



A Journey Through Racial Passing in Novel “The Color of a Lie” by Kim Johnson

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Abstract

This research analyzes novel the *The Color of a Lie* (2024) by Kim Johnson, that focused on racial passing, on how systemic racism shapes both the social process and the psychological impacts experienced by the Greene family, particularly Calvin Greene. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness (1903), this study explores how racial passing functions as a survival strategy within a racially stratified society that privileges whiteness and marginalizes Blackness. The findings reveal that the process of passing unfolds through four interconnected stages: repositioning identity through movement, altering physical appearance and behavior, disconnecting from the Black community, and assimilating into white social and institutional spaces. Each stage demonstrates how systemic racism compels individuals to reconstruct their identities to gain safety and acceptance. The psychological effects include the fractured self, the burden of guilt, the fear of exposure to white society, and the loss of authenticity, reflecting the internalization of racism and the emotional cost of sustained self-denial. Overall, this study concludes that *The Color of a Lie* reveals how systemic racism works by showing that racial passing is both a result of and a challenge to white supremacy. The novel also shows that the search for safety and acceptance often forces people to hide or erase their true identity.

Keywords: *Racial Passing, Critical Race Theory, Double Consciousness, Systemic Racism, Identity, The Color of a Lie*

A. INTRODUCTION

Racism remains a major issue in American society, shaping how people live, think, and define their identities. Even though racial segregation has legally ended, inequality continues through systems that privilege whiteness over other racial identities. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) explain that racism today is often systemic, meaning it is embedded in laws, institutions, and social norms that structure everyday life. This systemic form of racism makes people of color, especially Black

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individuals, struggle to gain fair access to safety, education, and economic stability. Under such conditions, some Black individuals choose to “pass” as white as a way to survive and access opportunities that society denies them because of race (Hobbs, 2014).

Racial passing is not simply an act of deception but a reflection of how deeply racism shapes one’s sense of self. Ginsberg (1996) argues that passing reveals the instability of racial categories, proving that race is something socially performed rather than biologically fixed. Similarly, Wald (2000) describes passing as existing between visibility and invisibility, where individuals conceal their true identity to avoid discrimination. This act represents both a desire for freedom and the emotional pain of denying one’s origins. It demonstrates how systemic racism compels individuals to reshape their identities just to survive in a world where whiteness is treated as the norm of humanity.

In literature, racial passing has often been used to question how identity is constructed under racial hierarchies. Classic works such as Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929) and Brit Bennett’s *The Vanishing Half* (2020) explore how Black characters who live as white struggle with guilt, fear, and internal conflict. Kim Johnson’s *The Color of a Lie* (2024) continues this exploration through the story of the Greene family, who decide to pass as white in 1950s America. Set in Levittown, a segregated suburb built exclusively for white families, the novel depicts how racism determines who is allowed to belong in the so-called “American dream.” Through the eyes of Calvin Greene, the story reveals how racial passing affects not only how others perceive him but also how he perceives himself.

This research employs Critical Race Theory (CRT) to analyze how the process of racial passing in Kim Johnson’s *The Color of a Lie* operates as a response to systemic racism within American society, revealing how racial inequality influences the characters’ decisions and transformation process. CRT, developed by scholars such as Crenshaw (1995) and Delgado & Stefancic (2017), views racism as a permanent feature of social structure that benefits the dominant group. Alongside CRT, this study also applies W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness, which explains how African Americans experience “two souls, two thoughts” (Du Bois, 1903), a divided awareness of seeing themselves through both their own eyes and the eyes of a racist society. Together, these theories reveal the external pressures and internal conflicts experienced by those who pass as white.

By combining these perspectives, this study argues that *The Color of a Lie* portrays racial passing as a survival strategy rather than a personal choice. The Greene family’s decision to live as white reflects how systemic racism leaves them with no real alternative. However, the act of passing also brings deep emotional consequences, including guilt, fear, and the loss of authenticity. Through Calvin’s perspective, the novel shows that while racial passing offers safety, it also erodes a sense of belonging and truth. In this way, Johnson’s work highlights how racism operates not only in social systems but also within the human heart and mind,

exposing the painful cost of survival in a racially stratified world (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Collins, 2019).

