



Attitudes toward Persons with Albinism among a Sample of Barbadian and Trinidadian Nationals

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The paper explores the attitudes toward albinism among a sample of Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals. The sample of 300 nationals of Barbados and Trinidad consisted of 100 males and 200 females in the 10-30 (n=141); 31-50 (n=97); and 50-75 (N=62) age ranges were chosen as a purposive non-random sample. They completed the Attitude and Behaviour Questionnaire towards persons with Albinism (ABAQ). Factor analysis revealed the factor structure of the Attitudes and Behaviours toward Albinism Questionnaire. The factors of misconception, sympathy, and empathy were identified and the data analysed to assess attitudes toward persons with albinism. . There were nine questions on interaction with persons with albinism and a comment section which revealed through interpretational analysis some underlying feelings by the respondents about albinism. The sex and age categories were analysed to determine any significant differences. The finding suggests that there was positive regard for persons with albinism. Recommendations emanating from the research were advanced.

Keywords: Albinism, attitude, misconception, sympathy, empathy, Jennifer, Deanne, Ford

Introduction

Albinism is a congenital disorder that, affects people from all races. Most children with albinism are born to parents who have normal skin, hair and eye colour for their ethnic backgrounds (Oetting, 1998). The prevalence of all forms of albinism varies considerably worldwide but an overall estimate is that one in 20,000 people worldwide is born with one of the five types albinism. The worldwide estimate is that one percent of the population carries one of the six (6) types of albinism gene, which is on either chromosome 9, 10, 11, 13, 15 or X and when inherited from both parents is responsible for the manifestation of albinism (National Organisation for Albinism and Hypopigmentation 2004a).

People manifest many different hues, from black to brown to white and shades in-between but the genetics behind this spectrum of skin colours have continued to be an enigma. The chief determinant of skin colour is the pigment melanin, which protects against ultraviolet rays and exists in cellular organelles called melanosomes (NOAH, 2004a). The word “albinism” refers to a group of inherited conditions when people have little or none of the pigment melanin in their eyes, hair, or skin. They have inherited altered genes that do not make the usual amounts of this pigment melanin (NOAH, 2004a). The focus of this study is to explore the attitudes toward persons with albinism among a sample of Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals in order to identify any physical and psychological problems that these attitudes may initiate.

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The formation of attitudes and behaviours toward persons with albinism that result are described in this paper. Research on attitudes toward albinism in the urban area of Soweto, South Africa, suggested a continued belief in the mystical powers of people with albinism and professes that when people with albinism die, they vanish (Kromberg et al., 1987). In contemporary media and literature, this death belief is represented in the 1995 film 'Powder', in which a child born with albinism after his mother is struck by lightning is assumed to have mystical powers that result in his vanishing after death (Luna, 2004; Murtha, 1998; NOAH, 2004b). Recently, the controversial film 'The Da Vinci Code' featured a person with albinism as one of the villainous characters.

Witkop (1975) claims that historically, people with various depigmenting conditions, including albinism, have occupied a spectrum of social positions, ranging from outcasts to demigods. Montezuma, Emperor of the Aztecs at the time of Cortez's conquest, maintained a museum of living human biological curiosities; prominent among these people were numerous persons with albinism. Among the San Blas, an Indian group in Mexico, persons with albinism are treated as semi-outcast and are not allowed to marry (Cress-Welsing, 1990).

In the Caribbean, the most popular person with albinism is Winston Foster from Jamaica, more popularly known by his alias of 'Yellowman'. He was born in 1956 and placed in an orphanage. In Jamaica, largely because of the lack of knowledge of the condition of albinism, he was treated with hostility and scorn. He had no one to give him any support and faced a youth fraught with hardship. It was while he was institutionalised that he nurtured a singing career. In recent years, 'Yellowman' suffered with throat and skin cancer, but like the struggles of his earlier days, he has not let these difficulties stand in the way of his aspirations. In spite of the cancer, 'Yellowman' continued his singing career and has become a calmer, more conscious singer, using his lyrics to give the message of tolerance. (<http://www.globalrhythm.net/print.cfm?rubricarticleid=943>)

Psychological Perspective

Erikson (1959) posits that the social environment combined with biological maturation provides each individual with a set of crises that must be resolved. The individual is provided with a sensitive period in which to negotiate successfully each crisis before a new crisis is presented. The results of the resolution, whether successful or not, are carried forward to the next crisis and provide the foundation for its resolution. The crisis for a person with albinism affects them from birth because of the society's mistrust of the mother and the doubt over the paternity of the child (NOAH, 2005). In addition, the ignorance and lack of understanding of the phenomenon continue throughout a person's life as they encounter new situations in their lives (Erikson, 1963).

