THE BLACKER THE BERRY
Gender, Skin Tone, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy

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Using data from the National Survey of Black Americans, this study examines the way in which gender socially constructs the importance of skin tone for evaluations of self-worth and self-competence. Skin tone has negative effects on both self-esteem and self-efficacy but operates in different domains of the self for men and for women. Skin color is an important predictor of self-esteem for Black women but not Black men. And color predicts self-efficacy for Black men but not Black women. This pattern conforms to traditional gendered expectations of masculinity and femininity. Moreover, there are conditions of success that allow women to escape the effects of colorism. The impact of skin tone on self-esteem was much weaker for women from higher social class. Those who had lower self-esteem scores were dark-skinned women from working classes and dark-skinned women who were judged unattractive.

> She should have been a boy, then color of skin wouldn't have mattered so much, for wasn't her mother always saying that a Black boy could get along, but that a Black girl would never know anything but sorrow and disappointment? But she wasn't a boy; she was a girl, and color did matter, mattered so much that she would rather have missed receiving her high school diploma than have to sit as she now sat, the only odd and conspicuous figure on the auditorium platform of the Boise high school . . .
>
> Get a diploma?—What did it mean to her? College?—Perhaps. A job?—Perhaps again. She was going to have a high school diploma, but it would mean nothing to her whatsoever. (Thurman 1929, 4-5)

Wallace Thurman (1929) speaking through the voice of the main character, Emma Lou Morgan, in his novel, "The Blacker the Berry," about skin color bias within the African American community, asserts that the disadvantages and emotional pain of being "dark skinned" are greater for women than men and that skin

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color, not achievement, determines identity and attitudes about the self. Thurman's work describes social relationships among African Americans that were shaped by their experiences in the white community during slavery and its aftermath. In the African American community, skin color, an ascribed status attribute, played an integral role in determining class distinctions. Mulattoes, African Americans with white progenitors, led a more privileged existence when compared with their Black counterparts, and in areas of the Deep South (i.e., most notably Louisiana and South Carolina), mulattoes served as a buffer class between whites and Blacks (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992). In the *Black Bourgeoisie*, Frazier (1957) describes affluent organized clubs within the Black community called "blue vein" societies. To be accepted into these clubs, skin tone was required to be lighter than a "paper bag" or light enough for visibility of "blue veins" (Okazawa Rey, Robinson, and Ward 1987). Preferential treatment given by both Black and white cultures to African Americans with light skin have conveyed to many Blacks that if they conformed to the white, majority standard of beauty, their lives would be more rewarding (Bond and Cash 1992; Gatewood 1988).

Although Thurman's novel was written in 1929, the issue of *colorism* (Okazawa Rey, Robinson, and Ward 1987), intraracial discrimination based on skin color, continues to divide and shape life experiences within the African American community. The status advantages afforded to persons of light complexion continue despite the political preference for dark skin tones in the Black awareness movement during the 1960s. No longer an unspoken taboo, color prejudice within the African American community has been a "hot" topic of talk shows, novels, and movies and an issue in a court case on discrimination in the workplace (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992).[1] In addition to discussions within lay communities, research scholars have had considerable interest in the importance of skin color. At the structural level, studies have noted that skin color is an important determinant of educational and occupational attainment: Lighter skinned Blacks complete more years of schooling, have more prestigious jobs, and earn more than darker skinned Blacks (Hughes and Hertel 1990; Keith and Herring 1991). In fact, one study notes that the effect of skin color on earnings of "lighter" and "darker" Blacks is as great as the effect of race on the earnings of whites and all Blacks (Hughes and Hertel 1990). The most impressive research on skin tone effects is studies on skin tone and blood pressure. Using a reflectometer to measure skin color, research has shown that dark skin tone is associated with high blood pressure in African Americans with low socioeconomic status (Klag et al. 1991; Tryoler and James 1978). And at the social-psychological level, studies find that skin color is related to feelings of self-worth and attractiveness, self-control, satisfaction, and quality of life (Bond and Cash 1992; Boyd Franklin 1991; Cash and Duncan 1984; Chambers et al. 1994; Neal and Wilson 1989; Okazawa Rey, Robinson, and Ward 1987).

It is important to note that skin color is highly correlated with other phenotypic features—eye color, hair texture, broadness of nose, and fullness of lips. Along with light skin, blue and green eyes, European-shaped noses, and straight as opposed to "kinky" hair are all accorded higher status both within and beyond the African

American community. Colorism embodies preference and desire for both light skin as well as these other attendant features. Hair, eye color, and facial features function along with color in complex ways to shape opportunities, norms regarding attractiveness, self-concept, and overall body image. Yet, it is color that has received the most attention in research on African Americans.[2] The reasons for this emphasis are not clear, although one can speculate that it is due to the fact that color is the most visible physical feature and is also the feature that is most enduring and difficult to change. As Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992) pointed out, hair can be straightened with chemicals, eye color can be changed with contact lenses, and a broad nose can be altered with cosmetic surgery. Bleaching skin to a lighter tone, however, seldom meets with success (Okazawa Rey, Robinson, and Ward 1987). Ethnographic research also suggests that the research focus on skin color is somewhat justified. For example, it played the central role in determining membership in the affluent African American clubs.

Although colorism affects attitudes about the self for both men and women, it appears that these effects are stronger for women than men. In early studies, dark-skinned women were seen as occupying the bottom rungs of the social ladder, least marriageable, having the fewest options for higher education and career advancement, and as more color conscious than their male counterparts (Parrish 1944; Warner, Junker, and Adams 1941). There is very little empirical research on the relationship between gender, skin color, and self-concept development. In this article, we evaluate the relative importance of skin color to feelings about the self for men and women within the African American community.