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The data for this research was obtained from the novel *The Color of a Lie* (2024) written by Kim Johnson and analyzed using a qualitative descriptive method. The data were collected through close reading of the text to gain a deep understanding of the events, dialogues, and narrative descriptions that illustrate racial passing. The researcher identified and compiled words, phrases, and sentences that show how systemic racism influences the characters’ decision to pass as white and how this act affects their emotional and psychological state. After identifying the relevant data, the researcher focused on events that represent the process and psychological impact of racial passing as experienced by the characters in the novel. The selected data were then analyzed using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness to answer the research questions. In this study, the qualitative method is used to explore how CRT explains racial passing as a response to systemic racism, while double consciousness helps interpret the internal conflict and divided awareness experienced by the characters in *The Color of a Lie*.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Finding

The novel *The Color of a Lie* (2024) by Kim Johnson explores the operation of racial passing to reveal the social and psychological consequences of systemic racism in 1950s America. This research identifies racial passing in the novel through its process, function, and impact. Racial passing in this context refers to the deliberate transformation of identity as a survival response to a racial hierarchy that privileges whiteness and marginalizes Blackness. These acts of passing, though seemingly deceptive, are rooted in structures of oppression that force individuals to reshape their identities to gain access to safety, education, and opportunity. Through the experiences of Calvin Greene and his family, the novel illustrates how systemic racism infiltrates personal identity, producing inner conflict and emotional fragmentation. By examining the representation of racial passing in *The Color of a Lie* through the lens of Critical Race Theory and Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness, this study exposes the psychological division and social alienation that arise when survival depends on denying one’s racial truth.

a. The Process of Racial Passing

1. Changing Community by Relocating

The first stage of racial passing in *The Color of a Lie* begins when the Greene family moves to Levittown, Pennsylvania, a suburban neighborhood that symbolizes the postwar “American dream.” However, behind this image of comfort and prosperity lies a reality of racial segregation, since Black families were not

allowed to purchase homes in such areas. For Calvin, the narrator, the move represents the beginning of a new identity shaped by his father's decision to live as white. This transformation is reflected in the following quotation:

"You'll like Levittown," Mom said. "The neighborhood's beautiful. "You'll have your own yard. Maybe Dad will finally let you get a dog." "Two dogs." Dad flicked the words, gripping the steering wheel. "There'll be room." I'd only accepted moving to Levittown, Pennsylvania, because Robert was out in a township just eleven miles away. It was only after I said yes that Dad revealed his grand plan. Robert couldn't come with us, because Robert was a Red. And Charlotte was gone forever. It was as if my twin siblings had never existed, as if I, too, had ceased to exist. Only to emerge to a new life built on a white lie." (Johnson, 2024:3)

This quotation shows that the Greene family's relocation is not merely a physical movement but an act of survival within a racially divided society. The father's choice to move to Levittown demonstrates his belief that whiteness ensures safety and social mobility. The phrase "*a new life built on a white lie*" reveals the emotional and moral cost of this decision, since to live freely they must hide their true identity. From the perspective of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), this act reflects how systemic racism forces Black families to alter their identities in order to access the opportunities that white Americans receive by default. The segregated design of Levittown itself exposes how racism is institutionalized, determining who can belong and who must remain excluded from the "American dream."

Calvin's reflection on losing his siblings, Robert and Charlotte, adds a deeper layer to this transformation. By pretending that his siblings "had never existed," he symbolically erases a part of his family's Black identity. The move to Levittown becomes both a step toward safety and an act of self-denial. His father's tense grip on the steering wheel signifies not only determination but also fear, the fear of being discovered and losing everything. Through this depiction, Kim Johnson portrays racial passing as the first step of a forced adaptation, in which physical relocation marks the beginning of identity reconstruction. It becomes clear that passing is not a matter of personal choice but a response to structural oppression that defines survival in a white-dominated world.