According to Erikson (1963), adolescents are extremely sensitive about their appearance and this fosters considerable anxiety and self-doubt. Erikson's (1963) psychosocial theory posits that ego identity is a basic sense of who we are as individuals in terms of our self-concept and self-image. In adolescence, our improved cognitive powers allow us to analyze our roles, identify inconsistencies and conflicts in them, and restructure them in forging an identity. Sometimes we abandon earlier roles; sometimes we establish new relationships with parents, siblings and peers (Craig, 1999).

Erikson (1963) sees the tasks of identity formation as the major hurdle that adolescents must cross in making a successful transition to adulthood. Ideally, adolescents enter adulthood with a stable and consistent sense of who they are and how they fit into society. It is during the

period of adolescence that a child will be striving to integrate different roles into one single consistent identity. Teenagers with albinism are especially confused at this time, and find adjusting to life among their peers a little more difficult (Murtha, 1998; Tylor, 1987). Waugh (1999) claims that if the person with albinism feels that he or she is perceived to be different, it can lead to an immense effort to act as 'normal' as possible. This can result in denying altogether that one has albinism and losing touch with a very important part of one's self. A sense of identity helps give direction, purpose and meaning to life (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968; Waterman, 1985) and children with albinism sometimes have difficulty forming this sense of identity because of the myths, stigmatisation and misconceptions about albinism (Landau, 1998; Waugh, 1999).

Attitude

The term attitude refers to people's evaluation of virtually any aspect of the social world (Baron, Byrne & Branscombe, 2006; Olson & Maio, 2003; Petty, Wheeler & Tormala, 2003). Bagley, Verma, Mallick and Young (1984) posit that attitude is the predisposition of the individual to evaluate some symbol or object or aspect of his world in a favourable or unfavourable manner including the affective or feeling core of liking or disliking, and the cognitive or belief elements of the attitude (Baron et al., 2006).

Attitude, according to Eagly and Chaiken (1998), is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour. The two main elements are the attitude object and the tendency to evaluate, where the attitude object can be anything that a person discriminates or holds in his or her mind. The tendency to evaluate is not directly observable but intervenes between certain stimuli and responses. This experience manifests in certain attitudes, which are divided into three components. The three-component model of attitude assumes that attitudes are a combination of three distinguishable modes of experience and reactions to an object: affective, cognitive and behavioural. The affective component entails emotions and feelings elicited by the attitude object; the cognitive component consists of beliefs about the attitude object; and the behavioural component comprises actions and behavioural intentions directed at the attitude object (Hewstone & Stroebe, 2001).

People can have favourable or unfavourable reactions to issues, ideas, specific individuals, entire social groups and objects. Priester and Petty (2001) claim that our evaluations are often mixed, consisting of both positive and negative reactions. Armitage and Connor (2000) posit that ambivalent attitudes are easier to change than those that reflect a uniform position on an issue; as a result, behavioural responses tend to be unstable when attitudes are mixed. Baron et al. (2006) opines that when attitudes are ambivalent they are more susceptible to change, compared with when they are uniformly positive or negative. Attitudes are formed through social learning where our views are acquired in situations in which we interact with others or simply observe their behaviour (Baron et al., 2006).

The salient features of albinism invoke a variety of positive and negative attitudes towards persons with albinism, and about them by self and others. Ehrlich (1973) defines the concept of prejudiced attitudes as an interrelated set of propositions about an object or class of objects that are organized around cognitive, behavioural, and affective dimensions. A modern view claims that attitudes are our evaluations of any aspect of the social world that we acquire through social learning, social comparison, exposure to the mass media and identification with a group (Baron et al., 2006).

Attitudes that persons hold about albinism suggest a lack of knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon as some of the studies reviewed for this paper reveal. Research by Kromberg et al. (1987) found that the birth of a baby with albinism seems to cause a delay in maternal attachment and sadness similar to that described in connection with the birth of an infant with other congenital disorders. In support of this delay in maternal attachment, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978) found that when a baby dislikes being touched or has a disability like blindness, mutual attachment is at risk. The baby with albinism is born legally blind and different in appearance from the family, if the caregiver or mother does not initiate attachment there are implications for attachment and the future relationship.

Literature Review

This literature review presents research as it relates to attitudes toward persons with albinism concerning the myths, stereotypes, language and the impact on the social and emotional well being of persons with albinism. A critical review of research literature about albinism by Estrada-Hernández and Harper (2006) revealed that public attitudes toward albinism reflected a general lack of information and a related degree of negativism. Another study by Enzeilo (1989) suggested that there were usually unkind attitudes expressed towards albinos. Lund and Gaigher (2002) suggested that the most serious problem experienced by people with albinism was poor eyesight. However, persons with albinism felt that social problems such as being treated badly by parents, being shy, being subjected to name calling and feeling excluded in mainstream schools made their lives unpleasant.

