



# Same Family, Different Colors: Confronting Colorism in America's Diverse Families

*Lori L. Tharps*

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**Same Family, Different Colors: Confronting Colorism in America's Diverse Families** Lori L. Tharps Weaving together personal stories, history, and analysis, "Same Family, Different Colors" explores the myriad ways skin-color politics affect family dynamics in the United States.

Colorism and color bias the preference for or presumed superiority of people based on the lighter color of their skin is a pervasive but rarely openly discussed phenomenon, one that is centuries old and continues today. In "Same Family, Different Colors," journalist Lori Tharps, the mother of three mixed-race children with three distinct skin colors, uses her own family as a starting point to explore how skin-color difference is dealt with in African American, Latino, Asian American, and mixed-race families and communities. Along with intimate and revealing stories and anecdotes from dozens of diverse people from across the United States, Tharps adds a historical overview and a contemporary cultural critique. "Same Family, Different Colors" is a solution-seeking journey to the heart of identity politics, so this more subtle cousin to racism, in the author's words, will be acknowledged, understood, and debated."

## Same Family, Different Colors: Confronting Colorism in America's Diverse Families Details

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## From Reader Review Same Family, Different Colors: Confronting Colorism in America's Diverse Families for online ebook

### Arindam Kar says

Before I was ever subjected to racism, I was subjected to colorism. The subtle, and not so subtle, references within my culture that being "fair-skinned" was "good" occurred at a young age. Family members, Indian products and commercials (oh the memories of Fair & Lovely cream) all perpetuated this myth. It had a profound impact on my youth.

Fast forward to today. I am a husband and father in a cross-cultural family. I was drawn to this book so I could better understand the dynamics of colorism, in other cultures as well as my own, so that I will do better with my family. The book is well-researched and has a healthy balance of facts and anecdotes from the many interviews that Tharps conducted.

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### Jordan says

*By examining the ways different families from different ethnic groups confront and deal with skin color differences in the intimate space of the home, we can see where, when, how, and why color bias beings or ends and why it takes hold of some people while others are able to shrug it off like yesterday's news. We can see why a dark child in a Latino family scrubs herself with bleach every night so people understand she is her mother's child. We can see why a blond-haired, blue-eyed biracial girl covers her face with her Black mother's makeup so people recognize she is her mother's child. Colorism isn't just public statistics; it is also private agony that influences identity formation, self-esteem, and personal relationships. (13)*

I received this book through LibraryThing's Early Reviewers program, which is one of my favourite things in the world. I love books, I especially love free books, and I love that as a relative plebeian in the world, I still have the opportunity to get some ARCs. (Some authors receive stacks of ARCS per week. I would love to get there someday.)

I was stoked to win a copy of this book. While I have not personally been affected by colorism, I have close friends who have, and the issues examined within this book have been near the forefront of my mind for a while. As someone who is constantly looking to be more aware, to be more intersection in my causes, Same Family, Different Colors offers a look at a fairly taboo topic which is nonetheless incredibly present in many people's lives. As evidenced by the excerpt above, colorism within families and in America at large can have a devastating impact. If the idea of a child scrubbing themselves with bleach in an attempt to fit in and be recognized and identified with the rest of their family is not heartbreaking to you, you might want to check yourself.

This book was perfectly toned for me, with just the right ratio of personal anecdotes, interviews with individuals and families about their experiences, and historical context for why colorism might affect the four main types of families included (African Americans, Asian families, Latino families, and multiracial families). As a history nerd and someone who received a degree in History, there were some pieces of historical context that I knew, of course, but were presented in such a new light, in consideration of how that past might have led to this present where colorism is a real experience for people. For example, the idea that white men were willing and eager to marry African or Native women because of the lack of white women in the colonies, but if the law sanctioned those marriages, it would be implying that African and Native people were human. And then, of course, it would be much harder to justify the enslavement and mass slaughter of

those groups. I've never heard that fact of history stated in quite that way before, and it was quite a revelation for me.

I shared some more general thoughts about the book in my vlog:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqPqR...> .

I would definitely recommend this to anyone who is interested in race and color in the United States. This book is being released in early October, and is LibraryThing, and to Beacon Press, for the ARC of this book! And thank you to the author, Lori L. Tharps, for writing this difficult and essential book. Please note that excerpts in both the blog and the vlog are from an uncorrected proof, and may be changed in the final bound version.

Originally posted at Musings of an Incurable Bookworm: <http://incurablebookworm.blogspot.com...>

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### **Colleen says**

This is an interesting study of “colorism”: the preferential treatment of lighter-skinned people over those who are of a darker complexion. We all know of the favoured treatment of white people over blacks, but Tharps also studies how other groups view skin colour, the treatment of different skin tones within the same ethnic group and, often, the biases of skin tones within the same immediate family. The book covers history, social impact, and is also very personal in that she interviews individuals who are part of a family whose members have different coloured skins (her own family included: her three children range from dark to light with very different skin tones). It’s well worth reading.

