 revealed that women’s employment was fairly stable at 38% while the men remained stable as well but much higher (61%). According to a newspaper article from February 2016, titled Women in the Workplace, there is some contradiction to workplace practices that impinge on the rights of the Barbadian women (Barbados Today, 2016). The writer posits, “The most contentious of these has been discrimination of employment and occupation and equal pay for women”. Moreover, at the 579<sup>th</sup> meeting of the United Nations in 2002, the report on Discrimination against women in Barbados indicated that by 1999 the labor force was 136,600, with nearly 71 per cent male and 65.5 per cent female. However, the 2015 Continuous Household Survey in Barbados, which was published in the June 17, 2015 edition of **Barbados TODAY** showed that Barbados had a workforce of 124,300 persons, comprising of 63,500 males and 61,300 females. This recent data shows a minimal gap between the genders.

**Domestic Abuse.** Another major infringement on women's rights within the Caribbean region that characterizes gender discrimination is domestic abuse. The Trinidad Express reported that between 2012 – 2013, a magistrate court in one of the districts in Northern Trinidad dealt with some 17,748 domestic violent cases perpetrated against women. The correlation between domestic violence and gender discrimination against women is clearly explicated that while there are multiple reasons for the occurrence of domestic violence, it mainly occurs because of the belief in "male supremacy" (Fflokkes, 1997). Therefore, gender inequality within the Caribbean region continues to be manifested through domestic violence and unequal treatment of women in the workplace in the areas of promotion, salary and sexual harassment.

**Education.** The educational institutions are just as guilty of perpetuating gender bias against women. Gender segregation is promoted in the selection of academic courses selected by students where females are expected to choose subjects such as Home Economics, English Language, and Literature while males are guided towards information technology and science subjects (Bailey, 1997). Furthermore, content analysis of some 27 English textbooks revealed that most of the characters (over 70%) used for reinforcing varying Language concepts were males (Drayton, 1997). The underlying lesson is that men should take the leads in our societies while females should be relegated to inferior work. As a result, females become marginalized even in literature from a very young age, and begin to believe the discriminatory stereotypes as the texts reinforce that they are only capable of certain roles, while the young males believe in the stereotypes being presented and treat the females as inferiors.

## **Men**

**Socialization.** Gender inequality affects both Caribbean and American males. Unlike America, where gender discrimination is aligned with sexual harassment by men (Bobbitt-Zeher,

2011) in the workplace, gender inequality affects men as a part of the socialization process. Because Caribbean males have been perceived as the breadwinners within the home, it creates a multiplicity of problems when the roles are reversed. A study of Gender, Poverty and Land Ownership by Boodram (2011) in Trinidad and Tobago showed that 68.99 % of households are male dominated as opposed to 31% of the households run by females. In the event that a woman provides for the family or works for a higher salary, then society frowns on the union. Massiah (1982) revealed that within the Caribbean, approximately 30 to 50 percent of African-Caribbean families are headed by a female (Jamaica: 33.8%; Barbados: 42.9%; Grenada: 45.3). Statistics by Boodram (2011) further reveal that only 4.55% of households are managed by single parent males as compared to 19.23% that are headed by single parent females in Trinidad. In the Caribbean, it is a widely-held belief that a male who does not provide for his family is not considered as a man and is usually labeled with derogatory names. It is noteworthy that while research relating to perception of male masculinity under threat for not providing for the family has no concrete data, similar trends exist in America. McGinn, Lingo & Castro (2015) in referring to Pew Research studying perceptions in 2013 in the US only, found that 51% of male and female respondents to the interview believed that it was better for children if they had stay-at-home mothers who were not employed as compared with 8% who believed that children would benefit in the same way with stay-at-home fathers. Gender stereotypes, therefore, as a form of phenotype discrimination, affect men specifically with regards how unemployed men are perceived.

