

What's Color Got To Do With It? Skin Color, Skin Color Satisfaction, Racial Identity, and Internalized Racism Among African American College Students

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Abstract

Although skin tone perceptions influence the African American community, less is known about how skin color satisfaction differs across complexion. Employing an intersectionality framework, the current study assessed (a) the relationships between gender, self-reported skin color, skin color satisfaction, and the private regard aspect of racial identity; (b) whether skin color satisfaction moderates the relationship between perceived skin color and racial identity; and (c) whether internalized racism relates to skin color satisfaction. African American college students ($N = 191$) provided their perceived skin color and completed the private regard subscale of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity, the Nadanolitization Scale, and an abbreviated version of the Skin Color Satisfaction Scale. Hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to test most hypotheses. Although skin color was not significantly associated with skin color satisfaction, skin color satisfaction moderated the relationship between perceived skin color and

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private regard. Darker skin African Americans high in skin color satisfaction reported higher private regard than those low in skin color satisfaction. Additionally, internalized racism significantly predicted skin color satisfaction. Psychosociological implications are discussed.

Keywords

colorism, skin color satisfaction, African American, racial identity, internalized racism

It does not take much imagination to understand what generations of being told one is unworthy will do to a group's own validation of its worth. . . . The self-esteem of the Negro is damaged by the overwhelming fact that the world he lives in says, "White is right; black is bad." The impact on the Negro community is to overvalue all those traits of appearance that are most Caucasian. Evidence is clear that in almost every Negro family, the lighter children are favored by the parents.

—Grambs (1965, p. 14)

Although stated 50 years ago, Grambs's observation of the significance of skin color on the well-being of African Americans remains relevant today. Exploring family dynamics, Grambs noted a tendency for African Americans to evaluate themselves and other intragroup members against a culturally shared and hierarchical perception of light skin and Eurocentric facial features (i.e., narrow nose and thin lips) as more positive and desirable than dark skin and Afrocentric facial features (i.e., thick lips and wide noses; Hunter, 2005; Maddox & Chase, 2004). Today, that discriminatory and hierarchical system of skin color preferences is recognized as *colorism*. While attitudes toward certain Afrocentric features have become more idealized—lip and buttock enhancement procedures are being performed at unprecedented rates (Kim, 2014)—skin color remains a polemical and highly evaluated physical attribute, influencing social processes such as economic attainment (Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2006), mate selection (Hill, 2002), litigation (Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004), and body modification (Glenn, 2008).

Across several disciplines researchers have explored the potential for skin color biases to guide intergroup interactions (Gullickson, 2005; Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Robinson, 1992; Wade & Bielitz, 2005). For example, darker skin individuals have been found to experience more racial discrimination (Klonoff & Landrine, 2000), receive harsher legal punishment (Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson, 2006), and be seen as less attractive

(Kaufman & Wiese, 2011; Watson, Thornton, & Engelland, 2010). Anecdotal accounts from examinations of colorism within popularized media also shed light onto colorist driven discriminatory behavior and unfair evaluations of African Americans (CNN, 2012; Harpo Productions, Inc., 2013; Viglione, Hannon, & DeFina, 2010).

Yet despite surging interest in the colorism phenomenon, questions remain as to if and how skin color influences the self-evaluative processes of African Americans. That is, to what extent have negative perceptions of skin color impinged on the salience or development of racial identity attitudes or negative perceptions of self? To date, few scholarly works have (a) measured the degree to which African Americans of various hues are satisfied with their skin color, (b) the extent to which such evaluations influence other self-evaluative processes, or (c) the psychosocial conditions under which skin color satisfaction is fostered.

A PsycINFO search reveals no existing literature has examined skin color satisfaction in relation to racial identity attitudes or identified the potential mechanisms whereby one becomes dissatisfied with their complexion. Such an omission in the literature is puzzling given the historical research that suggests negative perceptions of skin color lead to “Black hatred” and/or identity rejection (Clark & Clark, 1940; Horowitz, 1936, 1939) and the studies that assert the contrary (Baldwin, 1980; Brand, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974; Cross, 1991). For example, findings from examinations of Black children and their preferences for White dolls over Black dolls (Clark & Clark, 1940) have been touted as evidence that self-hatred is inextricably interwoven into the identity of African Americans. However, as Cross (1991) highlights, there is very little scientific evidence to support these claims. By his estimation, assumptions of Black hatred have been based on hasty generalizations from research on children’s identity, not adults, and more egregiously, distort the literature by attempting to substantiate “Black pathology.”

Despite 80 years of skin color research, the dialogue continues as to whether variation in skin tone influences racial identification and perceptions of self. Additionally, questions remain as to whether or not skin tone biases disproportionately affect darker skinned African Americans and females. As such, the objectives of the current study were to (a) examine whether perceived skin color and gender are associated with skin color satisfaction, (b) assess how perceived skin color and skin color satisfaction relate to the private regard dimension of racial identity, and (c) examine the potential influence of internalized racism (e.g., the endorsement of negative race-related stereotypes) on skin color satisfaction.

