

ABSTRACT

WILLIAMS, ZAYNAH A. DOES IT MATTER IF YOU'RE BLACK OR WHITE? SKIN COLOR AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG MIDDLE-SCHOOL YOUTH. (Under the direction of Maxine Thompson.)

The purpose of this research is to examine how dissatisfaction with skin color, as a component of perceived physical attractiveness, is associated with adolescent depression and self-esteem, controlling for skin color, beliefs toward skin color, gender, socioeconomic status, perceived discrimination, and peer and teacher stressors. Using a diverse sample of 388 middle-school students, I employ ordinary least squares regression to test hypotheses about the gender-specific and skin color specific effects of dissatisfaction with skin color on adolescent depression and self-esteem. The results show that dissatisfaction with skin color is positively related to depression and negatively related to self-esteem among adolescents. However, black or brown-skinned African American youth who are dissatisfied with their skin color experience higher levels of depression in comparison to white youth who are dissatisfied with their skin color. Implications of the findings are discussed.

DOES IT MATTER IF YOU'RE BLACK OR WHITE?
SKIN COLOR AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG MIDDLE-SCHOOL
YOUTH

by

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BIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

The European characteristics of light skin color, blonde hair, and blue eyes are the “gold standard” for physical attractiveness in the United States (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992; Breland 1998; Fears 1998; Collins 2000; Hill 2002; Herring 2004; Masi De Casanova 2004). Eurocentric beauty messages are communicated across the media and, where possible, males and females are transforming their physical appearance to conform to these standards. Half of all American females color their hair, with 40 percent of them opting for the lightest colors (Loftus 2000). While technological advances make it possible to change one’s eye color and hair, skin color is less amendable. Social comparisons for minority youth to “light skin” standards are likely to have negative consequences. Research on African Americans, for example, supports the notion that skin colors that are darker than the “standard” have negative consequences for the self-concept (Telles and Marguia 1990; Keith and Herring 1991; Russell et al., Wilson, and Hall 1992; Ross 1997; Fears 1998; Hill 2000; Thompson and Keith 2001; Hill 2002; Herring 2004; Hunter 2004; Thompson and Keith 2000). However, most research on skin color and attractiveness for African Americans has examined within group comparisons. In this thesis, I employ between group comparisons to explore the association between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being for African American, Hispanic, and white adolescents.

In no other developmental phase is skin color so closely linked to attractiveness popularity and self-worth than in adolescence (Russell et al. 1992:102). During middle-school years, adolescents become increasingly aware of differences in physical appearance, and physical appearance serves as one criterion for selecting friends and

popularity (Porter 1991; Edwards 1972; Hill 2002). Since lighter skin colors are favored over darker skin colors in African American communities (Keith and Herring 1991; Breland 1998; Fears 1998; Collins 2000; Hill 2002; Herring 2004; Hunter 2004; Masi De Casanova 2004), friends who have different skin colors may find it increasingly difficult to maintain close relations as they become teens. In addition, light-skinned adolescents may find their popularity rising, and perhaps, conclude that friendships with darker-skinned peers may cost them socially (Russell et al. 1992:102)

Physical appearance, including skin color, is a component of what Goffman (1959) describes as the personal front for the presentation of self, meaning it is an attribute that follows the person where ever he or she goes. Skin color becomes one criterion for identifying and categorizing peers as attractive or unattractive.

Attractiveness, like skin color and sex, is an easily observed status and may serve as the basis for discrimination, which impacts social interactions and psychological well-being (Umberson and Hughes 1987). In a racialized society, such as America, possessing a Eurocentric phenotype is the primary indicator of social standing and moral character, with physical traits such as skin color, eye color, hair texture, and nose and lip shape becoming significant symbols of beauty and status (Hill 2002). Discrimination is a likely experience for youth whose physical appearance deviates from the preferred. Social rejection from peers and the sorting into social networks because of one's skin color maybe very stressful and enhance the risk for depression and low self-esteem. Self-evaluations are formed from the perceptions of the appraisals of others. Youth who believe their skin color is viewed negatively by others may become dissatisfied with their skin color, and consequently develop low self-esteem and depression.

The primary objective of my research is to understand the link between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being among adolescents using between group comparisons. To date, empirical research has not examined the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being by including African American, Hispanic, and white youth. The data for this study come from a survey of middle-school youth who were respondents in the Gender, Race and Middle School Project (GRMSP). The GRMSP explores the ways in which race and gender condition the social psychological processes that influence adolescent problems.

This study addresses four main questions. First, is there an association between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being among middle school youth independent of the influence of attractiveness and beliefs about skin color? Second, do ascribed status characteristics (e.g., race and gender) of middle-school youth influence the association between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being? Because peer and teacher interactions provide social feedback on acceptance, I explore the possibility that difficulties in interactions with peers and teachers serve as a vehicle for information to students on their acceptability. The third question is: how is the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being influenced by interactions with peers and teachers?

The fourth question focuses on the role of discrimination and is based on the fact that exclusion based on group membership is one of the most recognizable forms of discrimination among youth (Brown and Bigler 2005). Consequently, perceiving oneself to be the target of discrimination is likely to affect mental health (Casteel 1998; Taylor and Turner 2002; Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff 2003; Brown and Bigler 2005; Neville,

Coleman, Falconer, and Holmes 2005). Therefore, I pose the following question: do gender discrimination and/or race discrimination explain the association between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being? Lastly because skin color and attractiveness are gendered, meaning skin color influences the attractiveness levels given to females more than males (Hill 2002), the present study examines whether or not gender conditions the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent psychological well-being. Research suggests that females are generally more dissatisfied than males with their physical appearance, and males' self-esteem is not affected by body dissatisfaction (Furnham, Badmin, and Sneade 2002). As a background on the importance of skin color, a discussion of the historical context of colorism is provided to help explain how skin color distinction became an important component of physical appearance among African Americans and Hispanics. Assumptions about the role of skin color for white youth are also presented.

THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SKIN COLOR

Colorism is the prejudicial treatment of individuals falling within the same racial group on the basis of skin color (Robinson and Ward 1995). In the United States, colorism has its origins in slavery (Hunter 2004). Children of miscegenation, Mulattoes, were primarily descendents of wealthy white men who coerced their slaves (Herring 2004). Mulattoes were considered more intelligent than pure Africans because of their European ancestry and were treated as a separate group by slave masters (Russell et al. 1992:18). Preferences were often given to the Mulatto slaves by assigning them to indoor jobs on plantations, such as artisan, driver, valet, seamstress, cook, and

housekeeper, thus leaving the field work to their dark-skinned counterparts (Herring 2004). With indoor assignments on the plantation, Mulattoes were given advantages such as less violent treatment by overseers, less stressful tasks, limited access to reading and writing, and opportunities for skilled labor (Billingsley 1992). Separating the two groups of slaves encouraged mistrust between them and perpetuated the color caste system on the plantation (Hunter 2004). The Mulattoes benefited from the socioeconomic status of their white fathers and were often emancipated (Herring 2004).

After slavery, kinship ties to whites gave Mulattoes an advantage over dark-skinned African Americans in obtaining education, higher status occupations, and property (Herring 2004). To preserve their status, Mulattoes in most regions of the U.S. segregated themselves into separate communities and discriminated against dark-skinned African Americans (Russell et al. 1992). There was a small influential community of African American Mulattoes primarily from the North who were never enslaved. They formed a network of African Americans who would later serve as community, business, and civic leaders, and their light-skinned leadership was construed by whites as confirmation that white blood and lineage were superior to African blood and lineage (Hunter 2004). The repercussions of earlier mixed race categories based on skin color can be observed today in the tendency of African Americans with dark skin to experience lower job prestige, less educational attainment, and lower income levels compared to African Americans with light skin (Hughes and Demo 1989; Keith and Herring 1991; Hill 2000; Herring 2004)¹.

Most of the research on colorism has focused on its occurrences in the African American community (Hughes and Hertel 1990; Keith and Herring 1991; Russell et al.

1992; Robinson and Ward 1995; Ross 1997; Fears 1998; Thompson and Keith 2001; Hill 2002; Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji 2004; Horton and Sykes 2004); however, colorism exists in other minority communities (Herring 2004). For example colorism among Mexican Americans began with Spain's creation of a colonial and racist ideology that used the spread of Catholicism and the civilization of Mexico as justification for movement into the Americas (Hunter 2004). Spain's colonization created a society in Mexico that included the Spanish and indigenous people. Both consensual and violent sexual relations resulted in a racially mixed population called "Mestizo." The Mestizos often had lighter skin, light colored eyes, and pale hair due to their European ancestry, and they were favored by the Europeans over the indigenous peoples with darker skin (Herring 2004)². Skin color stratification among Latin American countries is not unique to Mexico, rather favoritism toward Mestizos of a lighter complexion is embedded in several Latin American societies (Herring 2004).

The Mexican population, like the African American community in its U.S. counterpart, was split between a light-skinned land owning class, and a dark-skinned class of poorer workers (Hunter 2004). European Americans were more willing to grant citizenship to the light-skinned, land owning Mexicans than they were to the dark-skinned poor class. Mexican American family and community norms began to value the advantages associated with light skin (Hunter 2004). Today, dark skin Mexican Americans receive lower earnings and less education compared to Mexican Americans with lighter skin and European phenotypes (Telles and Marguía 1990).

Overall, variations in skin color are generally thought to be less important to the attractiveness of whites (Rosenblum and Lewis 1999). However, historically northern

Europeans, with the exception of the Irish, were given more status in the eyes of Americans than darker-skinned eastern and southern Europeans (Hochschild, Burch, and Weaver 2005; Mire 2005). Eastern and southern European American women used skin-whitening in an attempt to reach the beauty status of Anglo-Saxon American women (Mire 2005). Today anxiety over not appearing “white enough” among white women is evidenced by increasing sales of skin whitening products marketed to white women as “anti-aging therapy.” These products lighten skin in efforts to remove dark spots and to stay youthful (Mire 2005).

More recently, a preference for darker skin, but not so dark as to be labeled non-white has emerged among whites (Sahay and Piran 1997). Preference for a darker complexion among whites is supported by the growth of the tanning industry. The tanning craze is captured in advertisements for tanning salons, tanning sprays, tanning pills, tanning beds, and liquid sun. Preference for the “rich bronze color” has grown into an eight billion dollar industry in 2005 (Allard 2005). In fact, the tanning industry’s advertisements argue that tanning leads to good health and improves feelings about the self and lowers depression. Despite the preventative health campaigns about the harmful effects of UV rays, including sunburns and skin cancer, whites continue their exposure to “health risks” in pursuit of the desired physical appearance. Although there is no data on tanning trends among youth, a survey by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that 43 percent of white children under age 12 had at least one sunburn during the past year (CDC, 2003). Media messages and adult models are likely to influence ideas about tanning among youth. These patterns and trends may suggest that skin color is a criteria for physical attractiveness in the white community. Given the frequency of

tanning practices and campaigns for skin-whitening products, it is surprising that there is no empirical research on the connection between dissatisfaction with skin color or skin color preferences and psychological well-being among whites.

The preceding discussion of the historical context of colorism among African Americans and Hispanics and the growth of the skin-whitening and tanning industry among whites suggests that the association between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being might differ for subgroups of students. Unlike previous research on skin color, which focused exclusively on African Americans, I extend this line of research to include Hispanics and whites. However because of the pervasiveness of colorism in the history of African Americans and Hispanics and the discriminatory nature of that experience, I expect that the association between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being will be stronger for African American and Hispanic students than for white youth. In the white community, in contrast to people of color, skin color is not part of a system of inequality. Although tanned skin symbolizes healthiness and sexiness and offers social rewards in the white community (Vannini and McCright 2004), light skin in the white community is not necessarily a disadvantage. I expect that dissatisfaction with skin color for white youth will not be associated with negative feelings about the self. The conceptual framework guiding the research study is presented in the following section.