**Employment.** Although there have been gradual changes of males occupying top management positions of schools and colleges, it is not as significant as expected for countries that are deemed as developing. Similar to the United States, top management positions at

Universities in the Caribbean, such as Deans and Department Heads are held by males. Taylor (1997) examined data from the St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad which revealed that between 1974 – 1988, (76 – 82%) of top management positions were held by males as compared to females. Jamaica too is no exception. In an article by Vivienne Green-Evans (2005) reference was made to the findings documented in the UWI's January 2005 publication *Strategic Repositioning, An Agenda for Action*. The results showed that males occupy most of the senior positions. Both the university's principal and deputy principal are male. The deans in all four faculties are male. Similarly, in the Medical Sciences Faculty, all four deputy deans (100%) are male. In Pure and Applied Sciences, three of the four deputy deans are male (75%) and in Social Sciences the deputy dean is male. In Humanities and Education, there are two male deputy deans, despite a higher ratio of female full-time employees. The evidence that one of the most influential social institutions is a proponent of phenotype discrimination, especially in terms of gender inequality is a worrying factor as to whether a cycle of discriminatory practices will constantly be replicated.

**Music.** Additionally, phenotype discrimination, with regards to gender inequality in the Caribbean has been researched in both music and religion. Numerous music videos stereotype women as sex symbols rather than persons to be taken seriously and respected. The Jamaican reggae, also known as dance hall music and the Trinidadian calypso or soca music as well as the Ragga Soca in St. Vincent promote sexist ideas of dominant males with many female partners and negative images which suggest that Caribbean women lack values and integrity (Lake, 1998). The lyrics sung by Vincentian artistes, Godfrey Dublin, "I taking way somebody woman, I doan kay if it cause confusion" and Winston Soso, "Some men like a woman with big bottom,

plenty hips and looking alright” promote the image of women as sex symbols or just “a pretty face”.

### **Religion**

Religion in the Caribbean also promotes gender inequality. According to Taylor (2001) gender inequality is glaring in Cuba where women participate in services rather than take part in any leading roles. The author further points to Rastafarianism, a predominantly black religion, which is male dominated. Women are not allowed to be in prominent positions and are barred from associating with the rest of the group once they are menstruating since they are regarded as being “unclean” (Taylor, 2001). Thus, in similar fashion as in America, gender discrimination against women permeates religion, education and with particular reference to the Caribbean, music.

### **Hair Texture in the Caribbean**

Although there is distance between geographical locations of America and the Caribbean, hair texture is used as a discriminatory tool within both regions (Alleyne, 2005). In countries such as the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, hair texture is seen as an indicator of higher socioeconomic status, or lower class, and has commandeered its own “special terminology” that expresses its social value “good”, “bad”, “kinky”, “pepper grain” and others (Alleyne, 2005 p. 7). Approximately 80 to 90 percent of families in the Caribbean are from an African background, and came as slaves to the region. Most of them settled in Jamaica, Barbados, and other Caribbean islands. Almost half of the population in both Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana is of African descent (Barrow 1996). It is clearly obvious; therefore, that most descendants will have hair texture that is reflective of their ethnicity. As such, it is not uncommon for women or men to choose partners based upon the length and texture of their

hair, nor is it uncommon for persons with a particular hair type to be deemed lesser, to be marginalized, and unfairly placed into a specific societal bracket. It is important to note here that persons with the “bad, kinky...” hair tend to be persons who are dark-skinned or black, which accounts for a large percentage of the Caribbean population. Informal discussions held by the writer with school teachers and administrators in three Caribbean islands (Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados and St. Vincent & the Grenadines) seeking information relating to hair texture revealed that students were bullied for sporting natural hairstyles.

Within the Caribbean school system, informal discussions with school teachers and administrators about information relating to hair texture revealed that students were bullied for sporting natural hairstyles. In one high school class, in the Caribbean country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, two young girls were counseled for depression and anxiety related to their natural short kinky hair for which they were being teased by their classmates. One of these girls had begun to cut herself as a means of coping with feelings of rejection because of her hair texture. The author’s personal experience comprised ridicule related to hair texture as well where school mates have use slangs such as “nappy hair”, “nigga knots” and “coarse hair” to describe the natural hair of the author and other students within the classroom. Each island has its own distinctive slangs that are used to express contempt and ridicule. Such derogatory terms promote the belief that natural hair texture cannot be admired; a classic example of hair texture discrimination.