By employing an intersectionality approach, in which the influence of skin color variation, gender, and race were considered concurrently, the

present study contributes to better understanding the social and psychological implications of skin color among African Americans, and its specific relation to skin color satisfaction and the private regard aspect of racial identity (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). As more information about the antecedents of internalized colorism is needed, this study begins an exploration of internalized racism, a psychosocial factor that may undergird greater or lesser skin color satisfaction.

Race, Skin Color, Gender, and an Intersectionality Framework

To comprehensively assess the nexus of perceived skin color, skin color satisfaction, racial identity, and internalized racism, we employed an intersectionality approach. Intersectionality is a concept that simultaneously considers the influence of multiple social identities such as gender and race, sexuality and race, and so on (Cole, 2009). More recently, it has framed psychological inquiries such that researchers have explored the degree to which various social identities construct unique experiences that otherwise could not be completely understood if these social identities were examined in isolation (Chow, Segal, & Tan, 2011; Poran, 2006).

As highlighted earlier, the intersection of skin color and race can yield differential life experiences for darker and lighter African Americans, and most important, have potentially far-reaching social and psychological implications (Boyd-Franklin, 2006). For example, skin color variation in familial contexts has been shown to exacerbate sibling rivalry, prompt questions of paternity, and to be at the root of painful trauma (Boyd-Franklin, 2006). However, an additional and equally important identity to consider in the context of colorism is gender.

Gender and Race. In several studies, researchers have contended that the psychological effects of skin tone biases are more amplified in the lives of African American women (Hunter, 2005; Keith, 2009; Neal & Wilson, 1989). That is, African American women may, as a result of incongruences between their physical appearance and societal preferences, experience greater emotional and psychological distress than African American men (Hill, 2002). Given the research on the societal objectification of women, and their propensity to equate physical appearance with existential value (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011), the notion that gender may modulate the effects of skin tone biases among African Americans is theoretically supported. However, there is limited empirical support for these claims.

By operating within a theoretical framework of intersectionality, the current study lends itself to better understanding how the intersections of race and skin color and race and gender produce either conflicting or similar reports of skin color satisfaction and racial identity attitudes. Furthermore, by

examining the colorism phenomenon through the lens of skin color satisfaction, the current study moves the discussion of “Black hatred” and the implications of negative self-perceptions within the African American community forward with empirical results.

Skin Color Satisfaction Among African Americans

Skin color satisfaction, being content with one’s skin color irrespective of hue (Bond & Cash, 1992), is an important construct that bears on how individuals evaluate themselves and are evaluated by others (Bond & Cash, 1992; Falconer & Neville, 2000; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992, 2013). Although studies of the construct are sparse, across the scant body of skin color related research, one of the more general assumptions is that darker skin African Americans are less satisfied with their perceived skin color than lighter skin African Americans (Russell et al., 1992; Thompson & Keith, 2001). Such a premise is based in part on multidisciplinary documentations of lighter skin individuals being held in higher esteem (Breland, 1998; Russell et al., 2013), global skin bleaching practices (Glenn, 2008), and colloquially articulated desires to be lighter (Thompson & Keith, 2001). However, such phenomena offer minimal support for the argument that darker skin individuals are less content with their complexions. Because much of our understanding of skin color satisfaction has been informed by anecdotal accounts and/or observations of social norms and behaviors (Golden, 2004; Wilder, 2010), conclusions about the psychosocial effects of perceived skin color have been interpreted with limited allowances. In fact, the dearth of empirical studies that have investigated the potential influence of perceived skin color on skin color satisfaction has left us with an incomplete picture of how colorism shapes evaluations of self and identity across complexion.

Among the few studies that have examined the relationship between skin color satisfaction and perceived skin color, findings have been inconsistent. For instance, Bond and Cash (1992), who developed one of the first scales to measure skin tone satisfaction (The Skin Color Questionnaire [SCQ]), found no significant differences in skin color satisfaction among light, medium, and dark skinned African American women. However, there was evidence of the idealization of lightness. Those who desired a different tone favored being lighter more than being darker and the majority of the subjects believed that Black men found light skin to be most attractive. Skin color satisfaction was also positively related to satisfaction with one’s overall appearance and face. Building on the SCQ, Falconer and Neville (2000) developed the Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (SCSS) and found skin color dissatisfaction to be positively associated with greater body image dissatisfaction. Yet no measures of

self-reported skin color were taken to determine if skin color satisfaction varied across complexion.