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### **Perla Mondragon says**

I think the book was good because it talked about how being in a mixed family was rough because people would say that being black is flawed and being skin is good. But it was a really good book because people with mixed families would give their experience.

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### **Karen Ashmore says**

The author examined colorism as manifested by African American, Latinx, Asian and mixed race families where offspring can run the gamut from light skinned passably white to dark mahogany in the same family. She also explained the history of colorism n different racial/ethnic groups. I knew about colorism in black families but had no idea of the system of colorism established by Spanish settlers in Latin America and the differentiation between mestizo and mulatto. I was disappointed she did not address transracial adoptive families bc we can certainly tell some stories but it was still a good read.

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### **Michelle says**

The author has some good ideas and questions that tend to get overlooked. Unfortunately the author's strong racist and colorist bias comes across both in her research sections and in her personal interviews which

makes it impossible to consider any part of this as valid scientific research. Her pale hatred and the ease with which she admits to disregarding anyone too white looking is disturbing particularly as she reports one of her own children to be so white-looking that she is "disappointed", "confused", and "worried" and wishes anxiously that her child would brown up. A truly worrying, confusing, and disappointing viewpoint from someone who supposedly wants to make families and communities more loving and supportive regardless of skin tone.

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### **Sarah Smith says**

Families are expected to look alike, but what about the nuclear families whose members have different skin colors? "Colorism" is the practice of ascribing moral or social values to skin color, and, as Lori Tharps discovers, it's everywhere. Skin color affects not only White and Black communities but Mexican and other Latino cultures and most Asian cultures. Tharps summarizes the history and science of skin colors ably, but the heart of her book are the hundreds of anecdotes she's collected from families.

Some of them are horrifying: the whiter-skinned father suspected of having kidnapped his own darker-skinned children; the mother assumed to be her lighter child's nanny; the darker-skinned children whose parents poisoned them with skin whiteners and pinned their noses with clothespins. But, as Tharps discovers, the story is far from "white is right, black stay back." Lighter people often want their children to have more color so that they'll be able to fit more easily into their chosen race, and among multicultural families the favored skin color is brown.

What do people want? "People universally want something different [than white skin]: to belong." To belong to a family and a culture; to belong without explaining or needing to insist; to be seen as themselves and not through a haze of assumptions. It's the kind of goal that could save lives.

If you have the slightest interest in American cultural complexity, read this book. A short, approachable book with a good bibliography, it's worthwhile reading to anyone from high school onward. Highly recommended to multicultural families, of course, and though Tharps restricts herself to nuclear families, blended and adoptive families will find value here as well.

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### **Lizzie says**

Interest book that explores the tension between race and color, and the idea that racism is not quite the same as colorism. People are discriminated against based not just on race but on color. In practice, this means that light-skinned blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and others face less racism than dark-skinned people in the same group. She does a good job of a brief exploration of colorism in several major racial/ethnic groups - African American, Asian & Asian American, Latino/Hispanic, multi-racial, and white. It is quite compelling to read the origins of colorism across all the ethnic groups.

One of the things that was most fascinating is that while colonial oppression led to the favoring of light-skinned people as they were closer to "white" in most cultures, in Asian light-skinned favorability began before Western oppression.

The book explores the history in each group, and then several stories that reveal the complexity of colorism. The book focuses on families with biological children who may be different shades of color and how that plays out in family and societal dynamics.

Interesting read for sure!

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## **Grady McCallie says**

I'm grateful to have received this as an advanced readers copy.

This book takes a look at colorism - bias for or against people on the basis on skin tone - among families in Black, Latino, and Asian communities across America. It includes some discussion of the broader problem of colorism in American society, but the starting and ending focus are dynamics within families where kids and parents have a range of different skin tones. Colorism is not a slippery concept, but something about Tharps' treatment of it is. I think it's that so many of her interviewees maintain that although they've faced bias in the world, they didn't face it within their own families. She finds a few people who were deeply hurt by explicit or implicit messages that their dark skin was undesirable. But a bunch more said they were not particularly affected, that their families never made an issue of it, and they feel well-adjusted as adults.

The chapter on Asian families struck me as the weakest, awkwardly mashing together South- and East-Asians despite major cultural differences. This chapter also got lost for a while weighing the extent to which colorism has always been an inherent feature of these societies versus a side effect of European colonial rule. That could be an interesting question, but it's far afield from the point of the book, the way families handle skin color variations today.