The literature that relates skin tone to self-image has several methodological limitations. First, with the exception of doll preference studies, there is an absence of a systematic body of research on self-concept development. This is particularly true for studies on adults. Inferences about the relationship between skin tone and attitudes about the self are drawn from findings of studies on attitudes about body image, mate or dating preferences, physical attractiveness, and skin tone satisfaction. Second, much of this literature is based on data from descriptive anecdotes of personal accounts, clinical studies, and laboratory studies that use small purposive samples of respondents. Studies using generalizable survey research methodology with nationally representative samples of respondents to examine the relationship between skin tone and self-concept development are rare. Third, the use of limited databases is often joined with a lack of adequate controls for socioeconomic status variables such as education and income. Despite the strong empirical literature that shows that skin tone is an important determinant of socioeconomic status as well as studies that argue that socioeconomic status is an important determinant of self-concept development, researchers have failed to take socioeconomic status into account. Fourth, not all studies employ an objective measure of skin tone. The use of self-reported skin tone may possibly contaminate the observed relationship between skin tone and self-concept outcomes.

Our study addresses several of these limitations. Using an adult sample of respondents who are representative of the national population, we examine the

relationship of skin tone to self-concept development. Our analyses employ objective and reliable measures of skin tone, self-concept, and adequate control variables for socioeconomic status. More important, we examine the way in which gender socially constructs the impact of skin tone on self-concept development. The following sections consider the gendered relationships between skin tone and self-concept development and outline the conceptual argument and prior empirical evidence.

Skin Tone and Gender

Issues of skin color and physical attractiveness are closely linked and because expectations of physical attractiveness are applied more heavily to women across all cultures, stereotypes of attractiveness and color preference are more profound for Black women (Warner, Junker, and Adams 1941). In the clinical literature (Boyd Franklin 1991; Grier and Cobbs 1968; Neal and Wilson 1989; Okazawa Rey, Robinson, and Ward 1987), issues of racial identity, skin color, and attractiveness were central concerns of women. The "what is beautiful is good" stereotype creates a "halo" effect for light-skinned persons. The positive glow generated by physical attractiveness includes a host of desirable personality traits. Included in these positive judgments are beliefs that attractive people would be significantly more intelligent, kind, confident, interesting, sexy, assertive, poised, modest, and successful, and they appear to have higher self-esteem and self-worth (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972). When complexion is the indicator of attractiveness, similar stereotypic attributes are found. There is evidence that gender difference in response to the importance of skin color to attractiveness appears during childhood. Girls as young as six are twice as likely as boys to be sensitive to the social importance of skin color (Porter 1971; Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992, 68). In a study of facial features, skin color, and attractiveness, Neal (cited in Neal and Wilson 1989, 328) found that

> unattractive women were perceived as having darker skin tones than attractive women and that women with more Caucasoid features were perceived as more attractive to the opposite sex, more successful in their love lives and their careers than women with Negroid features.

Frequent exposure to negative evaluations can undermine a woman's sense of self. "A dark skinned Black woman who feels herself unattractive, however, may think that she has nothing to offer society no matter how intelligent or inventive she is" (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992, 42).

Several explanations are proffered for gender differences in self-esteem among Blacks. One is that women are socialized to attend to evaluations of others and are vulnerable to negative appraisals. Women seek to validate their selves through appraisal from others more than men do. And the media has encouraged greater negative self-appraisals for dark-skinned women. A second explanation is that

colorism and its associated stressors are not the same for dark-skinned men and women. For men, stereotypes associated with perceived dangerousness, criminality, and competence are associated with dark skin tone, while for women the issue is attractiveness (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992, 38). Educational attainment is a vehicle by which men might overcome skin color bias, but changes in physical features are difficult to accomplish. Third, women may react more strongly to skin color bias because they feel less control of their lives. Research studies show that women and persons of low status tend to feel fatalistic (Pearlin and Schooler 1978; Turner and Noh 1983) and to react more intensely than comparable others to stressors (Kessler and McLeod 1984; Pearlin and Johnson 1977; Thoits 1982, 1984; Turner and Noh 1983). This suggests a triple jeopardy situation: Black women face problems of racism and sexism, and when these two negative status positions—being Black and being female—combine with colorism, a triple threat lowers self-esteem and feelings of competence among dark Black women.

CONCEPTUAL ARGUMENT

Skin Tone and Self-Evaluation

William James (1890) conceived of the self as an integrating social product consisting of various constituent parts (i.e., the physical, social, and spiritual selves). Body image, the aspect of the self that we recognize first, is one of the major components of the self and remains important throughout life. One can assume that if one's bodily attributes are judged positively, the impact on one's self is positive. Likewise, if society devalues certain physical attributes, negative feelings about the self are likely to ensue. Body image is influenced by a number of factors including skin color, size, and shape. In our society, dark-skinned men and women are raised to believe that "light" skin is preferred. They see very light skinned Blacks having successful experiences in advertisements, in magazines, in professional positions, and so forth. They are led to believe that "light" skin is the key to popularity, professional status, and a desirable marriage. Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992) argue that the African American gay and lesbian community is also affected by colorism because a light-skinned or even white mate confers status. Whether heterosexual, gay, or lesbian, colorism may lead to negative self-evaluations among African Americans with dark skin.