In the case of albinism, individuals are at risk of isolation, because the condition is often misunderstood. Social stigmatisation can occur, especially within communities of colour, where the race or paternity of a person with albinism may be questioned (Landau, 1998). In addition, social attitudes can affect how persons with albinism perceive themselves and evidence suggests that for a child to be socially competent he or she needs to have a positive self-concept and demonstrate socially acceptable behaviours. Self-esteem influences a child's interaction with peers, and this influence can be either positive or negative (Palmer, 2007). According to Kenrick, Neuberg and Cialdini (1999) self-esteem is the specific attitude we have toward ourselves. This attitude can be favourable or unfavourable thereby creating high or low self-esteem respectively in persons. Persons with albinism are constantly re-evaluating themselves in order to fit in and be accepted in society.

A study by Lund (2001) indicated that if teachers, who are well-respected community members, are well informed about albinism, they will influence local perceptions and attitudes toward albinism. Lund (2001) opines that the distinctive appearance of persons with albinism has a powerful impact on their lives from birth until death. They are always conspicuous, but not always 'seen' as individuals. Additional knowledge about their albinism should increase the self-esteem of those with the condition, enhance their self-image, improve their health prospects and empower them to counter negative attitudes within society. This would enable them to cope better in a society where their acceptance in the black community and even within their own family may be questioned. The recognition that albinism is found world-wide, in every population group, would help them come to terms with their place in society and develop a confident sense of self.

A study was conducted by Lund and Gaigher (2002) of thirty-eight children with albinism, from a special school in the Limpopo province in Africa which recruits primary school children with visual impairment from a wide rural area of the northern province of South

Africa. It is near the Tropic of Capricorn at an altitude of 1230 metres, with an average of 8.5 hours of sunshine per day, leading to high levels of ultraviolet (UV) radiation throughout the year. Of the 131 pupils at the school, 112 or 85.5 percent had albinism. Children in their sixth year at school and more completed a written questionnaire in English with a translator available if required, detailing socio-demographic, educational and health information, as well as protective measures adopted to manage their condition. In this study, only children old enough to express their views in English were included (Lund, 1998, 2001). The participants were asked about their perception of albinism and its causes. Each pupil was examined on a sunny day in autumn, to record cases of sunburn, facial skin lesions and the type of clothing worn.

Lund and Gaigher (2002) concluded that there was an acute lack of information about the causes and consequences of albinism. They posited that any health strategy or intervention programme should not only be geared towards alleviating the skin and eye problems so prevalent among people with albinism, but should also consider the social and psychological problems resulting from the striking difference in appearance between normally pigmented people and those with albinism. In African communities, where traditional explanations concentrate on the misfortune of illness or deviance rather than on a biomedical explanation of its physical causes, such 'deviant' appearances can impact negatively on the socialization of a child with albinism. Intervention programmes that work effectively in western societies cannot be duplicated in non-western societies without taking into consideration those cultural values that influence perceptions and actions about health and disease (Lund & Gaigher, 2002). The foundation for a lifetime of self-esteem and inner strength is being prized and valued as a whole person (Waugh, 1999), and anything that decreases that self-esteem devalues the person. Persons with albinism who feel isolated and different because of people's reaction to them may experience low self-esteem.

Language

Language can shape ideas and create reality. Sometimes the word 'albino' is used hurtfully and many feel it is dehumanizing to refer to a person in terms of a condition. The preferred terms 'person with albinism' and 'people with albinism' put the person first and the condition second (NOAH, 2005). However, for this research while the preferred term is person with albinism the word 'albino' is used sometimes in context where the word 'albino' makes the argument more poignant. In South Africa, persons with albinism who were interviewed by Richard (2000) about their albinism related that language could offend when used in hurtful names as 'Inkawu' when translated means monkey. Another interviewee in the study by Richard (2000) said that because of the absence of sunscreen lotions in rural Malawi, many persons with albinism develop lesions and people laugh and call them 'napweli' or translated means tomato with black spots. Yet another interviewee in the same interview said that the tens of thousand of southern Africans living with albinism have experienced discrimination and abuse and are often regarded as unnatural and even cursed. Albinism is a lifelong curse as white-skinned men in black society are shunned and feared as the products of witchcraft, taunted by children and drunks as 'peeled potatoes', 'monkeys' and 'ghosts'. Some societies in Africa used to sacrifice albinos to idols, banish them from villages or throw them into forests at birth (Richard, 2000).

Myths and stigmatisation

A myth is defined as an unusual traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the worldview of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1988). In the case of albinism, many of the myths surrounding the condition suggest that persons accepted the stories told about explanations as to the origins and features of albinism.