2. Repositioning Identity

The second stage of racial passing in *The Color of a Lie* focuses on how the Greene family not only changes their outward appearance but also adjusts their behavior, speech, and preferences to align with white social norms. This transformation is more than mimicry—it is a strategy of survival in a world that equates whiteness with safety and success. Every word, gesture, and habit must be carefully controlled to avoid suspicion. Calvin's father enforces this discipline with

strict instructions that illustrate the psychological cost of living under constant fear of exposure:

“Making those friends in the neighborhood should help.” Dad paused. “But don’t get comfortable.” I nodded because there was no arguing to be had. I’d lost all the battles before we arrived. “Good.” He clapped my back. “They ask you about food, music, television, you stick with what we talked about.” He’d been drilling this in me for weeks. He made sure I focused on things that I didn’t hate and were race neutral. Those became my answers—they weren’t deceptions, he’d said. But anything Black I had to swallow. Even Black artists who were played on mainstream white radio stations weren’t allowed. It will open Pandora’s box, he’d said. (Johnson, 2024:22)

This quotation reveals how deeply the Greene family internalizes the rules of white society. Calvin’s father teaches him to erase every sign of his Black identity, even in harmless preferences like music or television. His command, “*anything Black I had to swallow*”, captures the painful suppression of culture and self-expression demanded by racial passing. From the perspective of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), this moment demonstrates how systemic racism forces Black individuals to conform to white expectations in order to access privilege and safety. What appears to be a personal choice is, in reality, a response to structural oppression.

From Du Bois’s concept of *double consciousness* (1903), Calvin’s struggle reflects the psychological conflict of living between two identities. He must constantly monitor his thoughts and actions, knowing that authenticity could expose him to danger. His father’s reminder, “*don’t get comfortable*,” reinforces that there is no true belonging for those who pass. Calvin learns to live through two selves—the self that knows who he is and the self that performs whiteness for acceptance. This continuous self-surveillance fragments his sense of identity, creating an inner tension that mirrors the broader racial divide of American society.

In this stage, altering behavior becomes both a shield and a wound. The Greene family’s ability to blend in ensures their survival, yet it also erodes their connection to their heritage. Johnson uses this portrayal to critique the illusion of the American dream, showing that in a racially divided world, the cost of safety and belonging often demands the loss of authenticity and selfhood.

3. Disconnecting From the Black Community

The next stage of racial passing in *The Color of a Lie* focuses on the emotional separation from the Black community, which becomes one of the most painful consequences of living behind a false racial identity. Passing does not only require the Greene family to change their appearance but also to abandon relationships that

connect them to their past. Their relocation to Levittown, Pennsylvania, symbolizes not only movement across physical space but also the severing of emotional and cultural ties. This loss is portrayed through Calvin's struggle to accept that his new life means leaving behind his best friend and, with him, a part of himself:

"Ray'll be looking for me." I broke my silent protest when the Bucks County sign came into view. Mom leaned across the back seat to touch my knee. "You can call him when we're settled." "What if he asks when I'll be home?" "Calvin," Dad said. "He's my best friend." "You can write letters," Mom said. "Aunt Vera will get them to him." I swallowed hard. An in-between messenger like my nosy Aunt Vera could never be a replacement for friendship, for missing my junior year. "Can he visit?" I gritted my teeth because I knew the answer. I just wanted to make my dad say it. "You know that's not possible." Dad adjusted the rearview mirror so his whiskey-colored eyes could bore into mine. They were always striking against my father's pale skin, which turned a fawn color under the sun." (Johnson, 2024:2–3)

This quotation captures Calvin's internal conflict as he begins to realize the emotional cost of passing. His simple question, "*Can he visit?*", reveals a child's desire to hold on to a friendship that represents honesty and belonging. His father's answer, "*You know that's not possible,*" confirms that racial passing demands isolation and secrecy. The family must cut ties with their Black community to protect their new identity. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), this separation reflects how systemic racism forces people of color to distance themselves from their roots in order to survive within white-dominated spaces. The Greene family's safety depends on their ability to erase evidence of their Blackness, even if it means suppressing love and loyalty.

Calvin's silence at the end of the scene underscores the emotional weight of this loss. His longing for Ray represents not only the end of a friendship but the loss of a connection to his true identity. In choosing security over authenticity, the Greene family reveals the human cost of racial hierarchy: survival built on self-denial. Johnson's portrayal of Calvin's disconnection shows that passing is not freedom but exile, where safety comes at the expense of belonging and truth.