It's worth noting that I come to the book as a white man with no great diversity in my immediate family, so while the book was fascinating, I don't have much personal experience against which to ground-truth Tharps' insights. On the other hand, the majority of my friends 'of color' are children of multiracial relationships, and/or themselves have multiracial children. In that sense, the issues Tharp addresses here should affect a lot of my friends. It's not something I've heard folks talk about, but then that's one of her observations, that colorism isn't talked about much because it makes a lot of people uncomfortable. Ultimately, Tharps' conclusions are ambiguous: colorism needs to be talked about openly, or maybe she's unnecessarily concerned about her resilient, biracial kids; it's normal to want to share features of our identities with our children, but also important to raise them to be happy as themselves, but also needful to help them understand how the world will see them. Because of that ambiguity, I can't say the book left me with a clear message about colorism, but reading the variety of experiences her interviewees have had - good and bad - has certainly broadened my sense of the varieties of human experience, and for that I'm grateful.

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## **Nelson says**

This is a chatty, informal, journalistic take on the issue of color in America. Tharps rightly recognizes the increasing inability of assigning phenotypes reliably to race. Indeed, thinkers are now (and have been for some time) questioning the utility of the 'term' race at all. So Tharps' effort to think through issues of color, in particular what she terms 'colorism' is welcome. Much of the text is comprised of anecdotal evidence from different people with mixed backgrounds, explaining how they did or did not learn to cope with the problems of color as they presented themselves, especially in families with members of different hues. There are chapters on colorism in black, Latino, Asian and mixed race families. While many readers will no doubt cozy up to Tharps' no-nonsense style and collection of anecdotal histories, others (including the present reader) will long for a bit more academic rigor in the treatment of the subject. Tharps' text does consult

various experts in this emerging field and her list of works consulted offers a destination for those who find themselves looking for more. Imagine that for many readers however, this will be a welcome, brisk and readable introduction to a topic that we are no doubt going to be hearing a good deal more about in the coming years.

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### **Debbie says**

This book was written by a woman in a "mixed race" marriage and whose children are all different shades of light to brown. She's interested in "colorism"--the cultural preference for lighter skin--and how looking different from one or both parents affects the children. She explored "mixed-race" marriages as well as variations found within "same-race" marriages. She looked at historical preferences for appearances in these cultures and interviewed children and parents in families where the children don't look like they "belong" to the parent. She's interested in how that effects family dynamics and what methods were used to bring up emotionally healthy children.

I found the stories interesting, but they weren't as useful as I'd thought. What worked for one family was sometimes the exact opposite of what worked in another. My newborn niece looks like her mom but not her dad (who is my brother). My sister-in-law had been hoping for children looking more like my brother. As her side of the family had a preference, I'd hoped to learn more about these dynamics. I guess this book points out that feeling like you belong is important in family dynamics, which I've found true even growing up in a "we look alike" family.

I received this ARC as a review copy from the publisher through Amazon Vine.

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### **Barbara White says**

What a fascinating book! Lori Tharps not only shares how colorism has affected her own life, but shares how other families deal with different colors in their families. This is an eye-opening book that I feel would be a great read for high school students to learn about diversity and how it can work within the confines of an individual family.....and beyond. Thanks to Goodreads First Reads, Beacon Press, and Lori Tharps for a copy of Same Family, Different Colors. I look forward to reading more by Lori.

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### **John says**

Review to come.

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### **Gloria says**

An amazing book that I am so glad I read. I have read other books by Lori L. Tharps and this was a different type of book than I usually read. The author was definitely thinking about her children and how to best talk with them about this topic. Having read many books on Slavery and the impact on our lives it was interesting to read about different cultures and how they think about color and their family's different hues. The information was at time overwhelming but eye opening at the same time.

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My Father grew up in the South and he faced many obstacles and prejudices but he did not teach that to his children. He wanted the best for us so he stressed education and commitment to what you wanted to do in life. My Mother was also from the South and she also never made an issue of the different hues of her children. It was equal love for us all and I am grateful for that.

I am 61 years old Black American Woman and never thought or noticed that my sisters and brothers were a different hue from me. We were just family with different personalities.

My husband is lighter than me and could be mistaken for someone from the Middle East, but both of his parents are Black American raised in the South. Our son is a mixture of both our hues and people often ask him if he is from the Islands. Such a strange thing to ask but I guess that goes to show that people see you first and talk to you later.

I have taken some lessons from reading this book and plan on letting all I know about this book. Hopefully the future will hold a different understanding of Colorism and Racism leading to the elimination of both.

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### **Ms. Reader says**

I received this book from Goodreads First Reads in exchange for an honest review...

This is a fantastic book for blended families, who come from different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicity. Coming from a very large family (we are white, but I have one niece who is part-black and another niece who is part-Hispanic), this book gave me an incredible insight! It is very well-written and well put together.

I highly recommend this book.

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