Measuring differences in skin color satisfaction among self-reported light, dark, and medium skinned participants, Coard, Breland, and Raskin (2001) administered the SCQ and found the average level of skin color satisfaction among dark skin participants to be significantly greater than that of light skin participants. Such findings run counter to what much of the literature suggests. Paradoxically, dark skin participants who were satisfied with their skin color also had lower self-esteem, which further illustrates the complexity surrounding skin color and self-evaluations. In the most recent exploration of skin color satisfaction and body dissatisfaction, Mucherah and Frazier (2013) examined skin color satisfaction among women across the African diaspora (Africa, the United States, and Caribbean) and found biracial women to be most satisfied with their skin color. Although the results from this study broaden our understanding of the nuanced effects of culture on the manifestations of skin color perceptions and preferences, the authors make conclusions about each population without considering the potential influence of within-group differences in skin color.

Taken together, the previously reviewed studies reveal skin color satisfaction to be an important indicator of overall body satisfaction; however, questions remain as to whether skin color satisfaction is, indeed, more prevalent among African Americans of a specific skin tone. By measuring both perceived skin color and skin color satisfaction, the present investigation attempted to better clarify the relationships between perceived skin color, skin color satisfaction, and other aspects of self and identity. Skin color satisfaction is not the only self-evaluative process presumed to be influenced by skin color. Racial identification has also been hypothesized to differ across complexion.

Skin Tone, Self-Evaluation, and Racial Identity

Limited studies have examined racial identity attitudes in the context of contrasting phenotypic characteristics. Among those that have, similar but divergent constructs (e.g., Black Consciousness [Milliones, 1980], African Self-Consciousness [Baldwin & Bell, 1985], and Nigrescence [Cross, 1995]) were used to offer insight into how racial identity attitudes and physical attributes may interact. For example, Smith, Burlew, and Lundgren (1991) found that women with more African features (i.e., wider noses, darker skin, thicker lips, etc.) were more satisfied with their overall appearance when they reported higher Black consciousness. Among women with fewer African features (i.e., narrower noses, lighter skin, and thinner lips), Black consciousness was not associated with physical appearance satisfaction. Conducting a similar study,

Chambers, Clark, Dantzler, and Baldwin (1994) found that participants with higher African self-consciousness used more positive adjectives in their descriptions of high African feature pictures than did those who were medium or low in African self-consciousness.

Black identity/Nigrescence has also been examined in relation to skin color. Robinson (1992) found pre-encounter attitudes to be negatively correlated with skin color satisfaction for males and females. Immersion-emersion attitudes were also found to be positively correlated with light and dark skinned subjects' desires for darker skin. Such findings suggest the immersion-emersion stage of racial identity development may generate a greater desire for a darker complexion. Coard et al. (2001) also found lighter skin color to be positively associated with higher levels of the immersion-emersion stage of racial identity.

In sum, a small but significant number of studies have examined racial identity attitudes and similar constructs in relation to variations in phenotypic expressions among African Americans. However, the paucity of these empirical inquiries, as well as their mixed findings, points to the need for additional examinations. In the current study, the link between skin tone variation and racial identity is examined through the lens of skin color satisfaction. Moreover, because several of the studies cited (Chambers et al., 1994; Smith et al., 1991) measured skin color as a component of either Afrocentric or Eurocentric features, and not as the variable of interest in and of itself, the current study revisits the relationship between skin color and racial identity attitudes with an explicit and independent measurement of perceived skin color and the private regard aspect of racial identity.

Racial Identity—Private Regard. One of the most widely used scales to measure racial identity among African Americans is the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1998). Derived from the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity, the MIBI consists of four dimensions: salience, centrality, regard, and ideology (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). While salience and centrality refer to significance of race, regard and ideology are related to the meaning individuals attach to racial group membership. Of relevance to the current study is private regard.

Private regard refers to how positively or negatively a person feels about being African American (Sellers et al., 1998). It has been linked to higher levels of self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, personal growth, and personal self-esteem (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). High private regard has also been shown to lower the impact of racist experiences (Smith-Bynum, Best, Barnes, & Burton, 2008), which is especially relevant to the current study, as skin

color has been demonstrated to elicit discriminatory experiences (Klonoff & Landrine, 2000).

To date, no extant research has examined the private regard dimension of racial identity in relation to skin color variation. Despite earlier research suggesting darker skin individuals experience greater feelings of self-hatred, skin color discontent, and racial identity rejection, it remains unclear as to whether or not racial identity attitudes are in fact influenced by complexion. To this effect, understanding the potential degree to which skin color and skin color satisfaction collectively influence how individuals attach value to their racial identity is beneficial. Of additional interest was internalized racism, a psychosocial factor that may underlie skin color dissatisfaction.

Internalized Racism. Researchers have theorized for years about the psychosocial consequences of negotiating and encountering racism in America. As discussed earlier, several hypotheses have emerged that have either pointed to the existence of “Black Self-Hatred” or denied it. Thus, in addition to better understanding how skin color, gender, and race produce differential reports of skin color satisfaction and racial identity attitudes, the current study also sought to examine a factor that may engender skin color dissatisfaction: internalized racism.