Author, Marsha Buchanan (2013) wrote about her experiences of wearing her own natural hair in the Caribbean and the reactions she received when she dared to wear her hair in its natural state. She stated when wearing her hair in an afro she was met with: “Can’t you comb your hair?” or “Why are you letting yourself go like that, do you want me to fix your

hair?” However, she noticed that it was acceptable for the mixed blacks with the looser curl patterns and straighter hair to wear their hair natural since they were considered to have “the right type of hair” to sport natural hair styles (Buchanan, 2013). Hair texture is not only a source of general discrimination for looking neat, but can also be a source of discrimination for socioeconomic standing, class and is even used as an identifier for whether certain women belong to a particular religious denomination (Buchanan, 2013). While there is a scarcity of statistical data on the desire for straightened hair within the Caribbean context, Alleyne (2005) implies that the pride that was accredited to natural hair in Jamaica in the 1960s and 1970s is no longer visible today. According to the Alleyne (2005) what is prevalent is while hair may be in “corn rows or twisted”, the natural hair has already been chemically treated and most women seek for braids that match the straightness and length of persons with European hair texture. Therefore, it seems safe to articulate that more preferred hair texture across many Caribbean countries is hair that is manageable or similar to European hair.

### **The Impact of Phenotype discrimination on Mental Health in United States**

Research further reveals that Blacks are 20 % more likely to experience serious mental health problems than adult Whites. Thus, Blacks are also more likely to experience feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, depression, and sadness than adult Whites (Office of Minority Health, 2016). The discrimination and stigma that surrounds African Americans seeking mental health treatment is extremely self-harming. In response to the question, “How comfortable would you feel talking about personal problems with a professional?” African Americans (76%) were less likely than non-Hispanic whites (80%) to report feeling comfortable. African Americans (29%) and Hispanics or Latinos (30%) were also less likely than non-Hispanic whites (35%) to report feeling embarrassed when asked, “How embarrassed would you be if your



friends knew you were getting professional help for an emotional problem?” (Shim et al., 2009)

The issue of lack of black representation of therapists within the mental health community plays a major role in the diagnosis and treatment of black clients. Due to the fact that less than two percent of American Psychological Association Members are Black/African American, there is worry that European American mental health practitioners are not culturally competent enough to treat particular issues that black people face (American Psychological Association, 2014).

This shows that the predominant providers of mental health care are not persons of color. Such discrimination towards African-Americans in need of mental health services has led to many Black persons not wanting to seek treatment or not choosing to stay in treatment (Ward & Heidrich, 2009). For example, troubling findings reported by Dr. Monnice T. Williams (2011), gave a few examples of discrimination experiences by Black clients by non-minority therapists. The reports claimed that therapists were quick to dismiss color as a form of oppression, choosing instead to adopt a “colorblind approach”. The report further alludes that statements such as “I don’t see you as black. I see you as a regular person” made to black clients by white therapists imply that the therapist finds the client irregular in some way, due to the skin color and such statements are inherently discriminatory. For example, Middle-class black women and men were about 30% and 60% less likely, respectively, than their white middle-class counterparts to hear back from a therapist agreeing to see them (Kugelmass, 2016). By encouraging Black clients to “work much harder so that they (the black clients) could be successful like other people (non-black persons)”, therapists were buying into the stereotype that Black/African American clients are inherently lazy and as such were discriminating their clients solely on the color of their skin (Constantine 2007). In situations where a first counseling session would include such insensitive remarks, in many cases, 50% of Black/African Americans would not return for a second session

(Association of Black Psychologists, 2003). Thus, mental health issues of blacks are inadvertently affected by the responses of white therapists who may not be cognizant that insensitive remarks do more damage than good to the psyche of black persons who suffer from mental health problems.

Furthermore, according to a study conducted by Ward, Wiltshire, Detry and Brown (2013), Black/African Americans are particularly concerned about the stigma they would experience if they seek mental health treatment, especially the men. In this study, 30% of the participants reported having a mental illness but most were unwilling to seek treatment. The black men were quite aware that if they were diagnosed with mental illnesses, this could have a deleterious effect on access to housing, custody of children, and even jobs. Hence discrimination in the mental health treatment system affects men because of labelling and stigmatization.