SKIN COLOR, SELF EVALUATION, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

The self-concept consists of three components: physical, social, and spiritual (James 1890). The physical self is the most recognizable aspect of the self-concept. If

society positively judges an individual's attributes, the impact on his or her self-concept is positive. Likewise, if society devalues certain physical attributes, negative feelings about the self are likely to ensue.

Language is the primary mode of expression about an individual. When a term is used to describe an individual, something about his or her character or appearance is implied. "Dark," "Light," and "Fair" are descriptions of skin color. As children acquire language, they learn the meanings of these categorical terms and begin to understand the attitudes others are taking towards them through such terms (Cahill 2004). Group interactions of youth reveal that skin color and ethnicity are salient aspects of their lives. Many youth understand that by virtue of their skin color, whites are accorded more power, control, and prestige (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2004). Youth may also understand that lighter skin colors are considered desirable and show preferences toward light-skinned youth. Through social interactions, social judgments about one's physical attributes can influence feelings about the self and psychological well-being. There are two social processes that guide feelings about the self: reflected appraisals and social comparisons.

Reflected Appraisals. Cooley's (1902) looking-glass self offers a conceptual framework for evaluating dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being among adolescents. The "looking-glass self" concept describes a reflective, evaluative process by which the opinions and attitudes of others influences feelings about the self and well-being. According to Cooley (1902), individuals can only reflect upon and form images of themselves through the imaginary adaptation of someone else's perspective. Since peers play a salient role in establishing identity and evaluating the self among adolescents

(Jones 2001), the “someone else’s perspective,” described in Cooley’s looking-glass self are primarily the opinions of peers for youth. Cooley suggests (1902) that in our imagination we constantly perceive in the mind of others some thought of our appearance, mannerisms, aims, deeds, and character and are affected by our perceptions of other people’s views³. Such socially reflected images inform the individual of who and what she or he is, and the consequent feelings of pride and shame provide the foundation for a sense of esteem.

Youth understand the meanings of categorical terms (i.e., white, light, brown, dark, and black) and the attitudes others take towards them through such terms (Cahill 2004). Parrish (1944), one of the first people to study skin color stereotyping among African American teenagers, discovered that junior high students used as many as 145 different terms to describe skin color, and each term was associated with a particular personality type. Light to medium skin tones were associated with intelligence and refinement, while dark skin tones were associated with being mean and toughness (Parrish 1944). The early work of Parrish (1944) is similar to later research in explaining that African Americans who approximate European American standards of physical attractiveness are viewed as more attractive and competent (Breland 1998; Collins 2000; Hill 2002). Children who are considered “too dark” or in some cases “too light” in comparison to family members or peers are often taunted, experience feelings of shame, become dissatisfied with their skin color, and wish to change their skin color (Russell et al. 1992). They internalize the negative evaluations suggested by their family members and peers and may constantly imagine that others view their skin color poorly.

Internalizing negative evaluations from others has an effect on self-esteem. Self-

esteem, a component of the self-concept, refers to a person's total positive evaluation of self (Gecas 1982). Self-esteem includes competence, the belief that one has control over events (self-efficacy) and worth, the degree to which people feel they are valued (Gecas 1982; Caste and Burke 2002). Research on African Americans finds a positive relationship between light skin and self-esteem and self-efficacy (Thompson and Keith 2001). Among African American adolescents, dissatisfaction with skin color is found to be negatively related to self-esteem (Robinson and Ward 1995).

Social Comparisons. Dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being are also related to Festinger's (1954) social comparison process. Social comparisons involve people judging themselves against others and making either positive or negative evaluations based on those comparisons (Festinger 1954). People tend to compare themselves negatively with people whose qualities, in this case skin color, are considered more attractive than their own (Wood 1989). The social comparison process may explain why Ward and Robinson (1995) found that African American students who self-reported as lighter or as darker than most people they knew had lower levels of satisfaction with their skin color, compared to students who classified their skin color as somewhere in between. The social comparison process may also explain why Porter (1991) found that skin color symbolized a sense of physical attractiveness and fostered a sense of sameness among African American adolescents.

Due to the pervasiveness of media, it may be difficult for adolescents to avoid social comparisons with media portrayals of skin color (Milkie 1999). The leading African American females in films are usually light-skinned with European features, while the leading African American males appearing in films are usually dark-skinned

(Russell et al. 1992). Overall, the media also perpetuates images of fair-skinned, long haired, Eurocentric beauty (Collins 2000). Among adolescents, the media may serve as a guide to defining physically attractive skin colors for boys and girls, influence the way youth with certain skin colors are treated, and affect individual level of satisfaction with skin color.

Self-evaluations are negatively associated with depression among adolescents (King et al. 1993). Although peers are a source of self-definition and support, stressful peer circumstances, such as feeling ostracized for not meeting peer standards of beauty, may cause youth to adopt negative feelings about their self-worth and self-efficacy (Caldwell et al. 2004). Negative feelings about oneself and social rejection enhance the risk for depression through the disruption of interpersonal environments and the generation of stress (Caldwell et al. 2004). I hypothesize that youth who are dissatisfied with their skin color will have lower levels of psychological well-being in comparison to youth who are satisfied with their skin color. I also predict that youth who are self identified as light-skinned will experience higher levels of psychological well-being compared to their dark-skinned counterparts.

DISCRIMINATION, SKIN COLOR, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Discrimination is the prejudicial treatment of individuals on the basis of their membership in social groups, including racial and gender affiliation (Brown and Bigler 2005). Perceptions of discrimination are likely for adolescents whose physical appearance differs from the societal standard. Perceived discrimination is subjective and depends on an intricate process of perception, recall, and reporting of past life experiences (Schnittker and Mcleod 2005). When adolescents perceive themselves to be

targets of discrimination, mental health consequences are likely to develop (Casteel 1998; Taylor and Turner 2002; Wong et al. 2003; Neville et al. 2005; Brown and Bigler 2005). Discriminatory attacks can affect people's beliefs about their group membership and affect their psychological health by directly increasing the amount of stress they experience (Williams-Morris 1996; Krieger et al. 2005).