Goffman (1987) argues that society establishes categorizations, where certain characteristics are considered normal within a category, the outcome can be referred to as social identity. According to Goffman (1987), social identity is based on first appearances, and occurs through mixed contacts in social situations where stigmatised individuals are in contact with non-stigmatized individuals. Our anticipation of others, our assumptions as to what the person is like, is based often on these first appearances. Goffman distinguishes between people who are discredited and people who are discreditable. Goffman (1987) further describes three types of stigma. The first one is the abominations of the body, like physical deformities, the second are the blemishes of individual character, and the third one is the tribal stigma, referring to race, nationality and religion. A stigmatised person is perceived as a victim who is inferior or someone who is not quite human. In accepting Goffman's definition of a stigma, persons with albinism fall into the group that he calls discredited persons whose differences are evident on the spot.

The study by Lund and Gaigher (2002) reveals that albinism is projected as a condition still deeply immersed in myths and superstition resulting in the stigmatisation and rejection of affected people. It also discloses a physical environment, which is preventing rather than supporting people with albinism from reaching their potential. The myth described in the study by Lund and Gaigher (2002) is that albinism is the result of witchcraft. Myths of this kind suggest that families with babies that have albinism are victims of witchcraft, which has led to the baby being born with albinism. The three persons with albinism in the study by Ezeilo (1989) included interpersonal, especially heterosexual, problems and society's unkind attitude as disadvantages of their albinism. These persons with albinism admitted that they found it hard to make and keep relationships.

Machipisa (2003) interviewed five persons with albinism and they revealed that there is a traditional belief that if you sleep with an albino woman, you will be cured of HIV. The term 'sleep with' means having sexual intercourse, which results in the person with albinism being exposed to the virus that causes AIDS. This modern day myth about albinism and HIV creates further risk to persons with albinism. Another myth revealed in this interview was that there is a belief in Zimbabwe that if a pregnant woman looks at a person with albinism, she will give birth to a child with the same condition unless she spits on her stomach. The belief is that this action erases any curse placed on the baby in the womb, because of the encounter with the person with albinism (Machipisa, 2003). In a journal article, a young member of the Albinism Society of South Africa makes a plea for understanding about albinism. She opines that persons with albinism are also human beings who just lack pigmentation (Mametsa, 2007).

Attitudes, tales and myths have developed and changed over centuries. One story suggests that albinism is the product of a Negress-gorilla or a Negress-water spirit mating. In some places in South Africa today people with albinism are still referred to as 'nkau', which means monkey. Other myths about albinism refer to blessings as well as punishments, and skills in sorcery as well as healing (Kromberg et al. 1987).

In addition, Waugh (1999) reveals that the media, including literature and film, have contributed to stereotypes of albinism. Some of these characters can be seen in the films like 'Albino', 'Foul Play', and 'The Time Machine' where albinos were the bad guys. It still goes on today in

movies like 'Die Another Day', 'Star Trek: Nemesis' and 'The Matrix: Reloaded', where characters are portrayed with questionable personalities.

Michael McGowan, a person with albinism, who heads NOAH, makes a plea for a better deal for persons with albinism. McGowan advises that the Da Vinci Code is the sixty-eighth film since 1960 to feature an evil albino. It is an incredible statistic when you consider how few albinos actually make it to the silver screen, the proportion of them being depicted as intent on murder and destruction is remarkably high. The problem is that there has been no balance because there are no realistic, sympathetic or heroic characters with albinism that you can find in movies or popular culture. His plea like those of others with albinism is "*stop making us out as mystical freaks and unconscionable assassins*" (Elsworth, 2006).

Unfortunately, the persons who have perpetuated many myths about people with albinism are those who have never met someone with albinism or know anything about albinism. Landau (1999) states, that some people have believed these often unrealistic untruths whole-heartedly. Landau (1999) posits that referring to a person by a distinguishing genetic trait makes that trait the most important thing in a person's life. She further posits that this should not be the case with albinism since human beings are far too complex to be identified by a single aspect that has nothing to do with their intelligence, curiosity, sense of humour, artistic ability, or thoughtfulness (Landau, 1999).

Research by Gaigher et al. (2002) revealed that it is the social context, as much as, and sometimes more than the physical condition, that largely structures and limits the lives of people with albinism. The McBride and Leppard (2002) study found that the use of hats to relieve the heat, glare and sun initiated some ridicule and embarrassment to the wearers, creating further isolation.

Socio Emotional Issues

Waugh (1999) posits that a strong emotional response is a normal part of living, growing, and intellectual development. Since suppressed emotions are often turned inward and causes stress, depression and physical maladies, it is very important to develop healthy ways to express and integrate these emotions. Therefore, it is necessary to recognise feelings and determine their source. Along with the external influences of society, every person has a vital and essential emotional response to their personal experiences with albinism. These personal responses shape who they are and how they adapt to their albinism and will occur throughout life because of the many challenges and frustrations the condition presents.