Self-evaluations are seen as having two dimensions, one reflecting the person's moral worth and the other reflecting the individual's competency or agency (Gecas 1989). The former refers to self-esteem and indicates how we feel about ourselves. The latter refers to self-efficacy and indicates our belief in the ability to control our own fate. These are two different dimensions in that people can feel that they are good and useful but also feel that what happens to them is due to luck or forces outside themselves.

Self-esteem and skin tone. Self-esteem consists of feeling good, liking yourself, and being liked and treated well.[3] Self-esteem is influenced both by the social comparisons we make of ourselves with others and by the reactions that other people have toward us (i.e., reflected appraisals). The self-concept depends also on the attributes of others who are available for comparison. Self-evaluation theory emphasizes the importance of consonant environmental context for personal comparisons; that is, Blacks will compare themselves with other Blacks in their community. Consonant environmental context assumes that significant others will provide affirmation of one's identity and that similarity between oneself and others shapes the self. Thus, a sense of personal connectedness to other African Americans is most important for fostering and reinforcing positive self-evaluations. This explains why the personal self-esteem of Blacks, despite their lower status position, was as high as that of whites (Porter and Washington 1989, 345; Rosenberg and Simmons 1971).[4] It does not explain the possible influence of colorism on self-esteem within the African American community. Evidence suggest that conflictual and dissonant racial environments have negative effects on self-esteem, especially within the working class (Porter and Washington 1989, 346; Verna and Runion 1985). The heterogeneity of skin tone hues and colorism create a dissonant racial environment and become a source of negative self-evaluation.

Self-efficacy and skin tone. Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1977, 1982), is the belief that one can master situations and control events. Performance influences self-efficacy such that when faced with a failure, individuals with high self-efficacy generally believe that extra effort or persistence will lead to success (Bandura 1982). However, if failure is related to some stable personal characteristic such as "dark skin color" or social constraints such as blocked opportunities resulting from mainstreaming practices in the workplace, then one is likely to be discouraged by failure and to feel less efficacious than his or her lighter counterparts. In fact, Pearlin and colleagues (1981) argue that stressors that seem to be associated with inadequacy of one's efforts or lack of success are implicated in a diminished sense of self. Problems or hardships "to which people can see no end, those that seem to become fixtures of their existence" pose the most sustained affront to a sense of mastery and self-worth (Pearlin et al. 1981, 345). For Bandura, however, individual agency plays a role in sustaining the self. Individuals actively engage in activities that are congenial with a positive sense of self. Self-efficacy results not primarily from beliefs or attitudes about performance but from undertaking challenges and succeeding. Thus, darker skinned Blacks who experience success in their everyday world (e.g., work, education, etc.) will feel more confident and empowered.

Following the literature, we predict a strong relationship between skin tone and self-esteem and self-efficacy, but the mechanisms are different for the two dimensions. The effect of skin tone on self-efficacy will be partially mediated by occupation and income. The effect will be direct for self-esteem. That is, the direct effect will be stronger for self-esteem than for self efficacy. Furthermore, we expect a

stronger relationship between skin tone and self-esteem for women than men because women's self-esteem is conditioned by the appraisals of others, and the media has encouraged negative appraisals for dark-skinned women.

DATA AND METHOD

The Sample

Data for this study come from the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) (Jackson and Gurin 1987). The sample for the survey was drawn according to a multistage-area probability procedure that was designed to ensure that every Black household in the United States had an equal probability of being selected for the study. Within each household in the sample, one person age 18 or older was randomly selected to be interviewed from among those eligible for the study. Only self-identified Black American citizens were eligible for the study. Face-to-face interviews were carried out by trained Black interviewers, yielding a sample of 2,107 respondents. The response rate was approximately 69 percent. For the most part, the NSBA is representative of the national Black population enumerated in the 1980 census, with the exception of a slight overrepresentation of women and older Blacks and a small under-representation of southerners (Jackson, Tucker, and Gurin 1987).

Measures

Dependent variables. There are two indicators of self-evaluation: *self-esteem* and *self-efficacy.* The NSBA included six items that measure self-esteem. Two items are from Rosenberg's (1979) Self-Esteem Scale: "I feel that I am a person of worth" and "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." Two items are from the Monitoring the Future Project (Bachman and Johnson 1978): "I feel that I can't do anything right" and "I feel that my life is not very useful." Two items measure the worth dimension of self-esteem: "I am a useful person to have around" and "As a person, I do a good job these days." Respondents were asked to indicate whether the statements are *almost always true* (4), *often true* (3), *not often true* (2), and *never true* (1). Negatively worded items were reverse coded so that high values represent positive self-esteem. Items were summed to form a self-esteem scale ($\alpha = .66$).

Self-efficacy measures the respondents' feelings of control and confidence in managing their own lives. The four questions asked in the NSBA are the most highly correlated (Wright 1976, 107) in a commonly used scale of personal efficacy (for validity of the scale, see J. P. Robinson and Shaver 1969, 102). Each of the four items was followed by two responses:

1. "Do you think it's better *to plan your life a good ways ahead,* or would you say life is *too much a matter of luck to plan ahead very far?*"

2. "When you do make plans ahead, do you usually *get to carry out things the way you expected or do things come up to make you change your plans*?"
3. "Have you usually *felt pretty sure* your life would work out the way you want it to, or have there been times when you *haven't been sure about it*?"
4. "Some people feel they *can run their lives* pretty much the way they want to, others feel the *problems of life are sometimes too big* for them. Which one are you most like?"

The items were summed to form a scale where high values represent a high sense of personal efficacy ($\alpha = .57$). The positive responses were coded 2, and negative responses were coded 1. Hughes and Demo's (1989, 140) analysis of these data shows that the measure of self-efficacy is empirically distinct from the measure of self-esteem.