Race and Color Discrimination. Discrimination on the basis of skin color or ethnic identity results from a racialized ideology. Racial ideology encompasses ideas and values found in society that are used to publicly justify political stances as they relate to racial matters (Neville et al. 2005). These values and ideas shape and are shaped by society, and are the connection between individual beliefs about skin color and the dominant societal beliefs about skin color. Social institutions and structures play an integral role in shaping interactions between racial groups. For example, notions of people with dark skin as savage and irrational (Hunter 2004) were established as justification for the slavery system and a response to the Abolitionists demand to free African Americans (Hunter 2004). In Western society, black is always contrasted negatively with white and such evaluations shape social interactions that all people, including black people, are prejudiced against dark skin (Drake and Cayton 1962). Darker-skinned individuals tend to be more aware of discrimination in comparison to lighter-skinned individuals (Edwards 1972), and discrimination on the basis of color is thought to account for the lower job prestige and educational attainment among persons with dark skin (Telles and Marguía 1990; Keith and Herring 1991; Ross 1997; Fears 1998; Hill 2000; Herring 2004).

Because skin color stratification is the manifestation of a racialized ideology, it

must constantly be reinforced and recreated by individuals with power (Edwards, Carter-Tellison, and Herring 2004:79). For example, in the workplace setting, light-skinned African Americans were most likely to benefit from the antidiscrimination legislation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. By employing light-skinned African Americans, companies could be in compliance with affirmative action policies while minimizing the visibility of new African American employees (Russell et al. 1992). The tendency for whites to hire and promote light-skinned African Americans over their dark-skinned counterparts led to tensions between African Americans over skin color in the workplace. Recent research finds that whites are more likely to give light-skinned African Americans higher employability ratings while giving significantly lower employability ratings to dark-skinned African Americans (Brown et al. 2003).

Not only are darker skinned individuals targets of discrimination by whites, but minority groups also discriminate within group on the basis of skin color. Colorism occurs in conjunction with race discrimination or in the absence of race discrimination when members of the same race are treated differently because of their skin color (Saccamno 2004). Colorism, also known as intraracial discrimination, is a growing basis for discriminatory claims. The EEOC received 1,382 charges of color bias in 2002 in comparison to 459 in 1987 (Saccamno 2004). Examples of intraracial discrimination include Tracy Morrow, the first person to file charges of color discrimination at the federal level, who accused her dark-skinned boss, Ruby Lewis, of skin color harassment (Russell et al. 1992). In 1990, Nimat Rashid, a dark-skinned woman, filed a complaint of discrimination with the EEOC for being harassed by a light-skinned black supervisor.

Although the previously mentioned cases of colorism and race discrimination

focused on adults, children and adolescents are also subject to experience discrimination. During the middle-school years, adolescents may perceive discrimination from their teachers. Possessing light skin color signifies physical attractiveness and is considered more attractive and less threatening in our society. Research suggests that youth whose teachers perceive them as physically attractive are stereotyped as more intelligent and are expected to excel in school (Clifford and Walster 1973). Because of their physical appearance, African Americans students are found to receive less attention and praise and to be reprimanded more than white students (Casteel 1998). The experiences of race discrimination by peers and teachers are found to negatively affect adolescent academic motivation and self-esteem (Wong et al. 2003). I predict that youth who perceive race discrimination are more likely to be dissatisfied with their skin color and experience poor psychological outcomes in comparison to youth who do not perceive race discrimination. I also expect that youth with negative peer and teacher experiences will be more likely to be dissatisfied with their skin color and experience poor psychological outcomes in comparison to youth with positive peer and teacher experiences.

Gender Discrimination. Gender discrimination may also explain the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent well-being. Among adolescent males, issues of skin color may not be central to their self-worth because their self worth appears to come from performance in the classroom and sports rather than physical appearance (Russell et al. 1992). Sexism perpetuates notions that females' abilities are inferior to the abilities of males and justifies the differential treatment of females. Historically, females' worth has been related to physical appearance and the value that males assign to feminine beauty as opposed to their minds and abilities (Kilbourne 1999; Franzoi 2001). Because

of the gender biases and limitations experienced by females, there is a higher prevalence of depression among females compared to males (Silverstein 1997). An example of gender bias is the common practice for teachers to give more positive evaluations to male students than to equally deserving female students (Brown and Bigler 2005). Since attractiveness standards are placed heavily on women, I expect that girls will be more likely than boys to experience poor psychological outcomes from being dissatisfied with their skin color. I also predict that youth who experience gender discrimination will be more likely to be dissatisfied with their skin color and experience poor psychological outcomes in comparison to youth who do not experience gender discrimination.

“Gendered colorism” (Hill 2002) is a special case of gender discrimination in which race, gender, and discrimination interact to explain the relationship between dissatisfaction of skin color and psychological well-being. Here, one would expect the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being to be stronger among African American females in comparison to white females. Femininity is associated with beauty (Kilbourne 1999), and beauty is a social construction informed by race in which most females who are labeled as beautiful are white (Hunter 2004).

Females of color are usually labeled beautiful only when they possess European facial features, long hair, or light skin (Hunter 2004). While both white females and females of color spend millions of dollars on beauty products, many products that target females of color, such as skin bleaches, promote whitening as part of the beautifying process (Russell et al. 1992; Hunter 2004; Mire 2005). Advertisements for beauty products promote the notion that females closest to the “European look” are the most attractive of their group (St. Jean and Feagin 1998; Mire 2005). I expect that the association between

dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent psychological well-being will be more pronounced for African American females, because gender and skin color together may communicate negative ideas about competence for females of color.