Neither the public nor those with the condition agree on the issue of whether to identify albinism as a disability. This ambiguity creates a problem in the language used to talk about albinism and the accessing of funding for persons with albinism. The identification of albinism as a disability is complicated further by the concept of legal blindness, which is defined by a visual acuity of 20/200 or higher in the better eye with correction. Only some persons with albinism fit the legal category of visual impairment yet, in spite of varying visual acuity, many of the problems experienced by those with albinism remain similar to those with visual impairment (Waugh, 1999). Braathen and Ingstad (1986) found that in Malawi people with albinism are considered, and consider themselves to be disabled.

Social attitudes toward albinism are often similar to those experienced by other disability and minority groups. These attitudes include a lack of understanding, fear of the unknown, and prejudice based on appearance (Baron et al., 2006). Albinism is a unique condition and it is this uniqueness that has led to separateness and isolation for many people with albinism. Waugh

(1999) claims that a common myth is that people with albinism must have red eyes but people with albinism usually have blue or grey eyes, which appear reddish in certain types of light because the blood vessels are not masked by the pigment melanin. Consequentially, those with albinism have inherited a legacy of irrational notions about themselves.

Albinism can have an especially negative effect on young people of all races. However, especially in African American families, the child with this conspicuous colour feels like an outsider (Landau, 1999). In the Caribbean Islands, most of the population is of African descent, so the lack of skin colour is even more conspicuous. It is vital that family members have accurate information about albinism in order to dispel any unpleasant stereotypes they have heard or formed about albinism. There is no single force greater than the family, in helping a child understand and accept his or her self (Waugh, 1999). Albinism often unexpected in a family can be a catalyst for acceptance, understanding, and love that encompasses all family members and each of their individual differences. It is a physical manifestation of uniqueness, with joys and hardships all of its own (Waugh, 1999).

Methodology

Design

This research is exploratory in nature. According to Phillips and Pugh (1998) exploratory research is involved in “tackling a new problem, topic or issue” (p.49) about which little is known. The focus of this paper is to assess the attitudes toward persons with albinism among a sample of Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals.

The following research questions will guide this research:

1. What is the attitude of a sample of nationals in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago towards persons with albinism?
2. Are there any significant differences with regard to the attitude towards persons with albinism:
 - between the Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals?
 - between male and female Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals?
 - between female Barbadian and female Trinidadian nationals?
 - between male Barbadian and male Trinidadian nationals?
 - between male Barbadian and female Trinidadian nationals?
 - between male Trinidadian and female Barbadian nationals?

A cross sectional design was used to collect data from the sample of nationals in the selected countries. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005) claim that the cross sectional design is suitable because different respondents are studied at one point in time. This study employed a multi-method approach, and Campbell and Fiske (1959) call this mixing of different methods a multi-method matrix. However, the idea of mixing moved from seeking convergence to actually integrating or connecting the quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). Recognising that all methods have limitations, researchers felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralise or cancel the biases of other methods.

Target population, sample and sampling procedure

These two countries were chosen because Trinidad represents what is called the ‘big islands’ and Barbados represents what is called the ‘small islands’ of the Caribbean. The researcher lives and

works in Barbados so there was easy access to the participants. The researcher's family of origin still resides in Trinidad and Tobago and her personal experience with albinism was encountered in that country.

The entire sample of 300 persons was a purposive or non random sample and the sample comprised of 120 Barbadian and 180 Trinidadian nationals. Barbados is the smaller country of 270 000 persons and Trinidad and Tobago is the bigger country of 1.3 million persons (CIA World Fact book 2009) hence a smaller group was chosen from Barbados and a larger group was chosen from Trinidad.

Instrumentation

The Attitudes and Behaviours toward persons with albinism questionnaires were administered to a sample of 300 nationals from Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago to gather information on their attitudes toward persons with albinism. The questionnaire contained three demographic questions on age, sex and country of birth. Sex was used as a variable to find out whether there were variations between males and females regarding their attitudes toward persons with albinism. Research by Gavron et al. (1995) suggested that boys with albinism might use coping mechanisms that are less socially positive and that could endanger their physical health. A study Machipisa (2003) purports that female persons with albinism have problems keeping relationships and tended to be single parents.

There were nine questions on attitudes toward persons with albinism consisting of five positive attitudinal statements and four negative attitudinal statements. There were nine questions on interaction with persons with albinism. A comment section was included to garner information from the respondents that the questions did not ask specifically and allow them an opportunity to put their feelings in the response.