The internalization of stereotypes has been defined as either internalized racialism or internalized racism (Cokley, 2002). Whereas internalized racialism is accepting both positive and negative stereotypes about one’s group, internalized racism is the acceptance of only negative stereotypes. The Nadanolitization Scale (NAD; Taylor & Grundy, 1996) has been used to measure both (Milliones, 1980; Taylor, 1990; Washington, 1997). As skin color can activate stereotyping (e.g., lighter skin individuals are more intelligent; Wade, 2008), the current study focuses on internalized racism.

Because internalized racism has been described as an experience of self-degradation and embarrassment of one’s African identity (Watts-Jones, 2002), and as the relationship between skin color and developed feelings of “Black hatred” is still unclear, the current study was interested in examining whether or not internalized racism (i.e., the endorsement of negative race-related stereotypes) can predict skin color dissatisfaction. Although both constructs have received limited attention singly, no extant studies have attempted to consider the two concurrently. Notwithstanding, there is evidence that a correlational link may exist. For example, Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, and Jackson (2010) examined the endorsement of negative stereotypic images of African American women (e.g., “Black women are loud”) and found them to be positively associated with endorsements of colorism (i.e., a preference for Eurocentric physical traits). In light of these findings, as well anecdotal

accounts that identify skin color related stereotypes as a source from which negative perceptions and evaluations of skin color stem (Golden, 2004; Russell et al., 2013), we perceived the measurement of the effect of internalized racism on skin color satisfaction as an important step in identifying the potential mechanisms whereby African Americans become satisfied or dissatisfied with their complexions.

Present Study

Using an intersectionality framework, the current study examined (a) whether perceived skin color predicted skin color satisfaction, (b) whether gender was related to skin color satisfaction, (c) if perceived skin color and skin color satisfaction were related to the private regard aspect of racial identity, and (d) whether internalized racism fosters greater skin color dissatisfaction.

With regard to the question of whether or not the intersection of gender and race amplifies experiences with colorism, we first hypothesized that African American women would report greater skin color dissatisfaction than African American men. Second, taking into account the historical degradation of dark skin and positive evaluations of light skin, our second hypothesis was that darker skin individuals would be less satisfied with their perceived skin color than lighter skin individuals. Moreover, as darker skin individuals have reported greater experiences with discrimination (Klonoff & Landrine, 2001) and are generally perceived less favorably due to colorist practices and beliefs, our third hypothesis was that darker skin individuals would report less positive racial identity regard than lighter skin individuals. However, in light of the potential psychological benefits associated with skin color satisfaction (Bond & Cash, 1992; Falconer & Neville, 2000), our fourth hypothesis was that skin color satisfaction would moderate the relationship between skin color and private regard, such that darker skin individuals high in skin color satisfaction would report more positive regard of racial identity than those low in skin color satisfaction. Finally, as little attention has been paid to the potential psychosocial factors that enhance or reduce skin color satisfaction (e.g., the internalization of negative race-related stereotypes), our fifth hypothesis was that internalized racism would predict skin color satisfaction in a negative direction.

Method

Participants

Participants were 191 African American college students, 116 females (60.7%) and 75 males (39.3%). The mean age was 19.5 years, and the range

was from 17 to 32 years. The sample consisted of 102 freshmen (53.4%), 52 sophomores (27.2%), 22 juniors (11.5%), and 14 seniors (7.6%). One participant failed to report class standing (0.5%). Students were recruited from a predominately White but relatively diverse university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, 17% of the student population was African American.

Measures

Racial Identity, Private Regard. Racial identity was assessed using the six-item Private Regard subscale from the MIBI (Sellers et al., 1998). As one of the three dimensions examined by the MIBI, the private regard subscale denotes how positively or negatively an individual feels about African American group membership. Responses are on a 7-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 for *strongly disagree* to 7 for *strongly agree*. Higher scores reflect more positive racial identity. An example of an item is "I am proud to be Black." Initial reports of reliability were less than ideal, with alphas ranging from .55 to .61 (Sellers et al., 1997). However, over time the measure has revealed stronger reliability coefficients ($\alpha = .76$; Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyễn, 2008). The Cronbach's alpha in this sample was .70.

Internalized Racism. Internalized racism was measured using the Racist subscale of the NAD developed by Taylor and Grundy (1996). The NAD measures the extent to which a person internalizes negative racial stereotypes of African Americans. Construct validity of NAD scores was established through positive correlations with racial identity stages (Cokley, 2002). The scale has adequate reliability ($\alpha = .81$; Taylor & Grundy, 1996). The Racist subscale specifically assesses internalization of racial stereotypes related to mental/genetic deficiencies, sexual prowess, and natural ability (Cokley, 2002). Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 for *strongly disagree* and 5 for *strongly agree*. Higher scores reflect higher internalization of negative stereotypes about Blacks. A sample item is "The Black race is mentally unable to contribute more toward Americans' progress." Cronbach's alpha in this sample was .71.