DATA AND MEASUREMENT

The findings reported here are from a study on race and gender identity, delinquency, and well-being among middle-school youth. During the 2003-2004 academic year, a survey was administered to students at an urban public school. Letters describing the purpose of the survey and procedures for ensuring confidentiality were sent to the parents of all 535 students in the school. The data were collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire to those students whose parents allowed them to participate. The survey was administered in 8 of 10 health/gym classes. Students are assigned to health/gym classes randomly; there is no reason to expect that those not included in the sample differ in any significant manner from those included in the sample. Ten students in the school did not take health/physical education for medical reasons (less than 2%). Thus, 465 students were eligible to be included in our sample. Surveys were received from 388 of the eligible students, a response rate of 83%. The nonrespondents include 14 students (3%) who refused to participate in the study. The remaining non-response rate is due to student absence (13%), particularly at the second round of data collection. The survey was administered over two semesters.

A series of analyses to assess the extent to which absences and nonresponses were random were conducted. First, the demographic characteristics of our sample was compared to the demographics of the school. Sixty percent of the students in the school are White, and 40 % are minorities (30% African American, 5% Hispanic, 3% Asian and

2% multi-race). The demographics of the sample mirror these numbers, with 55% of the students reporting their race as White; 31% as African American; 5% Hispanic; 3% Asian, and 5% other race). Second, to assess whether the high rate of absences at the second round of data collection compromises the data, the underlying distributions on a series of variables from the first round of data collection and the second round of data collection were compared. The respondents in the second round of data collection do not differ significantly in race, grades in various subjects, depression scores, or in their participation in delinquency from those in the first round of data collection (when attendance was not compromised). Both investigators were present during the administration of the questionnaire in each class in order to assist students with problems in comprehension.

Sample Characteristics

Adolescents in the sample are between the ages of 10 and 15 years, with an average age of 12.4 years. Approximately equal numbers of males (50%) and females (50%) participated in the study. Information on parent education, employment and work position was collected from each respondent. The sample is diverse in socioeconomic characteristics. For fathers, 9.1 percent had less than a high school degree, 10.5 percent were high school graduates, 10.8 percent had some post-high school education, 27.8 percent had graduated from high school and 17 percent had advanced degrees. Twenty-five percent of the students did not know their father's level of education. For mothers, this distribution is 4 percent, 10.4 percent, 16 percent, 30.4 percent and 15.6 percent respectively. Twenty-three percent of the students did not know their mother's level of education. Most of fathers were employed (96%) and 20% of mothers were homemakers

or not employed outside the home. No information on family income was collected. The analyses are limited to African American, Hispanic and white respondents with complete data (n=252).

Measures

Dependent Variables

There are two dependent variables that measure adolescent well-being, *depression* and *self-esteem*. The depression scale includes thirteen items: “bothered by things that don’t usually bother me,” “could not shake the blues,” “trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing,” “felt depressed,” “thought my life had been a failure,” “felt fearful,” “sleep was restless,” “felt lonely,” “had crying spells,” “felt sad,” “felt like I couldn’t do what I needed to do,” “had trouble getting my breath,” and “worried about what others were thinking.” The items included in this measure are based on the CES-D scale (Radloff 1977). Responses for these items are coded as rarely = 1, some of the time = 2, often = 3, and most of the time = 4. The alpha reliability for the depression scale is .88. The scores range from 13 to 52 with higher values indicating higher levels of depression. The self-esteem measure ($\alpha = .73$) consists of three items: “at times I think I am no good at all,” “I do not have much to be proud of,” and “all in all I feel like a failure.” These items are derived from Rosenberg’s (1979) self-esteem scale and are coded as strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree or disagree = 4, agree = 5, and strongly agree = 6. The self-esteem scores range from 3 to 15 with higher values indicating higher self-esteem.

Independent Variables

Dissatisfaction with Skin Color. Dissatisfaction with skin color is the independent variable of primary interest. The middle-school students were asked how well they

agreed with the following statement: “I do not like my skin color.” This item is coded as strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree or disagree = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 6.

Perceived Physical Unattractiveness. This single item indicates if the student was bothered by his or her physical appearance. The item is coded “1” for yes and “2” for no. One third of the students reported concerns about their physical appearance.

Beliefs About Light Skin. The students were asked how much they agreed [strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree or disagree = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5] with the following statement: ‘light-skinned people are more attractive than dark-skinned people.’

Ascribed Characteristics. The main socio-demographic variables under investigation are race, skin color and gender, which parallel the present study’s interest in discrimination. The respondents were asked to indicate their sex (male = 0, female = 1). For skin color, the respondents were asked to indicate which of the following categories best described their skin color: black = 1, dark brown = 2, medium brown = 3, light brown = 4, white = 5. Students were asked to indicate their race identity as Anglo or white, Mexican American, African American, Hispanic and Chicano. Asian and other race identity are not included in these analyses. Because race identity and skin color identity are highly correlated, we created a measure that reflects the shared meaning of the two identities, “race color identity”. The skin color variable was combined with race resulting in the following categories for the race color identity measure: medium or light brown/Hispanic, black or dark brown/African American, medium brown/ African American, light brown/African American, whites who consider their skin to be other than

white and whites with white skin color.

Peer and Teacher Stressors. There are four indicators of strained social interactions with peers and teachers. Two items measure stressful interactions with teachers.

Students were asked if the following event or situation happened to them in the past year: “teacher yelled at me” and if they “didn’t get along with my teacher.” Each item is coded “0” for no and “1” for yes. The other two items measure stressful interactions with peers. Students were asked if the following event happened to them in the past year “not picked for a team” and “picked last for a team.”

Perceived Discrimination. Perceived discrimination is assessed with two scales: race discrimination ($\alpha = .86$) and gender discrimination ($\alpha = .86$). To measure *race discrimination*, the students were asked how often [never = 1, rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, often = 4] the following statements are true: People act as if you are not smart because of your race, people act as if they are afraid of you because of your race, you receive poor service in stores because of your race, people do not respect you because of your race, and you are called names or insulted because of your race. The scores for race discrimination range from 5 to 20.

To measure *gender discrimination* the students were asked how often [(1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often] the following statements are true: people act as if you are not smart because of your sex, people do not respect you because of your sex, you are called names or insulted because of your sex. The scores for gender discrimination range from 3 to 12. See Table 1 for a description of the variables and the means and standard deviations of measures used in the analyses.