4. Assimilating into White Institutional Spaces

In *The Color of a Lie* (2024), Calvin's experience in Levittown shows that racial passing also involves adapting to white social and institutional spaces. Assimilation becomes necessary for survival in an environment where whiteness defines belonging and moral worth. For the Greene family, participating in community and religious life means performing behaviors expected of white Americans to maintain their disguise. This adaptation reveals how systemic racism

forces individuals to mold their identities according to the standards of a dominant group.

“When the sermon began, my mom’s grip on my hand tightened. I glanced up at her, witnessing her closed eyes and silently moving lips, focused in prayer. I wondered, was she praying for acceptance? For safety? For Charlotte? Or was she simply praying for the strength to endure? I closed my eyes and prayed for the same. Church whizzed by; we fumbled through it. The music was disorienting, and while the sermon preached righteous good acts, it felt flat to my soul. I knew we weren’t included. Not when the congregation would turn into a mob if they knew our truth. It simply didn’t take with me. And as I looked at my mom, I knew it didn’t take with her, either. She clasped her purse and was out of her seat the second church ended.” (Johnson, 2024:10)

This quotation reflects how assimilation is performed through silence and restraint. Church attendance, which symbolizes community for white families, becomes a form of concealment for Calvin and his mother. Her quiet prayer and his awareness that they “weren’t included” reveal the tension between faith and fear. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this moment exposes how racism governs even spiritual spaces, where Black individuals must suppress their identity to gain acceptance. The act of worship turns into a performance of whiteness rather than genuine devotion.

From Du Bois’s concept of *double consciousness*, Calvin’s reflection shows his divided awareness as he sees himself through his own eyes and through the imagined judgment of the congregation. His longing for acceptance clashes with his knowledge that such belonging is conditional. Assimilation, therefore, functions as both protection and confinement—allowing temporary safety but deepening the loss of authenticity. Through this portrayal, Johnson emphasizes that racial passing offers survival, not freedom, revealing how whiteness operates as a gatekeeper of morality and humanity in mid-century America.

b. Psychological Impacts of Racial Passing

1. The Fractured Self

The psychological conflict of racial passing in *The Color of a Lie* (2024) is most vividly portrayed through Calvin’s growing awareness of his fractured identity. Living under a false name and navigating the expectations of a white suburb, Calvin experiences what W. E. B. Du Bois terms *double consciousness*—a divided awareness that forces him to see himself through both his own eyes and the eyes of a racist society. The longer he lives as white, the more his sense of self becomes distorted by the demands of survival.

I'm the great pretender.... I seem to be what I'm not, you see.... I felt the mask I'd been wearing take over me. I knew who I was, and yet Levittown had twisted that all around. I rolled back on my feet. Sweating. "You look pale," Lily said, touching my face. "You okay?" "Think the ride's catching up with me. I need some fresh air." I grabbed her hand, and she linked her fingers in between mine. We stepped outside the barn, and I felt like everyone was watching me. Whispering at how I was pretending to be white. Pretending to be Black.

(Johnson, 2024: 157)

This quotation encapsulates Calvin's realization that the "mask" of whiteness has begun to consume his identity. His admission, "I seem to be what I'm not," signifies the deep psychological burden of sustaining a lie that gradually becomes indistinguishable from the self. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the mask represents the social and institutional forces that demand conformity to whiteness as the price of safety and belonging. Levittown, as a racially segregated space, operates as a mechanism that rewards Calvin's ability to perform whiteness while punishing any trace of his true heritage.

From Du Bois's perspective, Calvin's fear that others see him as "pretending to be white" and "pretending to be Black" illustrates the duality of consciousness that traps him between two worlds. He becomes a fragmented subject—too white to be fully Black, yet never white enough to belong. This tension exposes the psychological violence inherent in racial passing, where the individual internalizes the gaze of both oppressor and oppressed. His exhaustion and paranoia show that passing is not simply deception but a survival strategy that corrodes self-perception.

Ultimately, Calvin's divided self reflects the broader reality of systemic racism that forces Black individuals to negotiate their identity under constant surveillance. The more he performs whiteness, the further he drifts from authenticity. Johnson portrays this inner fracture as the emotional core of the novel, suggesting that the true cost of racial passing lies not only in social alienation but in the quiet disintegration of one's own sense of being.