Phenotype discrimination within the black community in the United States also continues to have detrimental effects on another phenotypically discriminated against minority group: people with disabilities. In general, persons of color with disabilities tend to have a harder time accessing vocational rehabilitation services as compared to their white counterparts. For example, in a comparative study between African Americans and Whites with disabilities, from a sample of over 70,000 participants, it was found that 92% of European Americans (Whites) received services as compared to 8% of African Americans (Feist-Price, 1995). Wilson, Hinojosa & Gines (2010) stated that African Americans are more likely to be denied VR services when compared to their White American counterparts with disabilities. For those persons of color that did gain access to rehab services, the cases tended to be inconclusive and were closed unsuccessfully (Wilson, Hinojosa & Gines, 2010). These findings supported their earlier research that “preferential treatment of lighter-skinned individuals (i.e. whites with disabilities)

may be due to skin color at either the conscious or unconscious level” (Wilson, Hinojosa & Gines, p. 179).

Further, alienating darker hued blacks and leading to further mental health issues, educational institutions dole out more disproportionate punishments to darker students. According to a national sample, a study conducted by Hannon et al. (2013) showed that darker skinned males and females were at a higher rate of receiving school suspensions even when controlling for academic performance. The data indicates that 45% of African American youth overall had been suspended. The experience varies considerably by sex, however, with 53% of males having been suspended compared to 38 % for females. Of those students, young women of the darkest hues were three times more likely to be suspended than their light skinned counterparts. The data stated that the “presumption of superiority” of lighter skinned students compared to darker skinned students resulted in “second chances” or the “benefit of the doubt”, not available to dark skinned girls. The result would be disproportionate punishment for those students with darker skin, a blatant show of discrimination. A student who had a greater risk of being suspended had a lower likelihood of graduating (Hannon et. al, 2013). The lack of certainty about future plans and success in many cases led to feelings of worthlessness, depression, and in some cases suicide. Findings by Perry and Stevens-Watkins (2012) confirm this view, as they reported African American women whose skin were medium or dark toned were not only likely to be victims of gendered racism but also at a “substantially increased risk for suicidality, while there was no significant effect among those reporting lighter skin” (p.10). It is evident that discrimination based on color range from discriminating against blacks with disabilities to alienation and consequently to the lack of access to the completion of education for

blacks. The overarching idea, however, is that discrimination can lead to thoughts of suicide or depression which are aligned to mental health issues.

A meta-analysis review conducted by Paradies et al. (2015) reviewed literature which focused on the relationship between reported racism and mental and physical health outcomes. Data from 293 studies reported in 333 articles published between 1983 and 2013, and conducted predominately in the U.S., were analyzed using random effects models and mean weighted effect sizes. Racism was associated with poorer mental health, including depression, anxiety, psychological stress, and various other outcomes (Paradies et al, 2015). Paradies et al (2015) noted:

“Of the 293 studies, the most frequently reported mental health outcome was depression, (which showed up in 37.2% of the articles), followed by low self-esteem, (24.3%), psychological stress (21.3%), distress (18.3%), and anxiety (14.4%) ... suicidal ideation, planning and/or attempts (3.6%), ... Other mental health symptoms such as paranoia and psychoticism, were reported in 3.6% of articles.” (p.14)

The statistics, therefore, gave credence to a strong linkage between the phenotypic discrimination of persons of color and its impact on mental health.

Objectifying women based on skin color, body size and shape can also have detrimental effects on their psyche. In a study of the objectification of Latina women, discrimination (body shaming) and body surveillance, 180 women indicated that the internalization of these beliefs of attractiveness was related to eating disorders and symptoms of depression (Velez, Campos & Moradi, 2015). The intersectionality of phenotype discrimination with other factors is one that has been studied more often in recent years. Quite often, one aspect of phenotype discrimination is predominantly linked with another. Predominantly, skin color and gender together cause maelstrom of discriminatory practices that will have disastrous effects on the

person who are victims of discrimination. In a recent study about gender discrimination against Black women, the authors found that gender discrimination as well as racial discrimination increased the risk for poor health and low well-being (Perry, Harp & Oser, 2013). Gender discrimination has far reaching effects, even creating what is known as Impostor Syndrome, which was tested for in 157 African American students tested at a predominantly white institution (PWI). 68.2% of the women tested acknowledged they experienced some form of Impostor Syndrome. (Bernard et al. 2017). Impostor Syndrome refers to feelings of intellectual incompetence experienced by persons who believe that they have deceived others regarding their intellect. Recent studies suggest that the societal gender inequality gap could possibly increase the susceptibility of the development of Impostor Syndrome in women, even more so than that of men (Cokely et al., 2015). The intersectionality of racial discrimination and gender discrimination against African American women can especially cause these women to question the validity of their own intellectual capabilities resulting in Impostor Syndrome. This can have a harmful effect on mental health, with symptoms that range from depression to anxiety to full psychological distress (Willis, Sosoo & Neblett, 2017). Therefore, the connection between mental health and skin color discrimination has been well established through a myriad of studies.