Control Variables. Age and parental education are used as controls in the analyses,

although they are not shown in the tables. Respondents were asked to indicate their age in years. The responses ranged from 11 to 14 years. There are four dummy variables for parent education level: high school graduate or less, some college or technical training, bachelor degree, and professional degree. Each variable is coded “1” and the comparison category is high school graduate or less.

Logic of Analyses

In the regression analyses, the baseline model (Model 1) assessed the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on adolescent psychological well-being controlling for the effects of perceived unattractiveness and skin color belief. In Model 2, I examined whether or not the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on adolescent psychological well-being is mediated by the student’s ascribed social demographic status, controlling for student’s race color identity, gender, age, and parent education level. Model 3 introduces peer and teacher stressors to the analyses. In this model I examined whether or not the association between dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent psychological well-being is influenced by interaction between peers and teachers. Next, the possibility that perceived unfair treatment based on gender and/or race might mediate or explain the association between dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent psychological well-being is examined separately. Model 4 introduced the race discrimination measure, and Model 5 introduces the gender discrimination measure. Model 6, the full model, examined the association between dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent psychological well being in the context of the combined impact of race and gender discrimination. The independent effect of dissatisfaction with skin color is illustrated in model 6 as well. Before examining the multivariate relationships, I

examined the association between the ascribed status attributes, race color identity and gender, with psychological well-being variables and with the primary independent variables of interest. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2. Significance results are given at the $p < .05$, $.01$ and $.001$ levels.

RESULTS

Mean scores considering differences by race color identity and gender in adolescent psychological well-being, perceived unattractiveness, belief about skin color, and perceived discrimination are presented in Table 2. First, there are no statistically significant race color identity differences in mean scores on depression or self-esteem. Second, the analyses show that dissatisfaction with skin color, perceived unattractiveness, and skin color beliefs do not differ by race color identity. African American adolescents with darker complexions are no more likely to be dissatisfied with their skin color or to feel unattractive than Hispanic or nonHispanic white adolescents. Since colorism is rooted in a racialized experience, I predicted that African Americans with darker complexions may perceive more race discrimination than other African American, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic white students. The results support this assumption. However, there are no significant differences among the mean scores on gender discrimination for the race color identity groups. While the mean score on dissatisfaction for African Americans with “darker” complexions is larger than the scores for other race/color identity groups, the difference was not statistically significant. All of the adolescents report dissatisfaction with skin color and feeling unattractive. However these findings indicate that African American adolescents with “darker complexion” perceive more race discrimination than other African American students, Hispanics and

nonHispanic white students. As expected, adolescents with white skin perceive less race discrimination than adolescents with darker skin colors.

Looking across Table 2, mean scores by gender on depression and self-esteem are statistically significant. Adolescent females are more depressed than adolescent males, and their self-esteem scores are lower than the self-esteem scores of adolescent males. Previous research on gender differences and psychological distress shows that girls are more likely to internalize distress, while boys are more likely to externalize feelings of distress (Gore, Aseltine, and Colten 1992). The internalization of distress leads to higher levels of depression among females. Mean differences by gender on dissatisfaction with skin color are not statistically significant. Females are no more likely than males to be dissatisfied with their skin color, but females are less likely to feel unattractive. This latter finding is surprising considering that attractiveness standards, including skin color, are applied more heavily to females, and females' worth in our society is based on their physical appearance rather than her abilities (Russell et al. 1992; Kilbourne 1999; Franzoi 2001).

Gender differences in perceived discrimination are statistically significant, with females perceiving more gender discrimination compared to males. The higher rates of perceived discrimination among females merits attention, because gender discrimination is associated with less favorable levels of mental health (Dubois et al. 2002). In contrast to gender discrimination, gender differences in perceived race discrimination are not statistically significant.

Table 3 presents correlations among key variables in the analyses. Comparisons regarding depression and self-esteem are consistent with the literature: Dissatisfaction

with skin color and feeling unattractive are positively related to depression and negatively related to self-esteem. Race color identities are not associated with dissatisfaction with skin color or perceived unattractiveness, but having darker skin increases the experience of not getting along with the teacher. Other correlations suggest that dissatisfaction with skin color and feeling unattractive are positively related to each other, and both are positively associated with not getting along with the teacher, being picked last for a team, race discrimination, and gender discrimination.

Depression

Table 4 presents the Ordinary Least Squares regression models for the depression outcome measure. Looking at the baseline model, the coefficients for dissatisfaction with skin color ($b=.272$; $p<.001$) and perceived unattractiveness ($b=.255$; $p<.001$) are positive and statistically significant. Youth who are dissatisfied with their skin color and who feel unattractive report high levels of depression. With each increase in dissatisfaction with skin color, there is a .272 predicted increase in the depression score. With each increase in perceived physical unattractiveness, there is a .255 predicted increase in the depression score. The measure belief about skin color does not reach statistical significance. The baseline model explains 14% of the variation in predicting depression among adolescents. In model 2 gender ($b=.124$; $p<.05$) is a statistically significant predictor of depression, suggesting that females are more likely to report depression than males, and this effect remains statistically significant until Model 6. The coefficient for dissatisfaction with skin color is reduced by 15 percent. The measures for race color identity are not statistically significant. Model 2 explains 18 percent of the variation in depression.

There is a 35% reduction in the size of the coefficient for dissatisfaction with skin color and perceived unattractiveness when measures for the peer and teacher stressors are introduced to the equation in Model 3. However, both coefficients for dissatisfaction with skin color and perceived unattractiveness remain statistically significant. About 29 percent of the variation in predicting depression among adolescents is explained by Model 3. Three of the four peer and teacher stressor measures have a statistically significant and positive effect on depression. Students who report that a teacher yells at me, being picked last for a team, or not being picked for a team have higher levels of depression than students who do not report such events. Of these three measures, only the effect for not being picked for a team fails to remain statistically significant in the subsequent models. Also note that dissatisfaction with skin color no longer has the strongest impact on depression. Being picked last for a team has the largest effect on depression.