Perceived Skin Color. Perceived skin color was assessed using the following item taken from the National Survey of Black Americans (Simon Wiesenthal Center, & Market Facts, Inc., 1985): "In terms of skin color, are you . . . ?" The responses ranged from 1 to 6, with 1 = *very dark skinned*, 2 = *dark skinned*, 3 = *medium brown*, 4 = *light brown*, 5 = *very light skinned*, and 6 = *other*.

Skin Color Satisfaction. Skin color satisfaction was measured with items taken from both the SCSS (Falconer & Neville, 2000) and the SCQ (Bond & Cash, 1992). Both scales assess skin color satisfaction, self-perceived skin color, and ideal skin color. For the current study, only items pertaining to overall skin color satisfaction were included. Thus, the adapted SCSS consisted of the following three questions: (a) "How satisfied are you with the shade (lightness or darkness) of your own skin color?" (b) "Compared to the complexion (skin color) of members of my family, I am satisfied with my skin color," and (c) "Compared to the complexion (skin color) of other African Americans, I am satisfied with my skin color." The first item originates from the SCQ, whereas the latter two items were taken from SCSS. Responses are on a 9-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 for *extremely dissatisfied* to 9 for *extremely satisfied*. Higher scores reflect higher levels of skin color satisfaction. This measure has demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .81$; Falconer & Neville, 2000). Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .87.

Procedure

This study was approved by the university's institutional review board. Students enrolled in psychology classes were given the opportunity to enroll in the study and take the online questionnaire through the online SONA system in exchange for course credit.

Data Analytic Strategy

Data was analyzed using SPSS 19 (Brosius, 2011). Preliminary analyses were conducted to screen data for outliers and violations of the assumptions of multiple regression, including linearity, normality, and homogeneity of variance. No outliers were found during preliminary analyses. *t* Tests were computed to examine differences in skin color satisfaction across gender. Correlational analyses were computed to examine relationships among variables. To test the primary hypothesis regarding the relationships between perceived skin color, private regard, and skin color satisfaction, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was computed. Predictor variables were centered to reduce nonessential multicollinearity. Perceived skin color was entered in the first step. The moderating variable, skin color satisfaction, was entered into the second step. Last, the interaction term between perceived skin color and skin color satisfaction was entered into the third step. The dependent variable was private regard. A multiple regression analysis was also computed to determine if internalized racism predicted skin color satisfaction.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix for Variables of Interest.

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Skin Color (Spearman's rho)	—			
2. Skin Color Satisfaction	-.018	—		
3. Private Regard	-.175**	.392***	—	
4. Internalized Racism	.173**	-.265***	-.069	—

** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Results

Participants reported relatively high levels of skin color satisfaction ($M = 7.28$; scale ranged from “1” to “9”) and mid-range levels of private regard ($M = 3.17$; scale ranged from “1” to “7”). In terms of skin color variation, participants reported a variety of complexions: 38% ($n = 73$) of the sample reported their skin color as medium brown; 31% ($n = 60$) reported light brown; 16% ($n = 30$) reported dark; 14% ($n = 26$) reported very light; and only 1% ($n = 2$) reported very dark.

A correlational matrix of study variables is in Table 1. No significant correlation was found between skin color and skin color satisfaction, $r(189) = .018$, $p = .807$. There was a significant inverse correlation between skin color and private regard, $r(189) = -.149$, $p = .040$, and skin color satisfaction and internalized racism, $r(189) = -.265$, $p < .001$. There was also a significant correlation between skin color satisfaction and private regard, $r(189) = .392$, $p < .001$.

Gender Differences in Skin Color Satisfaction

To test our first hypothesis, a between groups t test was computed to assess differences in skin color satisfaction across gender. Although women reported higher satisfaction scores, there was no significant difference between males ($M = 7.03$, $SD = 1.81$) and females ($M = 7.47$, $SD = 1.73$); $t(189) = -1.66$, $p = .098$. Because there was no significant gender difference in skin color satisfaction, gender was not used as a control variable in subsequent analyses.

Skin Color and Skin Color Satisfaction

To test our second hypothesis concerning the relationship between perceived skin color and skin color satisfaction, a multiple regression analysis was computed. This relationship was not significant, $F(1, 189) = .191$, $p = .663$, $R^2 = .001$.