### **The Impact of Phenotype Discrimination on Mental Health in the Caribbean Skin Tone**

**Jamaica.** Within the Caribbean context, persons of a darker hue are also seen in a more negative light as compared to lighter skinned Caribbean nationals, most likely off-spring from interracial marriages or descendants from light skinned slaves (Alleyne, 2005). This is particularly true for Jamaica, as about 97% of the population is of total or partial African

descent, while other ethnic groups include East Indians (1.3%), Chinese (0.2%), Europeans (0.2%) and Other (0.6%) (Encyclopedia of the Nations, 2010b). However, although the majority of the population is Black, the country continues to be controlled by the minority White, Jewish, Arab, Chinese and East Indian population (Charles, 2003). As a result, dark-skinned women especially become unhappy with their skin tone and suffer from depression and major self-esteem issues which has led to a rise in skin bleaching practices. Farlane (2006) states, “The images of lighter-skinned people seen on music videos and on advertisement boards promote the message that lighter skin is more beautiful and desirable to the opposite sex, and a prerequisite for access to the ‘good life’” (as cited in Gabriel, 2007, p. 44-45). The reiteration that the fairer a person was, the more likely that person would have access to better things gave rise to the bleaching phenomenon. This idea was further cemented since “Media images reinforce racial hierarchies by presenting lighter skin as beautiful and preferable over darker skin,” (Lewis, et al., 2011). The focus on looks could also be attributed to the explanation posited by Gabriel (2007):

“There has never been any attempt at explaining what drives non-white people to burn their skin with chemicals other than subtle attempts to suggest it is borne of a desire to be white, thereby reinforcing the concept of the white beauty ideal”. (p.45)

Even the music of the popular dancehall artistes promotes the preference for lighter skin and bleaching as a means for women to get ahead. Well known Jamaican artist Buju Banton released a song in 1992 “I Love My Browning”, an ode to the type of women he prefers. In Jamaica, the term “browning” refers to a black person who is very light skinned (Powell, 2003). Seventeen years later, popular female dancehall artiste Lisa Hyper released several songs “Proud A Mi Bleaching” and “Bleaching Fit Me”. Some of the lyrics include:

“Mi proud ah mi bleaching... Mi nah hide, rub on my Doctor Clear (a skin bleaching product) ... Look how mi face it pretty [I am proud of my bleaching... I will not hide, rub on my Doctor Clear. Look at how pretty my face is].” ... Another line in the song is: “Ah bleaching make Kim get Mr. Right. Cause when night come she use Fair and White (another skin bleaching product).” [Bleaching is the reason why Kim got Mr. Right. Because she uses Fair and White at night] (Duncan, 2013).”

The impact of the constant bombardment of media and society at large, regarding the dislike of dark skin has therefore led to complexion dissatisfaction amongst darker hued girls and women across Jamaica, leading possibly to issues of self-hatred.

**Dominican Republic.** However, Jamaica is not the only country where discrimination based on skin tone has far reaching effects. In the larger Caribbean diaspora, the Dominican Republic has recently been the subject of much scrutiny for their treatment of blacks, particularly, persons of Haitian descent. Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean. In 2015, the Dominican Republic came under much fire for their attempt to conduct a mass deportation of Haitians living in that country. The move triggered international and regional backlash for several reasons, the predominant reason was that the people being deported were overwhelmingly dark skinned Haitian nationals. In a study conducted in 2014, researchers found that the humiliation and discrimination received by the Haitians from persons living in the Dominican Republic contributed significantly to Haitian migrant mental ill-health and limited access to health care (Keys, Kaiser, Foster, Burgos Minaya & Kohrt, 2014).