Independent variables. Skin tone is the independent variable of primary interest in this study. Values of skin tone were based on interviewers' observations of respondents' complexions and recorded after the interview. The interviewer was asked to respond to the following: "The [respondent's] skin color is (1) *very dark brown*, (2) *dark brown*, (3) *medium brown*, (4) *light brown* (light skinned), and (5) *very light brown* (very light skinned)." Ninety-eight percent of the respondents were classified according to this scheme. Of those assigned a color rating, 8.5 percent (175) were classified as being very dark brown, 29.9 percent (617) as dark brown, 44.6 percent (922) as medium brown, 14.4 percent (298) as light brown, and 2.6 percent (54) as very light brown. This measurement scheme is similar to other studies that used objective ratings of skin color (Freeman et al. 1966; Udry, Bauman, and Chase 1969).

Three sets of independent variables are used in these analyses: sociodemographic, socioeconomic status, and body image. The sociodemographic variables include age, marital status, region of current residence, and urban area. Age of the respondent is self-reported and measured in years. Marital status is a dummy variable coded 1 for currently married, with those who are not married as the comparison category (0). Region of current residence is collapsed into two categories: South is coded 1, and non-South is coded 0. For the urbanicity variable, respondents were coded 1 if they lived in an urban area and 0 elsewhere.

The second set of variables consists of socioeconomic status variables and includes education, employment, and income. Education of respondents is measured as years of completed schooling, with 18 categories ranging from 0 to 18 years or more of educational attainment. A dummy variable for employment status is coded 1 for working with pay and 0 for laid off or not working for pay.[5] Personal income was initially coded using 17 categories ranging from 1 for *no income* to 17 for *income of $30,000 or more*. Each respondent was assigned scores that correspond to the midpoint of his or her income category for personal income. A Pareto curve estimate was used to derive a midpoint for the open-ended categories (see Miller 1964).

Three measures of body image are physical attractiveness, weight, and disabled health status. Interviewers were asked to indicate where the respondent fell on a semantic scale from 1= *unattractive* to 7 = *attractive*. We recognize that interviewer perceptions of skin tone are likely to affect interviewer perceptions of attractiveness. That is, interviewers probably evaluated lighter skinned African Americans, especially women, as being more attractive. However, this was the only measure in the NSBA. The correlations between skin tone and attractiveness, however, are modest ($r = .13, p < .01$ for men and $r = .20, p < .01$ for women), suggesting that they operate somewhat independently. On this basis, we concluded that omitting this information would introduce more bias than the bias produced by their correlation. Respondents' weight is also assessed by interviewers' observations. Interviewers were asked where the respondent fell on a scale from 1 = *underweight* to 7 = *overweight*. Disabled is measured as follows: For each of 13 medical conditions, respondents were asked, "How much does this health problem keep you from working or carrying out your daily tasks?" The responses were *a great deal* (2), *only a little* (1), or *not at all* (0). High scores indicate greater disability. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the independent and dependent variables for male and female respondents separately.

Data Analysis

To assess the impact of gender on the relationship between skin tone and self evaluations, we analyze the data separately for men and women.[6] Data analysis consists of a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equations that assess the effects of skin tone on indicators of self-esteem and self-efficacy. A hierarchical multiple regression strategy is used to analyze the data. Successive reduced-form equations are presented for each dependent variable. The first equation looks at the bivariate relationship between skin tone and each dependent variable. Our strategy is to determine how this relationship is altered as successive groups of independent variables are controlled. Therefore, the second equation includes skin tone and the sociodemographic variables. Equation 3 includes skin tone, sociodemographic variables, and socioeconomic status variables. The fourth equation includes all the above plus the body image variables.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the regression of self-efficacy on measures of skin tone, sociodemographic, socioeconomic, and body image variables for men and women separately. Looking at column 1, we see that skin tone has a significant positive effect on self-efficacy for both men and women. A lighter complexion is associated with higher feelings of perceived mastery. Among men, each incremental change in skin color from dark to light is associated with a .33 increment in self-efficacy; for women, changes in skin color are associated with a .18 increment in self-efficacy.

TABLE 1: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations by Gender

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	$\bar{x}$	SD
Men (n = 647)													
1. Skin tone												2.62	.90
2. Age	.017											41.79	17.70
3. Urban	.089*	−.131**										.77	.42
4. South	.000	.064	−.410**									.55	.50
5. Married	.035	.186**	−.106**	.041								.52	.50
6. Income	.137**	−.023	.209**	−.229**	.257**							10.89	8.74
7. Education	.106**	−.516**	.266**	−.200**	−.001	.402**						11.00	3.76
8. Employed	.021	−.279**	.063	−.009	.148	.357**	.304**					.69	.46
9. Attractiveness	.133**	−.125**	−.017	.037	.084*	.060	.127**	.130**				4.41	1.37
10. Weight	.005	.110**	.038	−.070	.052	.034	−.039	−.012	−.151**			4.02	.91
11. Disabled	−.002	.443**	−.081*	.020	.033	−.138**	−.320**	−.350**	−.072	.107**		1.95	2.96
12. Self-efficacy	.116**	.061	.123**	−.094	.076	.160**	.159**	.017	.055	.013	−.114**	8.26	2.50
13. Self-esteem	.054	.016	−.060	.065	.089*	.123**	.071	.151**	.098*	−.004	−.161**	21.29	2.59
Women (n = 1,036)													
1. Skin tone												2.78	.90
2. Age	−.069*											42.03	17.39
3. Urban	.085**	−.101**										.78	.42
4. South	−.051	.064*	−.407**									.56	.50
5. Married	.034	.006	−.094	.034								.36	.48
6. Income	.139**	−.082**	.226**	−.219**	.044							5.95	5.45
7. Education	.154**	−.490**	.225**	−.142**	.074*	.434**						11.03	3.27
8. Employed	.085**	−.193**	.058	−.021	.087**	.437**	.340**					.52	.50
9. Attractiveness	.196**	−.076*	.017	.042	.037	.094**	.127**	.092**				4.38	1.47
10. Weight	−.025	.061	−.019	−.008	.006	−.021	−.060	.009	−.205**			4.31	1.13
11. Disabled	−.098**	.404**	−.083**	.049	−.044	−.222**	−.399**	−.332**	−.128	.077*		2.97	3.69
12. Self-efficacy	.061*	.081**	.134**	−.103	.015	.210**	.164**	.087**	.076*	−.024	−.111**	7.75	2.60
13. Self-esteem	.100**	.107**	.012	.021	.005	.135**	.078*	.131**	.095**	.046	−.159**	21.06	2.55