Perceived race discrimination is introduced to the equation in Model 4, explaining 30% of the variation in depression. Perceived race discrimination is not statistically significant. Model 4 reduces the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color and the effect of perceived unattractiveness on depression by 38 and 30 percent respectively. Model 5 presents results for the effect of gender discrimination on depression. Perceived gender discrimination is statistically significant, revealing that for each one unit increase in gender discrimination, there is a .231 predicted increase in depression. Note that the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color is reduced in magnitude by approximately 46 percent. Gender discrimination, not dissatisfaction with skin color, has the largest effect on depression.

When gender discrimination and race discrimination are included simultaneously (Model 6), race discrimination remains statistically insignificant. This finding may suggest that gender discrimination when considered in concert with race discrimination has an independent effect on depression. That is, gender discrimination has an influence above and beyond that of race discrimination. Unfair treatment embedded in gender bias may be a more important predictor of depression than race discrimination. Both perceived dissatisfaction with skin color and perceived unattractiveness have independent effects on depression, suggesting that net of the strong influence of gender discrimination and peer and teacher stressors, the experiences that lead to dissatisfaction with skin color are important predictors of depression.

Self-esteem

Table 5 presents the Ordinary Least Squares regression models for the self-esteem outcome measure. The baseline model reveals that the coefficients for dissatisfaction with skin color ($b = -.401$; $p < .001$) and perceived unattractiveness ($b = -.192$; $p < .05$) are negative and statistically significant. Youth who are dissatisfied with their skin color and who feel unattractive report low levels of self-esteem. With each increase in dissatisfaction with skin color, there is a .401 predicted decrease in the self-esteem score. With each increase in perceived physical unattractiveness, there is a .192 predicted decrease in the self-esteem score. The baseline model explains 21 percent of the variation in predicting self-esteem among adolescents. Controlling for gender and skin color, Model 2, has little impact on the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and self-esteem. The coefficient for dissatisfaction with skin color is reduced by only two percent. Similarly, there is a negligible change in the association between

perceived unattractiveness and self-esteem. The measures for race color identity are not statistically significant. Gender ($b = -.138$; $p < .05$) is a statistically significant predictor of self-esteem, suggesting that females are more likely to report low self-esteem compared to males, and this effect remains statistically significant in Models 3 and 4. Model 2 explains 23 percent of the variation in predicting self-esteem.

Model 3 reduces the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color and the effect of perceived unattractiveness on self-esteem by 17 and 46 percent respectively. About 29 percent of the variation in predicting self-esteem among adolescents is explained by Model 3. Only two of the four peer and teacher stressor measures have a statistically significant and negative effect on self-esteem. Students who report being picked last for a team or not being picked for teams have lower self-esteem than students who do not report such events. These effects for being picked last for a team remain statistically significant in each of the subsequent models.

Perceived race discrimination is introduced to the equation in Model 4, increasing the amount of explained variation in self esteem to 29 percent. Model 4 reduces the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color by 20 percent. Model 5 presents results for the effect of gender discrimination on self-esteem. Perceived gender discrimination is statistically significant, revealing that for each one unit increase in gender discrimination, there is a .283 predicted decrease in self-esteem. As demonstrated in the depression analyses, when gender discrimination and race discrimination are included simultaneously (Model 6), race discrimination remains statistically insignificant. Perceived dissatisfaction with skin color has independent effects on self-esteem suggesting that net of the strong influence of gender discrimination and peer and teacher

stressors, the experiences that lead to dissatisfaction with skin color are important predictors of low self-esteem.

Interaction Effects. Does the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on adolescent psychological well-being vary by gender or race color identity? Does perceived gender or race discrimination condition the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent psychological well-being? I predict that Hispanic and African American youth are more likely to be depressed from being dissatisfied with their skin color in comparison to white youth because of the racialized nature of colorism. Due to the fact that attractiveness standards are applied more heavily to girls, I predict the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and poor psychological well-being to be strong for girls. I also expect that increases in perceived gender discrimination and perceived race discrimination may decrease one's level of self-worth, and consequently condition the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological outcomes. To address these questions, a series of models with interaction terms for dissatisfaction with skin color with gender, race color identity and each of the perceived discrimination items was examined separately. All variables were centered prior to the analyses as a means of addressing any problems of multicollinearity (Jaccard, Turrissi, and Wan 1990).

There is no evidence that the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on depression (see Table 6) or self-esteem differs by gender. There is also no evidence that race color identity, gender, perceived gender discrimination, or perceived race discrimination condition the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on self-esteem. However, there is evidence that race color identity, perceived gender discrimination, and perceived race discrimination condition the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on

depression.

When predicting depression, interactions between dissatisfaction with skin color and race color identity, dissatisfaction with skin color and perceived gender discrimination, and dissatisfaction with skin color and perceived race discrimination were statistically significant. The statistically significant interactions indicate that the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on depression depends on race color identity, perceived gender discrimination, and perceived race discrimination. To interpret the substantive meaning of the statistically significant interactions, the effects of dissatisfaction with skin color by race color identity were calculated for black and dark brown African Americans, medium brown African Americans, light brown African Americans, Hispanics, and whites with color [whites are the omitted category]. The effects for dissatisfaction with skin color and level of perceived gender discrimination and perceived race discrimination were calculated by using the value under different conditions (i.e. low, moderate, and high levels of discrimination). Low scores on perceived gender discrimination and perceived race discrimination were calculated at one standard deviation below the mean, and high scores were calculated at one standard deviation above the mean (Jaccard, Turrissi, and Wan 1990). The standardized coefficients were used in the calculations. The results of these calculations are shown in Table 6.