### **Gender discrimination**

**Women in the Caribbean.** Moreover, gender discrimination in the Caribbean in the education system has a significant impact on the mental health of young girls in the school

system (UNICEF, 2014). Data from the United Nations Children's Fund stated that in the Caribbean region, girls and adolescents face gender discrimination in the school environment including sexual harassment, violence and abuse from their peers or teachers. These types of harassment, coupled with outdated gender based stereotypes and beliefs about the role of girls can result in depression and demotivation to finish school (UNICEF, 2014). Furthermore, in situations where young adolescent girls do end up becoming pregnant by male classmates or peers within the school system, it is only the female who faces stigma, discrimination and ultimately expulsion for becoming pregnant (UNICEF, 2007). As a result, young teenage mothers in the Caribbean are more likely to experience depression, shame, and anxiety. They are even more likely to attempt to commit suicide (Wilson-Mitchell, Bennett & Stennett, 2014). While no comparison has been made with the response of young girls mentally to gender discrimination in America, it may be safe to say that because the Caribbean is heavily influenced by religious beliefs, it is more evident within the Caribbean context.

Females in the Caribbean constantly deal with the consequences of the discrimination and devaluation of girls' opportunities to education, exposure to gender based violence, and poverty (especially when it has to do with opportunities to attend school and participate in the formal job market) throughout their life cycle (Gavira & Rondon, 2010; WHO, 2009, p. 34). It is important to note here that education is inversely related to the prevalence of anxiety and depression (Stewart et al, 2009). Simply put, the more education a woman has, the less anxiety and depression she experiences, however the less education a woman has, the more anxiety and depression she experiences. Data from selected studies collated by Kohn and Rodriguez (2009), show that depression is by far the most prevalent disorder in women (12.6%) as compared to 6.7% in men but further studies in the region on mental health and women and children remain



scarce to non-existent, and so does disaggregation and analysis of the data. It is safe to assume that by the very virtue of living in certain Caribbean countries where women are constantly discriminated against and undervalued, there is a likelihood that women would experience some form of mental distress at some point in their lives.

It is quite evident that phenotype discrimination continues to affect the lives of not only the American population but also the Caribbean region. Most of the discrimination is overt as it relates to skin tone, the texture of a person's hair and the gender of the person. It has further been researched and established that phenotype discrimination can be detrimental to the mental health of individuals who are exposed to treatment that has such strong biases. The critical issue, however, is to formulate strategies that would change the mindset of persons who are engaged in discriminatory practices and in so doing reduce phenotype discrimination. Furthermore, the matter of empowering rehabilitation counselors with the requisite skills that enable them to assist persons who are exposed to the three types of discrimination, is paramount. It is important to note that while the Caribbean is much smaller in size when compared to America, similar treatment options must be explored. The Caribbean can model successful treatments options that have been used in America to solve mental health problems related to phenotype discrimination. On the other hand, shared data on techniques that will be used to deescalate the rising trend of mental health issues can only add value to existing data and boost further research.

## CHAPTER 3

### DISCUSSION

According to the research that the author reviewed, it was found that there is overwhelming evidence, especially in the United States, about the linkage between phenotype discrimination and mental health issues. The data reviewed emphasized that the observable characteristics of skin tone, gender and hair type/texture, especially relating to African Americans/Blacks were markers for discriminatory practices against this particular subset of people. The impact of phenotype discrimination is so wide-reaching, that it affects almost every area of life imaginable, from housing, to education and especially the criminal justice system. It is very important to note the effects of discrimination because the discrimination of persons of color can impede even the most basic of human rights. It is therefore extremely important that more intellectual and informal conversations be had about what phenotype discrimination is, and how it impacts the lives of persons who experience discrimination. Furthermore, the initiation of dialogue about the possible reasons behind such ingrained beliefs and stigmas, can possibly help therapists and counselors to deal with persons experiencing psychological distress because of daily encounters of phenotype discrimination. For example, it should no longer be acceptable to perpetuate the belief that one must conform to European hair standards of beauty in order to be accepted by one's peers or family members (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). Not only so, but the dialogue must be continuous so that it acts as a vehicle for change. Furthermore, the use of media campaign strategies show diversity in the way items are advertised or sold can have a major impact on the way persons perceive themselves and others. In a comparable vein, this strategy can also be used in mental health clinics, where instead of certain mental illnesses being represented by a specific racial group of persons, persons from multiple ethnicities can be

displayed on posters and television media to not give the impression that certain mental illnesses only occur in one subset of people.