2. The Burden of Guilt

The emotional cost of racial passing in *The Color of a Lie* (2024) is most powerfully expressed through Calvin's enduring sense of guilt and emptiness. Although passing offers him safety and access to privilege, it also separates him from his community and the authenticity of his racial identity. Calvin's inner conflict mirrors what Hobbs (2014) refers to as a "chosen exile," a condition in which individuals conceal their heritage to navigate a racist society but, in doing so, experience profound emotional and psychological loss. For Calvin, this guilt grows as he realizes that acceptance within white spaces requires him to reject the truth of who he is.

“When I entered school, I heard a quiet buzzing in the air, a stark contrast to the usual raucous voices that echoed through the hall. A group of men crowded the main office, and their presence sent shivers up my spine. I couldn’t tear my gaze away from the scene, and neither could my classmates. With the commotion, a sense of emptiness brewed in the pit of my stomach. While I blended in almost too easily with the white kids, who carried books and greeted me with wide smiles, I felt unseen and disconnected, like a soulless body floating through life. It was as if I were me, but not entirely. I felt like an imposter, a shell of myself. If I hadn’t known it before, I knew it after Sojourner. I’d had enough of playing white.” (Johnson, 2024: 50)

This passage captures Calvin’s psychological conflict as he begins to grasp the hollow nature of his success. His ability to “blend in almost too easily” underscores the paradox of racial passing—he achieves inclusion at the cost of invisibility. The emptiness he describes reflects the emotional toll of suppressing his identity, while his reference to Sojourner, a school that represents his cultural roots, reveals his longing for authenticity. The phrase “I’d had enough of playing white” marks a moment of awakening, a recognition that conformity to whiteness demands self-erasure. From a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective, Calvin’s guilt is not merely personal remorse but a symptom of systemic racism that forces individuals to exchange integrity for survival within an exclusionary social order.

Calvin’s sense of being “a shell of myself” represents the psychological consequence of living a double life. His guilt stems from understanding that his acceptance in white spaces is conditional and built on denial. The act of passing becomes both a means of safety and a source of alienation—a painful reminder that belonging, in a racist society, often comes at the expense of truth. Through this lens, Calvin’s guilt serves as a form of moral consciousness, an awareness that the privileges he gains are inseparable from the injustice that denies others the same access.

In this stage, Johnson presents guilt as the deepest emotional burden of racial passing. Calvin’s unease and self-loathing reveal how racism extends beyond external structures into the private realm of emotion and identity. The cost of passing is not exposure or rejection, but the internalized shame of betraying one’s own truth. His story illustrates how the psychological damage of racism persists long after the external threat subsides—turning survival itself into an act of quiet suffering.

3. The Fear of Exposure

The fear of exposure becomes one of the most consuming psychological burdens of racial passing in *The Color of a Lie* (2024). For Calvin, every action, word, and gesture carries the risk of revealing the truth about who he is. Living in Levittown means performing whiteness under constant scrutiny, where even the smallest slip could destroy his family's carefully built façade. This perpetual anxiety reveals how racism operates not only through external social control but also through internalized fear. The need to maintain secrecy transforms daily life into an act of self-surveillance, forcing Calvin to regulate his emotions, appearance, and behavior to preserve the illusion of safety.

"Looking for an album for my dad." I pointed to the Miles Davis album. I hated disowning the music I'd just convinced Lily was my favorite. I was also beginning to hate Ben. "This?" Ben plucked a few albums out, all Black artists. My stomach sank. Before Ben could make a scene, I shut the conversation down. "It's all hers." Then I left the aisle, dizzy and ready to run. "Wait up, Calvin. Hey, Calvin," Alex called after me. "It's no big deal. She can wait," Ben pressed. "No. It's hers," I called over my shoulder.

... Sweat dripped from my forehead, a nervous kind. I could feel them putting two and two together.... The way I'd bristled at the mention of a Black neighbor being ousted.... I pressed down my hair as if the curls would start showing as soon as they started to think maybe I wasn't white." (Johnson, 2024:64)

This passage vividly portrays how fear becomes embodied in Calvin's physical responses. His sweating, dizziness, and the instinctive act of pressing down his hair reveal the psychological toll of passing. The simple moment of disowning a Black musician becomes a crisis of identity, symbolizing the suppression of self for survival. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this scene exposes how white supremacy enforces control not only through overt discrimination but also through the internal policing of identity. Calvin's anxiety reflects what Du Bois conceptualized as the "double consciousness," in which the self is fractured by the need to see and judge oneself through the gaze of others. His body becomes a site of conflict where authenticity and conformity battle for dominance.