Skin Color, Skin Color Satisfaction, and Private Regard

Our third hypothesis suggested that darker skin individuals would have more negative private regard beliefs than lighter skin individuals. Our fourth predicted that this relationship would be moderated by skin color satisfaction. It was expected that darker skin individuals higher in skin color satisfaction would report more positive private regard beliefs than those lower in skin color satisfaction.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test these hypotheses. Perceived skin color, the independent variable, was entered into the first step of the analysis. The moderating variable, skin color satisfaction, was entered into the second step. The interaction term was entered into the third step. Perceived skin color and skin color satisfaction were centered to reduce nonessential multicollinearity.

The full model accounted for a significant amount of variance in levels of private regard, $F(3, 187) = 16.230, p < .001, R^2 = .207$. Perceived skin color was significantly associated with private regard, $t(187) = -2.260, p = .025, \beta = -.147$, with darker skin individuals reporting more positive private regard beliefs than lighter skin individuals. Higher levels of skin color satisfaction were also associated with more positive private regard beliefs, $t(187) = 4.261, p < .001, \beta = .953$. Additionally, the interaction between skin color and skin color satisfaction was significant, $t(187) = -2.612, p = .010, \beta = -.584$.

The change in R^2 from Block 1 to Block 2 was .155 and significant, $p < .001$. The change from Block 2 to Block 3 was .029 and significant, $p = .010$. A simple slopes analysis was conducted and showed that the gradient of the simple slopes was $-.234$. The t value was -2.616 and $p = .01$. This confirms the hypothesis that the moderating effects of skin color satisfaction on the relationship between skin color and private regard provided unique variance above and beyond the lower order effects. The interaction shows that skin color satisfaction increases more positive private regard beliefs for dark skinned individuals. Dark skin African Americans with high levels of skin color satisfaction reported more positive private regard beliefs than those with lower levels of skin color satisfaction. This effect was not found among lighter skin African Americans (see Figure 1).

Internalized Racism and Skin Color Satisfaction

To test our fifth hypothesis that internalized racism predicts skin color satisfaction, an additional multiple regression analysis was computed, controlling for gender. This relationship was significant, $F(1, 188) = 14.25, p < .001, R^2 = .070$. Greater internalized racism was associated with lower skin color satisfaction.

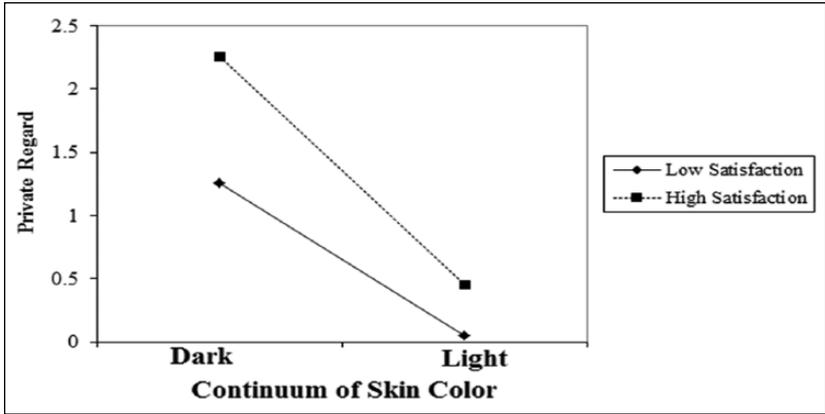


Figure 1. The moderating effects of skin color satisfaction on the relationship between skin color and private regard racial identity.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine the relationships between perceived skin color, gender, the private regard aspect of racial identity, and skin color satisfaction among African Americans. Additionally, we were interested in the moderating effect of skin color satisfaction on relationships between perceived skin color and private regard. Finally, we were interested in whether internalized racism predicts skin color satisfaction. Using an intersectionality framework, we examined how intersections of race and skin color and gender and skin color rendered differential reports of racial identity attitudes and skin color satisfaction. Such an aim was driven by prior research that indicates, inconclusively, that darker African Americans and women experience colorism uniquely.

Due to the historical devaluation of dark skin, we hypothesized darker skin individuals would be less satisfied with their perceived skin color and have less positive private regard beliefs. However, we also believed skin color satisfaction would moderate this relationship such that individuals higher in skin color satisfaction would report higher private regard than those lower in skin color satisfaction. The results revealed a number of significant and a few insignificant findings that are discussed below.

Skin Color and Skin Color Satisfaction

Findings from this study did not support our hypothesis that perceived skin color would predict skin color satisfaction. There were no differences in skin

color satisfaction between darker skin and lighter skin individuals. Nonetheless, the null findings are important in that they shed light on the long-standing debate over whether or not skin color influences evaluations of self. Although colorism literature would lead one to expect darker skin individuals have a greater dislike for their skin tone, the results did not support these claims.