*$p \leq .05$ (two-tailed test). **$p \leq .01$ (two-tailed test).

TABLE 2: Regression Results for Predicting Self-Efficacy, by Gender

	Men (n = 647)				*Women (n = 1,036)*			
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
Skin tone	.325**	.288**	.220*	.208†	.177*	.157†	.063	.029
	(.116)	(.103)	(.079)	(.074)	(.061)	(.054)	(.022)	(.010)
Age		.009	.022***	.030***		.015***	.029***	.033***
		(.063)	(.157)	(.215)		(.100)	(.191)	(.221)
Urban		.629*	.406	.406		.735***	.437*	.437*
		(.106)	(.068)	(.068)		(.117)	(.070)	(.070)
South		−.292	−.137	−.165		−.313†	−.179	−.201
		(−.058)	(−.027)	(−.033)		(−.060)	(−.034)	(−.038)
Married		.372†	.218	.206		.139	.010	−.001
		(.074)	(.044)	(.041)		(.026)	(.002)	(−.000)
Income			.015	.014			.056***	.054***
			(.052)	(.048)			(.119)	(.114)
Education			.135***	.126***			.144***	.127***
			(.196)	(.183)			(.181)	(.160)
Employed			−.163	−.378			.021	−.093
			(−.030)	(−.070)			(.004)	(−.018)
Attractiveness				.080				.084
				(.043)				(.048)
Weight				.029				−.015
				(.010)				(−.007)
Disabled				−.136***				−.072**
				(−.161)				(−.102)
Constant	8.260	7.096	6.767	6.771	7.753	6.727	6.313	6.140
R^2	.014	.040	.072	.093	.004	.034	.085	.096
Adjusted R^2	.012	.033	.061	.077	.003	.029	.078	.086

NOTE: Standardized coefficients are in parentheses.
†$p \leq .10$. *$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$.

Thus, the skin tone effect on self-efficacy is much stronger for men. In fact, the coefficient for the skin tone effect in the equation predicting self-efficacy for men is almost twice that of the coefficient for women.

The pattern of skin tone effects for men and women begins to diverge when the sociodemographic variables are added in the second equation. Among African American men, the effect of skin tone on self-efficacy remains statistically significant, and the coefficient is reduced by 11 percent. In contrast, among women, the skin tone effect is reduced also by a similar amount, but the significance level is reduced to borderline. Adding the socioeconomic variables to the equation (column 3), we see that the effect of skin tone on self-efficacy remains statistically significant for men. Note that men's standardized coefficient for education is almost twice as large as that of skin tone, suggesting that education has a stronger effect in determining self-efficacy for them. Body image, represented by attractiveness and weight (equation 4), does not statistically alter the effect of skin tone on self-efficacy for men. Disabled health conditions, which have a significant negative effect on self-efficacy for men, do not alter the skin tone effect. When all the independent variables are accounted for (equation 4), skin tone continues to have a moderate significant effect on self-efficacy among men. By contrast, the determinants of self-efficacy for women in this study are age, education, income, disability, and urban residence. The effect of skin tone is reduced by 80 percent and is no longer statistically significant after all variables are controlled. Note that among men, skin tone has a significant moderate effect on self-efficacy when other more robust factors such as education and age are controlled. Among women, skin tone effect on self-efficacy is largely indirect, via its consequence for income and education.

A similar analysis for the self-esteem measure is displayed in Table 3 and shows that the effect for skin tone on self-esteem is not statistically significant in the equation for Black men in this study. Conversely, among Black women, skin tone has a significant positive association with self-esteem, even after all other variables are controlled. These findings show that among women, a change in skin color from dark to light is associated with a .28 increment in self-esteem. The effect of skin tone on self-esteem for women is slightly enhanced when the sociodemographic controls are added to the equation (column 2) and remains constant in the face of a strong pattern of socioeconomic effects (equation 3). Education and employment have positive effects on self-esteem for African American women. Two indicators for body image have significant positive effects on self esteem—attractiveness and weight. Disabled conditions (equation 4) have a significant negative association with self-esteem. Of these socioeconomic effects, only education remains when body image variables are controlled, but the skin tone effect remains statistically significant. The body image variables have a moderate impact on the relationship between skin tone and self-esteem, reducing it by 20 percent. Women who are rated physically attractive have higher self-esteem scores, but attractiveness is at least in part related to skin tone.