The act of pretending to belong within white society transforms Calvin's inner world into a space of constant vigilance. He cannot express joy, preference, or even casual interests without calculating the racial implications of his actions. The fear of being "found out" corrodes his sense of ease, turning ordinary interactions into scenes of silent terror. His quick denial—"It's all hers"—demonstrates how deeply fear dictates his behavior, forcing him to betray his true tastes and emotions to maintain the illusion of whiteness. From a CRT perspective, this internalized anxiety underscores the psychological violence of systemic racism,

which compels individuals to erase themselves to survive within spaces that exclude them.

In this stage, Johnson portrays fear as both a survival mechanism and a form of imprisonment. Calvin’s cautious behavior and bodily tension reveal how deeply racism infiltrates the psyche, teaching those who pass to monitor themselves before others can judge them. His fear is not irrational; it is the rational response to a world where exposure could lead to social ruin or physical danger. Ultimately, the fear of exposure in *The Color of a Lie* encapsulates the most insidious effect of racial passing—the transformation of identity into a performance of endurance, where survival depends on silence, and truth becomes a risk too dangerous to tell.

2. Discussion

The Color of a Lie (2024) by Kim Johnson presents a powerful depiction of racial passing as both a survival mechanism and a psychological burden shaped by systemic racism. Unlike earlier works such as Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929) or Brit Bennett’s *The Vanishing Half* (2020), Johnson’s novel emphasizes that passing is not an act of deception but a forced response to structural inequality. Through the Greene family’s attempt to live as white in 1950s Levittown, the story exposes how racism is woven into social and institutional life, leaving Black families with limited choices for safety and belonging. Calvin’s internal conflict reflects W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness, as he struggles between authenticity and survival while constantly viewing himself through the lens of a racist society. From a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective, the novel reveals that the pursuit of the “American dream” under white dominance demands self-erasure and conformity. Ultimately, *The Color of a Lie* portrays the emotional cost of passing, showing that survival within a racist system often requires the painful sacrifice of identity and truth.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

After analyzing the forms and psychological impacts of racial passing in Kim Johnson’s *The Color of a Lie* (2024), this study concludes that passing is not a simple act of deception, but a survival mechanism shaped by systemic racism. The novel illustrates how racial inequality forces the Greene family to live under false identities to gain access to safety, opportunity, and belonging within a white-dominated society. Through the perspective of Critical Race Theory (CRT), racism in the novel is portrayed as a structural and institutional force that leaves Black individuals with few options other than assimilation. Meanwhile, W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness explains Calvin’s inner struggle between truth and survival, revealing the psychological split that arises from constantly performing whiteness while suppressing one’s authentic self.

This research identifies two main dimensions of racial passing in the novel: the process and the psychological impacts. The process includes changing community

by relocating, repositioning identity, disconnecting from the Black community, and assimilating into white institutional spaces. Each stage reveals how systemic racism dictates where people can live, how they must act, and what parts of their identity they must conceal. The psychological impacts are equally profound, including the fractured self, guilt, fear of exposure. These emotional consequences show that passing, while offering temporary safety, results in the gradual destruction of identity and belonging.

Through Calvin Greene's experience, *The Color of a Lie* exposes the painful reality of how racism infiltrates both social systems and personal consciousness. The novel highlights that survival within a racist structure often comes at the cost of self-erasure. It critiques the illusion of the "American dream," showing that it remains inaccessible to those whose skin color disqualifies them from belonging. Calvin's fractured sense of identity and persistent guilt embody the long-lasting effects of systemic racism that demand conformity to whiteness as the price for security.

Therefore, this research suggests that future studies on racial passing should further explore how literature portrays the intersection between identity, survival, and morality in racially divided societies. It also emphasizes the need for broader awareness of how systemic racism continues to shape social mobility and cultural assimilation. By understanding the experiences depicted in *The Color of a Lie*, readers are encouraged to question the structures that privilege whiteness and to advocate for spaces where authenticity does not come at the cost of safety.

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