Data collection

Three hundred persons were used as a representative sample of the general population in a non-random sampling method. The researcher visited three corporate offices, one in Barbados and two in Trinidad and Tobago and sought permission to conduct the survey. In the corporate office in Barbados, eighteen questionnaires were distributed and collected immediately after completion. The researcher administered and collected forty questionnaires in the two corporate offices in Trinidad and Tobago.

Two campuses of the University of the West Indies were used in this research. One lecturer administered sixty questionnaires to third year undergraduate students on the Cave Hill Campus in Barbados and returned fifty-two. On the St Augustine Campus in Trinidad and Tobago, a lecturer administered one hundred questionnaires to second and third year undergraduate students and returned sixty-eight. The researcher distributed fifty questionnaires to Barbadian men and women in two shopping malls and collected them immediately on completion. Six months later the researcher distributed the remaining seventy-two questionnaires to Trinidadian men and women in three shopping malls and collected them as they were completed. Only willing participants were used in this non-random sample to reduce any perceived bias and complete the survey on attitudes and behaviours toward persons with albinism.

Analysis

Measurement of Attitudes

The attitude questionnaire was rated on a five point Likert scale with a range from one to five where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. A pilot study of the Questionnaire on Attitudes and Behaviours toward persons with albinism was carried out using 30 persons in the general population who were selected in a convenience sample at a shopping mall and on the university campus in Barbados.

Factor Analysis of Attitude Scale

On the pilot study data of 30 Barbadians on the Attitudes and Behaviours toward Persons with Albinism Questionnaire principal component analysis, using varimax rotation was conducted on the nine items that measure attitudes towards albinism. An assessment of the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed using two statistical measures: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic and the Bartlett's test of sphericity. The results of the KMO statistics (.501) and Bartlett's test ($p < .001$) highlighted that factor analysis was appropriate for the data. The Kaiser's eigenvalue rule was chosen to extract the most appropriate number of factors. Factors with eigenvalues above 1.00 were chosen as the cut-off criterion for factor extraction. The results revealed that three factors were effectively extracted from the analysis based on the eigenvalue criterion. These three factors cumulatively explained 66 percent of the variance in the data. Based on prior recommendations (Field, 2005), items with loadings above .40 were retained under their respective factors (see Table 1). A moderate Cronbach alpha of .5116 was revealed on the reliability scale (SPSS11.01 2001).

Factor 1 (Misconception) comprised four items which were, *'I tend to get angry more quickly at people with albinism'*, *'People who look different like persons with albinism scare me'*, *'I tend to talk with albinism in a different tone of voice'* and *'I sometimes feel that people with albinism have been punished by God for something they did'*. This factor explained 33.47% of variance.

Factor 2 (Sympathy) comprised two items which were *'I feel sympathetic toward people who are visually impaired because of albinism'* and *'I assume that people with albinism deserve special consideration'*. This factor explained 18.15% of the variance.

Factor 3 (Empathy) comprised three items which included *'My heart goes out to people with albinism'*, *'I tend to be more patient with people with albinism'* and *'I am more understanding of people with albinism'*. This factor explained 14.84% of the variance (see Table1).

Table 1*Factor analysis of attitudes and behaviours toward persons with Albinism questionnaire*

Attitudinal Items	Factor 1 Misconception	Factor 2 Sympathy	Factor 3 Empathy
1) People who look different (like a person with albinism) scare me	.867		
2) I tend get angry more quickly at people with albinism	.809		
3) I tend to talk with people with albinism in a different tone of voice	.785		
4) I sometimes feel that people with albinism have been punished by God for something they did.	.536		
5) I feel sympathetic toward people who are visually impaired because of albinism.		.871	
6) I assume that people with albinism deserve special consideration.		.680	
7) I tend to be more patient with people with albinism			.811
8) My heart goes out to people with albinism			.595
9) I am more understanding of people with albinism			.535
Eigenvalue	3.01	1.63	1.34
Percentage variance explained	33.47%	18.15%	14.84%

Note. KMO statistic = .501; Bartlett test = 83.793 (df = 36), $p < .001$.

Description of Attitudes and Behaviours

The factor analysis (see Table 1) done on 9 Likert scaled items measuring attitudes and behaviours toward persons with albinism show the three attitudinal factors of misconception, sympathy, and empathy each capturing a distinct dimension of attitude (see Table 2). Hence, the three aggregate measures of attitudes in this study were misconception, sympathy, and empathy.

The mean and standard deviation of the attitudinal factors in Table 2 show that participants from the total sample of Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals demonstrated moderate to high levels of *sympathy* ($M=3.50$, $SD=.75$) and *empathy* ($M=3.08$, $SD=.63$) towards persons with albinism, and demonstrated low levels of *misconception* ($M=1.50$, $SD=.49$) towards persons with albinism. Hence, the participants have an overall positive attitude towards persons with albinism. Interpretational analysis of the interaction with persons with albinism questions revealed positive regard and a desire to be involved in the community by persons with albinism.