Although the overall models in the analysis for self-efficacy and self-esteem are modest, they compare favorably to sociological models predicting self-esteem and

TABLE 3: Regression Results for Predicting Self-Esteem, by Gender

	Men (n = 647)				*Women (n = 1,036)*			
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
Skin color	.157	.159	.112	.088	.283***	.303***	.235**	.187*
	(.054)	(.055)	(.039)	(.031)	(.100)	(.107)	(.083)	(.066)
Age		−.001	.010	.019**		.017***	.027***	.034***
		(−.008)	(.068)	(.132)		(.115)	(.185)	(.235)
Urban		−.235	−.405	−.400		.167	−.020	−.015
		(−.038)	(−.066)	(−.065)		(.027)	(−.003)	(−.002)
South		.244	.328	.295		.153	.218	.196
		(.047)	(.063)	(.057)		(.030)	(.042)	(.038)
Married		.429*	.153	.126		.013	−.104	−.125
		(.083)	(.030)	(.024)		(.003)	(−.019)	(−.023)
Income			.020	.019			.028	.025
			(.069)	(.065)			(.060)	(.053)
Education			.048	.036			.081**	.053†
			(.067)	(.051)			(.104)	(.068)
Employed			.696**	.449†			.512**	.292
			(.124)	(.080)			(.100)	(.057)
Attractiveness				.142†				.121*
				(.075)				(.070)
Weight				.047				.151*
				(.017)				(.067)
Disabled				−.148***				−.130***
				(−.169)				(−.189)
Constant	21.292	21.388	21.005	20.632	21.055	20.131	19.812	19.508
R^2	.003	.016	.046	.072	.010	.024	.058	.092
Adjusted R^2	.001	.008	.034	.056	.009	.019	.051	.082

NOTE: Standardized coefficients are in parentheses.
†$p \leq .10$. *$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$.

self-efficacy. It is most informative to look at the size of the coefficient for skin tone compared to other variables in the model. Skin tone effects are sizable in the models predicting self-efficacy for men and self-esteem for women.

Do Achievement and Body Image Condition the Effects of Skin Tone on Self-Concept?

The literature suggests that it is reasonable to expect that skin tone may interact with socioeconomic status and body image to affect self-concept (Ransford 1970; St. John and Feagin 1998). We expect that among women, the relationship between skin tone and self-esteem and skin tone and self-efficacy will be moderated by socioeconomic status and body image. That is, the relationships will be stronger for Black women from lower social classes and for Black women who are judged as unattractive. To test for these possibilities, we created interaction terms for skin color and each of the socioeconomic status variables and for skin color and each of the body image variables. As suggested by Aiken and West (1991), all variables used to compute interaction terms were centered. Each interaction term was entered into the regression equation separately. Simple slope regression analyses were then used to probe significant interactions. The results are presented in Table 4.

In the analyses of women's self esteem, two significant interaction effects emerge—skin tone and personal income ($b = -.035$, $p = .025$) and skin tone and interviewer-rated attractiveness ($b = -.113$, $p = .029$). The results from the simple-slopes analyses indicate that the relationship between skin tone and personal income is positive and significant among women with the lowest incomes. In other words, among women with the lowest levels of income, self-esteem increases as color lightens. The relationship is also positive and significant for women with average levels of income, although the relationship is not as strong. There is no relationship between skin tone and self-esteem among women with the highest incomes. Thus, women who are dark and successful evaluate themselves just as positively as women who are lighter and successful. Similar to the findings for income, skin color has a significant positive effect on self-esteem among women evaluated as having low and average levels of attractiveness, although the effect is stronger for the former. Self-esteem increases as skin color becomes lighter among women judged unattractive or average. There is no relationship between skin tone and self-esteem for women who are judged highly attractive. In other words, skin tone does not have much relevance for self-esteem among women who have higher levels of income and who are attractive. Education, unlike income, has no significant effect on women's self-esteem. We are at a loss to explain this finding. Perhaps income is more important because it permits women to obtain more visible symbols of success such as clothing, cars, and living quarters. We discuss this further in the concluding section.

Skin tone and interviewer-evaluated weight combine to affect men's self-esteem ($b = .274$, $p = .012$). Results from the simple-slopes regression analyses show that skin tone has a significant impact on self-esteem for men who are either under-

TABLE 4: Significant Interaction Effects and Summary of Simple Regression Analysis for Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy by Gender

Gender	*Interaction Effect*	b^1	*Value of Moderator Variable*	b^2	b_0
Dependent Variable = Self-Esteem					
Women	Skin Tone*Income	−.035*	Low income	.376*	19.373
			Average income	.185*	19.552
			High income	−.005	19.732
Women	Skin Tone*Attractiveness	−.113*	Low attractiveness	.350**	19.323
			Average attractiveness	.184*	19.524
			High attractiveness	.018	19.726
Men	Skin Tone*Weight	.274*	Low weight	−1.009*	20.372
			Average weight	.092	20.621
			High weight	1.192**	20.870
Gender	*Interaction Effect*	b	*Value of Moderator Variable*	b^1	b_0
Dependent Variable = Self-Efficacy					
Men	Skin Tone*Weight	.188†	Low weight	−.545	6.603
			Average weight	.210†	6.759
			High weight	.965*	6.916

NOTE: b^1 = coefficient for the interaction effect; b^2 = coefficient represents the effects of skin tone on self-esteem/self-efficacy at low (1 *SD* below mean), average (at mean equals 0), and high (1 *SD* above mean) values of the moderator variable.
†$p \leq .10$. *$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$.

weight or overweight, although the direction of the effects is opposite. Among under-weight men, self-esteem decreases as skin tone becomes lighter. However, among overweight men, self-esteem increases as skin tone becomes lighter. We suggest that cultural definitions of weight probably interact with those of skin color and health as explanations of the observed effects. In our culture, a robust athletic body is associated with masculinity, and a thin body frame combined with light complexion might be viewed as ill health. And a negative stigma of both weight and complexion affects self-esteem for men who are overweight and dark skinned. It seems that light skin compensates for the negative stigma of weight for large body frames but enhances the negative stigma for thin frames.