However, this finding must be interpreted with caution. The uneven distribution of participants along the skin color continuum (only about 17% of the sample self-identified as dark or very dark) may have skewed the results. Moreover, as skin color satisfaction was relatively high among all participants, irrespective of skin color, social desirability may have also shaped participants self-reported responses. Perceptions and biased evaluations of skin color have increasingly become the foci of contemporary research; however, African Americans have long understood the history and sensitivity surrounding the issue, and as such, may not have been as inclined to reveal their true sentiments about their complexions. Social desirability may have also influenced how individuals situated themselves along the color continuum. Given the negative affect associated with being "very dark" or "dark," participants may have shied away from identifying as such. Nevertheless, in spite of these potential influencing factors, the results indicate skin color alone is not a significant predictor of skin color satisfaction.

Gender and Skin Color Satisfaction

Another finding that emerged from this investigation is that gender had no bearing on skin color satisfaction, the private regard dimension of racial identity, or internalized racism. With specific regard to skin color satisfaction, this finding marks a departure from earlier works (Hunter, 2005; Thompson & Keith, 2001; Wade & Bielitz, 2005; Wilder, 2010) that found skin color biases to be more salient and to generate more psychological discomfort among females. The finding that the intersection of race and gender did not attenuate nor enhance the effect of perceived skin color on skin color satisfaction could also be explained by the unequal representation of participants along the color continuum. As much of the evidence that supports the notion of a greater negative effect of colorism on females has been rendered from explorations of women who identify as being dark skin (Hunter, 2005; Russell et al., 2013; Thompson & Keith, 2001), the limited number of participants who identified as such likely contributed to why the current study's findings were inconsistent with prior conclusions. Notwithstanding, our results could indicate either a shift in the perception of skin color among African American women or an overgeneralization of past research. In any case, additional

systematic research is needed to better understand whether or not skin color is more essential to the lives of African American women.

Skin Color, Skin Color Satisfaction, and Private Regard

Data from this study did, however, reveal skin color satisfaction to be positively related to private regard. A significant interaction emerged which indicated that skin color satisfaction moderated this effect among darker skin participants. That is, darker skin participants high in skin color satisfaction reported more positive private regard beliefs than those low in skin color satisfaction. This finding, in addition to substantiating our hypotheses, supports the earlier works of Bond and Cash (1992), Falconer and Neville (2000), and Mucherah and Frazier (2013) that identified skin color satisfaction as a barometer of self-perceptions and self-satisfaction among African Americans. Consistent with these studies, the present investigation provides support that being satisfied with one's skin color may be psychologically beneficial, especially for darker individuals. As more positive private regard beliefs have been linked to low levels of depression (Settles, Navarrete, Pagano, Abdou, & Sidanius, 2010) and decreased engagement in risky behaviors (Brook & Pahl, 2005; Chavous et al., 2003), the positive association between skin color satisfaction and the private regard dimension of racial identity builds a persuasive argument for the psychological advantages and importance of being satisfied with one's complexion.

The finding that darker skin participants high in skin color satisfaction had more positive racial regard beliefs than lighter skin participants and darker skin participants low in skin color satisfaction also challenges prior conclusions that darker skin individuals hold themselves in less positive regard and report lower self-esteem than their lighter contemporaries. As previously mentioned, there is a sizable amount of colorism literature that highlights negative social evaluations of dark skin and the potential for these biases to lead to deleterious psychosociological outcomes (Blair et al., 2004; Eberhardt et al., 2006; Hall, 1992; Russell et al., 2013). Yet despite the endorsement of anti-dark/pro-light rhetoric (Maddox & Gray, 2002; Parrish, 1946; Wilder, 2010), darker skin participants high in skin color satisfaction did not appear to be negatively affected. Rather, these individuals seemed to attach value to their racial identity to an even greater extent than lighter skin participants.

Such results call into question prior all-encompassing assumptions about the possible influence of skin color on evaluations of self and identity and, furthermore, highlight the importance of distinguishing between those darker skin individuals who are satisfied with their skin color and those who are not. Does *every* dark skin individual as a result of colorist driven discriminatory

practices perceive themselves less positively than lighter skin individuals? Results from this study suggest otherwise. In spite of their unique intersectional experiences (i.e., biased social evaluations), darker skin participants in this study appeared to benefit from skin color satisfaction, in that they held more positive feelings about being African American. These results were also inconsistent with those presented by Coard et al. (2001) that revealed lighter skin Blacks to have higher pro-Black/anti-White attitudes than darker skin Blacks.

Skin color satisfaction did not equally influence how lighter skin participants attached value to their racial identity, which was somewhat surprising in that skin color satisfaction would not appear to affect individuals of one hue more than others. One possible explanation for this finding is that skin color satisfaction may have been more salient for the darker skin participants than for the lighter skin participants, and as such, more influential. Being satisfied with one's skin tone as a lighter skin individual may be interpreted as reasonable and expected, especially given the value society has placed on those with this particular hue. However, being satisfied with one's skin tone as a darker skin individual, particularly in the face of social degradation, may be viewed as defiant and perhaps even something to be proud of. Evincing by the testimonies of the dark skin women in "Dark Girls," one may endure significant trauma as a result of skin tone biases. To this effect, resisting the internalization of the negative affect attached to dark skin, and ultimately becoming satisfied with one's complexion, may reflect the successful dissolution of an emotional and internal conflict, as well as a progression toward more positive evaluations of self and identity.