Independent samples t-tests were computed to determine whether there are significant differences between the total sample of Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals in relation to their attitudes toward persons with albinism (see Table 2). A statistically significant difference between Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals was found only on the empathy factor, $t(299) = 2.02$, $p = .04$. The Trinidadian participants reported higher levels of empathy than Barbadian participants did towards persons with albinism. Independent samples t-tests were computed to examine differences in the attitudinal factors of misconception, sympathy, and empathy toward persons with albinism between the various sex groups from the two countries.

The male and female Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals in the total sample (see Table 3) did not differ significantly on the attitudinal factors of misconception, sympathy, and empathy ($p > .05$).

The independent samples t-tests revealed a statistically significant difference between Trinidadian males ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.04$) and females ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .72$) on sympathy where the males reported significantly higher levels of sympathy than the females, $t(178) = 2.76$, $p < .01$ (see Table 3). A statistically significant difference between male and female Trinidadian nationals on empathy was also revealed, $t(178) = 4.41$, $p < .01$, where males ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .16$) reported higher levels of empathy than females ($M = 3.10$, $SD = .56$). The male and female Trinidadian nationals did not differ significantly on the attitudinal factor of misconception. The male and female Barbadian nationals did not differ significantly on the attitudinal factors of misconception, sympathy and empathy in this group ($p > .05$) (see Table 3).

Table 2

Means and standard deviations and independent 't' test, on the attitudinal factors for the total sample and of each country sample of Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals toward persons with albinism.

Attitudinal Factors	Total Sample		Barbadian		Trinidadian		‘t’
	N(300)		N(120)		N(180)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Misconception	1.50	.49	1.53	.56	1.47	.44	.98
Sympathy	3.50	.75	3.52	.72	3.48	.75	.45 2.02*
Empathy	3.08	.63	2.99	.70	3.14	.57	

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 3

Means and standard deviations and independent 't' test, on attitudinal factors for the Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals in the various sex groups toward persons with albinism.

Attitudinal Factors										
Country And Sex	(N) (300)	Misconception			Sympathy			Empathy		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	't'	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	't'	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	't'
All Males	52	1.44	.50	.86	3.61	.75	1.16	3.11	.63	.28
All Females	248	1.51	.49		2.48	.75				
BB Males	41	1.42	.55	1.54	3.49	.62	.44	2.91	.51	.97
BB Females	79	1.59	.55		3.55	.81		3.04	.77	
TT Males	11	1.52	.26	.34	4.09	1.04	2.76	3.85	.17	4.41
TT Females	169	1.47	.46		3.44	.72		3.10	.56	

Note. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Attitude

The Attitudes and Behaviours toward persons with Albinism Questionnaire (ABAQ) revealed that there was an overall positive attitude towards persons with albinism in both countries. The combined sample of Trinidadian and Barbadian nationals demonstrated moderate to high levels of *sympathy* and *empathy* towards persons with albinism. Specifically, the Trinidadian nationals

reported more empathy than the Barbadian nationals did towards persons with albinism. The low level of misconception by the Trinidadian and Barbadian nationals suggest some understanding towards persons with albinism.

This overall positive attitude (see Table 3) is different from research by Lund (2001) and Westhoff (1993) who described negative attitudes, discrimination, and lack of knowledge related to the condition of albinism. The interviews by journalist Small (2002a; 2002b) chronicled the issue of albinism in the Trinidad and Tobago press. Some additional television interviews and educational lectures may have contributed to the increased awareness of the nationals of Trinidad and Tobago. The recent exposure of albinism in the Trinidad and Tobago media may account for the higher levels of empathy in the Trinidadian nationals.

There has also been an increase in media coverage on the British Broadcasting Corporation and in the Barbadian media about the use of body parts of persons with albinism to make “get rich quick potions.” In addition, a recent article claims that four Tanzanian men were sentenced to death for the murders of persons with albinism to harvest their body parts (BBC News, 2009). These current news items keep the challenges faced by persons with albinism in the minds of others and increase the awareness of the condition.

This overall positive attitude is important to the development of an identity for these persons with albinism. This development of identity is supported by the view that individuals can perceive themselves differently depending on where they are at a particular moment in time on what is known as the personal-social identity continuum (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1985).

Trinidadian nationals reported higher levels of empathy than Barbadian nationals did towards persons with albinism. The interview by Holder (2000) was the one time the issue of albinism was highlighted in the Barbados press in the past decade during the collection of data for this research. The lack of exposure to persons with albinism may account for the lesser score on empathy by the Barbadian nationals. However, sometimes during the ‘cropover’ festival in Barbados the public is exposed to the talent of two calypso singers with albinism. The response to these persons is usually very positive. The high level of empathy suggests that the Trinidadians may be more aware of persons in society with albinism and have more understanding about the condition. The on going exposure through the media may be responsible for this attitude. Waugh (1999) posits that it is important that persons with albinism feel included in any society.