In the analyses of self-efficacy, there are no significant interaction effects among women. Among men, one interaction term emerged as marginally significant—skin tone and weight ($b = .188$, $p = .072$). The simple slopes indicate that skin tone and efficacy are negatively associated for underweight men, although the relationship is not significant. The relationship is marginally significant for men judged as average and is significant and positive for men judged overweight. Among those judged overweight, lighter men are more likely to have high self-efficacy. Note additional evidence that skin tone might compensate the effect of a negative stigma of weight on self among larger men.

DISCUSSION

The data in this study indicate that gender—mediated by socioeconomic status variables such as education, occupation, and income—socially constructs the importance of skin color evaluations of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy results not primarily from beliefs or attitudes about performance but rather reflects an individual's competency or agency from undertaking challenges and succeeding at overcoming them. Self-esteem consists of feeling good about oneself and being liked and treated favorably by others. However, the effect of skin color on these two domains of self is different for women and men. Skin color is an important predictor of perceived efficacy for Black men but not Black women. And skin color predicts self-esteem for Black women but not Black men. This pattern conforms to traditional gendered expectations (Hill Collins 1990, 79-80). The traditional definitions of masculinity demand men specialize in achievement outside the home, dominate in interpersonal relationships, and remain rational and self-contained. Women, in contrast, are expected to seek affirmation from others, to be warm and nurturing. Thus, consistent with gendered characteristics of men and women, skin color is important in self-domains that are central to masculinity (i.e., competence) and femininity (i.e., affirmation of the self).[7]

Turning our attention to the association between skin color and self-concept for Black men, the association between skin color and self-efficacy increases significantly as skin color lightens. And this is independent of the strong positive contribution of education—and ultimately socioeconomic status—to feelings of com-

petence for men. We think that the effect of skin tone on self-efficacy is the result of widespread negative stereotyping and fear associated with dark-skinned men that pervade the larger society and operates independent of social class. Correspondingly, employers view darker African American men as violent, uncooperative, dishonest, and unstable (Kirschenman and Neckerman, 1998). As a consequence, employers exclude "darker" African American men from employment and thus block their access to rewards and resources.

Evidence from research on the relationship between skin tone and achievement supports our interpretation. The literature on achievement and skin tone shows that lighter skinned Blacks are economically better off than darker skinned persons (Hughes and Hertel 1990; Keith and Herring 1991). Hughes and Hertel (1990), using the NSBA data, present findings that show that for every dollar a light-skinned African American earns, the darker skinned person earns 72 cents. Thus, it seems colorism is operative within the workplace. Lighter skinned persons are probably better able to predict what will happen to them and what doors will open and remain open, thus leading to a higher sense of control over their environment. Our data support this finding and add additional information on how that process might work, at least in the lives of Black men. Perhaps employers are looking to hire African American men who will assimilate into the work environment, who do not alienate their clients (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1998), and who are non-threatening. One consequence of mainstreaming the workplace is that darker skinned Black men have fewer opportunities to demonstrate competence in the breadwinner role. It is no accident that our inner cities where unemployment is highest are filled with darker skinned persons, especially men (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992, 38). During adolescence, lighter skinned boys discover that they have better job prospects, appear less threatening to whites, and have a clearer sense of who they are and their competency (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992, 67). In contrast, darker skinned African American men may feel powerless and less able to affect change through the "normal" channels available to lighter skinned African American men (who are able to achieve a more prestigious socioeconomic status).

While skin color is an important predictor of self-efficacy for African American men, it is more important as a predictor of self-esteem for African American women. These data confirm much of the anecdotal information from clinical studies of clients in psychotherapy that have found that dark-skinned Black women have problems with self-worth and confidence. Our findings suggest that this pattern is not limited to experiences of women who are in therapy but that colorism is part of the everyday reality of Black women. Black women expect to be judged by their skin tone. No doubt messages from peers, the media, and family show a preference for lighter skin tones. Several studies cited in the literature review point out that Black women of all ages tend to prefer lighter skin tones and believe that lighter hues are perceived as most attractive by their Black male counterparts (Bond and Cash 1992; Chambers et al. 1994; Porter 1971; T. L. Robinson and Ward 1995).

Evidence from personal accounts reported by St. John and Feagin (1998, 75) in research on the impact of racism in the everyday lives of Black women supports this

interpretation. One young woman describes her father's efforts to shape her expectations about the meaning of beauty in our society and where Black women entered this equation.

> Beauty, beauty standards in this country, a big thing with me. It's a big gripe, because I went through a lot of personal anguish over that, being Black and being female, it's a real big thing with me, because it took a lot for me to find a sense of self . . . in this white-male-dominated society. And just how beauty standards are so warped because like my daddy always tell me, "white is right." The whiter you are, somehow the better you are, and if you look white, well hell, you've got your ticket, and anything you want, too.