Thus, skin color satisfaction among dark skin individuals may hold greater importance and consequently have a greater impact on other assessments of self. However, this interpretation does not mean lighter skin individuals do not experience skin tone discrimination as well. Because there is also evidence to suggest lighter skin African Americans may endure ridicule for not being "Black enough" or wanting to be White (Russell et al., 1992; Wade, 2008), additional research, especially from a qualitative perspective, could serve to better understand how skin color satisfaction manifests differentially across complexions.

Skin Color Satisfaction and Internalized Racism

Findings from the study also supported the hypothesis that internalized racism would significantly predict skin color satisfaction. Although such results appear intuitive, previous assumptions about the effect of negative perceptions of African Americans on skin color evaluations have been largely derived from

anecdotal accounts (Golden, 2004; Russell et al., 2013). To this effect, the current study contributes to the colorism literature in that it offers empirical support for the link between the endorsement of racial stigmatization and decrements in perceptions of skin color. Moreover, such findings align with those of prior research that have found the internalization of negative race related stereotypes to have serious detrimental consequences, such as psychosocial stress, poor health outcomes, and decreased Black consciousness (Milliones, 1980; Tull, Wickramasturiya, & Taylor, 1999; Worcester, 2005).

In light of the psychological benefits associated with skin color satisfaction, identifying and understanding the mechanisms by which individuals are more likely to become dissatisfied with their skin is critical to combating the negative ramifications of colorist practices. In this respect, the finding that internalized racism is predictive of skin color dissatisfaction contributes to a broader understanding of the skin color satisfaction construct and the factors that underlie its reduction or amplification among African Americans. More research is needed to determine if internalized racism is in fact an antecedent of skin color dissatisfaction or a consequence.

Limitations

As previously mentioned, the primary limitation of this study is the uneven distribution of participants along the color continuum. This in large part could have been the result of relying on self-identification. Without an objective measure of skin color, the current study may have limited its ability to accurately capture the complexions of its participants. The uneven representation of skin color may have also been influenced by social desirability, which could have manifested as an unwillingness to identify with an unfavorable complexion. It is additionally important to acknowledge the potential for African American college students to have different perceptions of skin color than the general population, which may be more favorable or neutral. Relatedly, while it was conceptualized that perceived skin color would predict racial identity, causal modeling was not used and did not determine if, in fact, it is racial identity that could have preceded skin color satisfaction. Last, while racial identity was selected as an important indicator of psychosocial functioning, other types of self-evaluations (e.g., self-worth, depression, and self-efficacy) could render contrasting results.

Future Research

Much of the literature that informs our current understanding of colorism and the possible influence of skin color made use of subjective measures of skin color. By using more objective instruments, such as the spectrophotometer

(Yun, Lee, Rah, Kim, & Park, 2010), future researchers may be able to more accurately capture the unique and delineated experiences of African Americans situated at either end of the color continuum. However, in that same vein, as this study and others indicate, measuring the degree to which skin color biases affect African Americans may not be best achieved through an examination of skin color but rather skin color satisfaction. Regardless of one's complexion, this construct appears to have significant implications for psychological well-being.

While the current study has identified the internalization of racism as an individual factor influencing skin color satisfaction, future investigations could focus on the group-level mechanisms by which individuals become dissatisfied with their complexion. By examining the sociocultural factors that reinforce colorist ideologies, researchers may yield the data necessary to combat colorist influences. It is foreseeable that skin color satisfaction research could play a significant role in intervention efforts. Multidimensional programs/curriculums could be developed to counter colorist stereotypes, reduce the effects of skin color biases, and promote a greater sense of well-being. Additionally, as the colorism phenomenon is not specific to the African American community (Glenn, 2008), future investigations may gauge levels of skin color satisfaction among other populations influenced by skin tone stratification (i.e., in India, Japan, Latin America, etc.). Such studies could contribute to a more global understanding of if and how skin color satisfaction buffers the negative effects associated with skin tone biases and/or heightens psychological well-being.

Conclusion

Skin color biases exist within the African American community. However, as the findings of this study indicate, skin color satisfaction can moderate how skin color influences such self-evaluative indices as the private regard aspect of racial identity. Such results offer support for the construct's continued exploration among not only African Americans, but also among other global populations influenced by the colorism phenomenon. Last, by highlighting the significance of the internalization of racism to skin color satisfaction, we point to the need for future investigations to identify additional individual and group-level factors underlying skin color dissatisfaction.

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