Similar strategies can also be employed in the Caribbean, where colorism is ingrained in the minds of persons from a very young age. Through the use of early intervention techniques during the formative childhood years, minor changes can result in major impacts in combating stereotypes related to skin tone & gender. For example, giving children dolls and toys to play with that resemble their own skin tone, can help diminish complexion hatred. Another example of combating early discriminatory practices would include literature that gives both female and male equal roles and does not promote one gender over the other, nor use language that does so. Caribbean mental health therapists would therefore have a less daunting task if these strategies were to be implemented from an earlier age.

However, for the issues of mental health related to discrimination that are currently on the rise, it is important that rehabilitation counselors (both in America and the Caribbean) be aware of the literature and history behind phenotype discrimination, and do as much research as possible to be culturally competent enough to deal with their clients. While unfortunately there is a scarcity of statistical data on the widespread Caribbean region regarding mental health matters, having discussions with school administrators and historians can set the stage for educators to rethink teaching strategies and to examine deeply held concepts. Furthermore, Caribbean authors should be encouraged to write historic events that promote black people as heroes that our students can emulate as the students should be encouraged to read as many books as possible on phenotype discrimination. This can propel students to read Caribbean history literature to aid students in understanding colorism and its effect on mental health issues relating to complexion acceptance, and depression related to gender roles. Empowerment therapy, as

well as knowing about available resources for clients can go a long way to ensuring that persons who are affected by discrimination can access the help that they need at any given time.

Since there is a predominance of white therapists in the Rehabilitation Counseling in America, who may or may not be culturally competent to deal with the issues of Blacks or African Americans as it relates to discrimination, a proactive approach must be adopted. More must be done to ensure that there is more minority representation in the Counseling and Rehabilitation Association. It must be researched as to why there is a scarcity of Black therapists, and the importance of having representation in the field of Mental Health. Until then, non-black therapists should do their best to be open to the experiences of their Black clients, to constantly be up to date with recent literature, and to not diminish the experiences of their Black clients in any way, lest they not return (Williams, 2011).

Multicultural populations such as that of the Caribbean would most certainly benefit from therapeutic techniques that are dually cognitive, and motivation and empowerment focused. Many of the mental health issues related to the discrimination of dark skinned persons in the Caribbean, and especially women, are based in depression (UNICEF, 2014). By challenging the cognitions of the men and women who accept themselves as inferior to another skin tone, cognitive behavior therapy could possibly change their mindsets about how they view themselves. Twinning that technique with motivational and empowering therapeutic techniques consistently, could have an impact on the depression that is experienced by these men and women. Such techniques would also work on young women and even girls who have been discriminated against because of their hair texture. By shifting attention away from comparisons between their own hair texture and that of others, and focusing on why their natural hair texture makes them unique, mental health therapists can make a dent on the long-term impact of the

media and Eurocentric ideals of hair as it relates to beauty. It must be reiterated that young girls and women are worthy of respect and admiration even with their hair in natural states.

The impact of group therapy cannot be discounted in the Caribbean, due to the lack of mental health therapists in the region. Group therapy would reach a larger subset of people while allowing them to learn from each other about the ways in which phenotype discrimination affects everyone. Such therapy can also be conducted in high schools, where a lot of the discrimination starts at an early age. If young persons are given the opportunity to discuss openly how phenotype discrimination can harm self-esteem and have negative effects on the lives of others, this might have some impact on the levels of discrimination that occur in schools.

### **Limitations**

The author contends that there were several limitations to the research paper, specifically pertaining to the aggregation of data in the Caribbean. The lack of quantitative data is a significant hindrance to the collection of information from a society that has long been plagued by issues relating to phenotype discrimination, and its effect on mental health. The Caribbean's tendency to not document statistical and pertinent information relating to issues surrounding mental health could hamper the analyses of the status of mental health in the Caribbean region in the future. Due to the lack of quantitative data, there was heavy reliance on anecdotal evidence, which, while a good source of qualitative data, also runs the risk of having some form of bias.

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