Nevertheless, the relationship between skin color and self-esteem among African American women is moderated by socioeconomic status. For example, there is no correlation between skin color and self-esteem among women who have a more privileged socioeconomic status. Consequently, women who are darker and "successful" evaluate themselves just as positively as women of a lighter color. On the other hand, the relationship between skin color and self-esteem is stronger for African American women from the less privileged socioeconomic sectors. In other words, darker skinned women with the lowest incomes display the lowest levels of self-esteem, but self-esteem increases as their skin color lightens. Why does skin color have such importance for self-regard in the context of low income or poverty? Low income shapes self-esteem because it provides fewer opportunities for rewarding experiences or affirming relationships. In addition, there are more negative attributes associated with behaviors of individuals from less privileged socioeconomic status than with those of a more prestigious one. For example, the derisive comment "ghetto chick" is often used to describe the behaviors, dress, communication, and interaction styles of women from low-income groups. Combine stereotypes of classism and colorism, and you have a mixture that fosters an undesirable if not malignant context for self-esteem development. An important finding of this research is that skin color and income determine self-worth for Black women and especially that these factors can work together. Dark skin and low income produce Black women with very low self-esteem. Accordingly, these data help refine our understanding of gendered racism and of "triple oppression" involving race, gender, and class that places women of color in a subordinate social and economic position relative to men of color and the larger white population as well (Segura 1986). More important, the data suggest that darker skinned African American women actually experience a "quadruple" oppression originating in the convergence of social inequalities based on gender, class, race, and color. Earlier, we noted the absence of an interaction effect between skin tone and education, and we can only speculate on the explanation for this nonfinding. Perhaps education does not have the same implications for self-esteem as income because it is a less visible symbol of success. Financial success affords one the ability to purchase consumer items that tell others, even at a distance, that an individual is successful. These visible symbols include the place where we live, the kind of car we drive, and the kind of

clothing that we wear. Educational attainment is not as easily grasped, especially in distant social interactions—passing on the street, walking in the park, or attending a concert event. In other words, for a dark-skinned African American woman, her M.A. or Ph.D. may be largely unknown outside her immediate friends, family, and coworkers. Her Lexus or Mercedes, however, is visible to the world and is generally accorded a great deal of prestige.

Finally, the data indicate that self-esteem increases as skin color becomes lighter among African American women who are judged as having "low and average levels of attractiveness." There is no relationship between skin color and self-esteem for women who are judged "highly attractive," just as there is no correlation between skin color and self-esteem for women of higher socioeconomic status. That physical attractiveness influenced feelings of self-worth for Black women is not surprising. Women have traditionally been concerned with appearance, regardless of ethnicity. Indeed, the pursuit and preoccupation with beauty are central features of female sex-role socialization. Our findings suggest that women who are judged "unattractive" are more vulnerable to color bias than those judged attractive.

NOTES

1. In 1990, a workplace discrimination suit was filed in Atlanta, Georgia, on the behalf of a light-skinned Black female against her dark-skinned supervisor on the charge of color discrimination (for a discussion, see Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992).

2. Skin color bias has also been investigated among Latino groups, although more emphasis has been placed on the combination of both color and European phenotype facial characteristics. Studies of Mexican Americans have documented that those with lighter skin and European features attain more schooling (Telles and Murguia 1990) and generally have higher socioeconomic status (Acre, Murguia, and Frisbie 1987) than those of darker complexion with more Indian features. Similar findings have been reported for Puerto Ricans (Rodriguez 1989), a population with African admixture.

3. Self-esteem is divided into two components: racial self-esteem and personal self-esteem. Racial self-esteem refers to group identity, and personal self-esteem refers to a general evaluative view of the self (Porter and Washington 1989). In our discussion, self-esteem is conceptualized as personal self-esteem, which is defined as "feelings of intrinsic worth, competence, and self approval rather than self rejection and self-contempt" (Porter and Washington 1989, 344).

4. Self-concept theory argued that the experience of social inequality would foster lower self-concept of persons in lower status positions compared with their higher status counterparts. However, when comparing the self-concept of African American schoolboys and schoolgirls, Rosenberg and Simmons (1971) found that their self-feelings were as high and in some instances higher than those of white schoolchildren. This "unexpected" finding was explained by strong ties and bonds within the African American community as opposed to identifying with the larger community.

5. At the suggestion of one reviewer, we estimated all equations with respondents classified as employed part-time, employed full-time, and not employed. The results remained unchanged. The not employed group could be separated into "laid off" and "retired," but the former category had too few cases to include as a separate group. Using occupation, as one reviewer suggested, also resulted in a substantial loss of cases as many respondents (about 40 percent) were retired.

6. The decision to conduct separate analyses for men and women is based on findings of significant higher order interaction effects, which suggested, as did the literature, that the effects of skin tone on self-esteem and self-efficacy differ for men and women in complex ways. For example, in the analysis of

self-esteem, we found a significant three-way interaction effect for gender, skin tone, and income ($\beta = -.288$, $p = .024$). In the analysis of self-efficacy, we found a significant three-way interaction effect for gender, skin tone, and weight ($\beta = -.832$, $p = .015$). The two-way interactions (e.g., skin tone by gender, skin tone by income, gender by income) were not significant.

7. These findings also reflect the dual nature of colorism as it pertains to Black women. Colorism is an aspect of racism that results in anti-Black discrimination in the wider society and, owing to historical patterns, also occurs within the Black community. The finding that the effects of skin tone on self-efficacy become nonsignificant when socioeconomic status variables are added suggests that the interracial discrimination aspect of colorism is more operational for Black women's self-efficacy via access to jobs and income. The finding that the effect of skin tone is more central to Black women's self-esteem indicates that colorism within the Black community is the more central mechanism. Self-esteem is derived from family, friends, and close associates.

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