Male and female Barbadian and Trinidadian nationals did not significantly differ on the attitudinal factors of misconception, sympathy and empathy (see Table 2), suggesting that the positive attitude was not dependent on sex. The nationals in the two selected countries regardless of sex had a positive attitude towards persons with albinism. In spite of the rarity of the condition of albinism, nationals in the two countries did not harbour any negative feelings towards persons with albinism. Culturally Caribbean nationals embrace many different ethnicities and so acceptance of persons with albinism could be an easy prospect.

Barbadian male and female nationals did not differ significantly on any of the attitudinal factors therefore attitudes of the Barbadian nationals were not dependent on sex (see Table 3). Barbadian male and female nationals had a positive attitude towards persons with albinism regardless of sex. The knowledge of the two calypso singers with albinism in Barbados and the music of ‘Yellowman’ from Jamaica may have influenced the positive regard for persons with albinism in Barbados. The recent Barbadian press article about a female schoolteacher with albinism in Tanzania may have raised some awareness to the condition of albinism.

Review of research on attitudes toward persons with albinism revealed that supplying accurate information and some interpersonal contact with those with albinism appeared to result in a change of attitude towards those with albinism (Kromberg et al., 1987). Other research identified negative and uninformed attitudes toward people with albinism (Estrada-Hernandez & Harper, 2006). A comment by Anthony (23M) a person with albinism in this research is as follows: *“People do not understand and are afraid. Treatment is mostly negative. I believe they judge us because of a lack of knowledge.”*

The persons with albinism surveyed accepted that they looked different. They suggested that if people understood that the only difference was their milky white complexion, life might be easier. Research (Kromberg et al., 1992) reveals that different beliefs surrounding albinism were related in part to the effects of visible physical features of the condition of albinism of white skin and hair. A study by Gold (2002) suggests a stigma associated with the absence of skin colour.

Hasanee (2001) reported that people with albinism might experience some social problems. These problems sometimes arise because of the lack of understanding about albinism on the part of others. Persons with albinism may feel alienated because of the different appearance from their families, peers, and other members of their ethnic group.

Summary, Implications and Recommendations

A number of similarities surfaced with the international view on albinism and the participants' view, in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, on albinism as it relates to the attitudes toward persons with albinism. Generally, it was found that in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, the same attitudes toward persons who are different were meted out to persons with albinism. This was due mainly because of their milky light skin colour, which caused them to stand out among a predominantly dark-skinned population in the Caribbean Region.

This research was initiated because of the researcher's experience with her two siblings who were persons with albinism. The intention was to investigate people's attitudes toward persons with albinism. The persons surveyed displayed keen interest in the research and their participation in this research was invaluable.

In the course of this research, the attempts at raising awareness, to a very rare condition existing in some persons were appreciated. The majority of the participants were unsure if persons with albinism had a normal lifespan. The majority of participants felt that persons with albinism had normal intelligence. Only a small percentage of the population felt that persons with albinism were different and even considered them disabled. This view reflects a change in the attitude towards persons with albinism. The dissemination of this information about albinism is necessary in order to increase knowledge and awareness about albinism. The results of this research may initiate and encourage acceptance of people with albinism in the society through education.

The following suggestions emerged from this research:

1. The Ministry of Health in Barbados and the relevant Ministries in the other Caribbean countries can train staff to identify and be aware of the condition of albinism in order to educate parents and assist them with understanding the condition.

2. The Hospital and the Health Centres in both countries and across the region could offer some of Genetic and Emotional Counselling to parents of children with albinism and persons with albinism.
3. There is need for the formation and maintenance of an albinism support group to assist persons with albinism in all areas. The support group should extend to include support for families of these persons. This group can offer an opportunity for persons with albinism to meet and encourage each other and have the support of others.
4. There needs to be an awareness programme in schools and communities with the help of the media to keep the knowledge base about these persons with albinism current. This programme must release information to dispel any misconceptions about albinism.
5. There must be increased acceptance of persons with albinism and a greater tolerance for anyone who may be perceived as different in society.

Future Research

This research has created a deeper quest for knowledge about albinism by this researcher and by some of the participants. There is need for more Caribbean research on albinism to be undertaken. Firstly, there must be a study on prevalence of albinism in the Caribbean islands. Secondly, there must be a longitudinal study with a larger group of persons with albinism in the Caribbean islands to gain a true assessment of the physiological and psychological effects of albinism.

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