Comparing the coefficients for race color identity, the size of the coefficient for black and dark brown African American youth is nearly 1.7 times greater than the size of the coefficient for white youth. This finding reveals that the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on depression is stronger for African American youth with black or dark brown skin in comparison to nonHispanic white youth. The coefficients for gender

discrimination suggest that when perceived gender discrimination is low, the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on depression is 1.887, compared to 3.503 when gender discrimination is high. This difference suggests that when gender discrimination is high, the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on depression is nearly 2 times greater than the effect when gender discrimination is low. Comparing the coefficient for perceived race discrimination, the size of the coefficient at high levels of perceived race discrimination is nearly 1.8 times greater than that at low levels. For example when perceived race discrimination scores are one standard deviation below the mean, the score for dissatisfaction with skin color on depression is 1.915. In contrast, when perceived race discrimination scores are high, the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on depression is 3.596. Overall, the interaction models suggest that black or dark brown African American adolescents who are dissatisfied with their skin color experience more depression than white adolescents who are dissatisfied with their skin color. The interaction models also reveal that the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and depression is greatest when perceived gender discrimination or perceived race discrimination are high.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest strong evidence of the importance of physical appearance for adolescent psychological well-being. Youth who were dissatisfied with their skin color had lower levels of self-esteem and experienced more depression compared to youth who were satisfied with their skin color, as predicted. Race color identity was not a statistically significant predictor of depression or low self-esteem in the main effects models. This finding is surprising considering that skin color signifies physical

attractiveness, and historically physical attractiveness is defined in terms of Eurocentric notions of beauty, in which individuals who approximate European features are considered more attractive and rewarded.

I predicted that girls are more likely than boys to feel dissatisfied with their skin color, to feel unattractive, and to report low self-esteem and depression. Although mean scores suggested that dissatisfaction with skin color, perceived physical unattractiveness, low self-esteem, and depression are more common among females in comparison to males, further interaction analyses revealed that these differences were not statistically significant. I also predicted that the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent psychological well-being is partly explained by perceived race discrimination, perceived gender discrimination, and peer and teacher stressors. The inclusion of the perceived discrimination and the peer and teacher stressor items decreased the effect of dissatisfaction with skin color on depression and self-esteem in the regression models. However, dissatisfaction with skin color had independent effects on depression and self-esteem despite these controls.

The full regression models indicated that gender discrimination, not dissatisfaction with skin color had the strongest effect on depression and low-self esteem. Race discrimination was not statistically significant in the full model, which may suggest that gender discrimination captures some of the same processes as race discrimination in predicting dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being. This finding may also indicate that controlling for both perceived race discrimination and perceived gender discrimination does not yield any additional information because they are correlated. However, when perceived gender discrimination or perceived race discrimination is high,

the interaction models suggested that the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and depression is greatest. Perhaps a qualitative analysis that probes how peer and teacher interactions and various types of discrimination shape an adolescent's level of perceived attractiveness would provide more insight into the role of situational factors in explaining the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent psychological well-being and the meanings that adolescents assign to these experiences. Future studies should also explore the role of sexism in colorsim. If the combination of sexism and colorism has an effect on dissatisfaction with skin color and adolescent psychological well-being, then solely focusing on colorism may ignore important sources of psychological distress.

The interaction analyses merit attention, because they reveal that the depression African American youth experience from being dissatisfied with their skin color is the product of between group comparisons to white youth. Most research on colorism focuses on skin color differences within the African American community; however, within group differences do not appear to exist for African American youth, suggesting that colorism may operate in the same manner as racism. Unexpectedly, statistically significant differences were not found between Hispanic and white youth in the interaction analyses.

It is possible that white, African American, and Hispanic students reported being dissatisfied with their skin color and feeling unattractive for different reasons. Among the African American and Hispanic students, I hypothesize that dissatisfaction with skin color may be a response to colorism or to race discrimination. Mean scores considering racial differences in the analyses revealed that darker-skinned students perceived more

race discrimination than white students. For white students, dissatisfaction with skin color may be a response to attractiveness standards related to tanning, wanting brighter skin, or to dermatological problems, such as acne, rather than a consequence of colorism or race discrimination. Evidence that meanings of dissatisfaction with skin color may differ culturally can be observed in the use of skin whitening products and skin whitening advertisements that send different messages to racial groups. Among people of color, skin whitening is traditionally associated with oppression, self-hate, and feelings of inferiority. Skin whitening advertisements directed toward whites suggests that the use of the product is to restore youthfulness and brightness (Mire 2005). Future surveys should incorporate more specific probing questions in order to address the relationship between dermatological problems and dissatisfaction with skin color by race. This method may reveal if not liking one's skin color occurs in a cultural context.

There are some limitations to this study. First, since the findings rely on adolescents' self-reports of skin color, some misreporting, whether accidental or intentional is likely. Discomfort with disclosure is also likely. It is possible that societal preferences that promote the inferiority of dark skin may have led to the overreporting of lighter skin colors. Future research can build on this by using a point of reference, such as "compared to your peers, are you lighter or darker than most people you know." Also, having trained interviewers categorize the respondent into a skin color category may decrease misreporting. In addition, without longitudinal analyses, it is difficult to determine causation or the time ordering of the factors that cause adolescent depression. Also, the results of the study may not be generalizeable to all adolescents because the sample is relatively small.

Adolescents who label themselves as biracial are a minority group not specifically identified in the data merit attention in studying the relationship between dissatisfaction with skin color and psychological well-being. As we move into a more diverse society where social interactions among ethnic groups are more common, the population of biracial children is expected to increase (Pan 1997). Societal preferences rooted in a racist history and colorism may have a unique effect on dissatisfaction with skin color among biracial adolescents that is not captured in this study. There are some multicultural individuals with one black parent and one white parent who identify exclusively as white or exclusively as black (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2004). In other cases, many biracial children with a black parent attempt to distance themselves from being labeled as black due to the societal disadvantages associated with being black (Horton and Sykes 2004). Some biracial children may identify with their mother. For example, a child whose mother is white may identify himself as white, although his skin is darker (Horton and Sykes 2004). Research that studies outcomes of biracial children are rare, but biracial children are found to be particularly susceptible to differential treatment and social rejection by their peers (Pan 1997). It is possible that some of the respondents who identified themselves as white with skin other than white are biracial.

Overall, the results suggest that regardless of ethnic identity or gender, dissatisfaction with skin color and perceived physical attractiveness are contributors to adolescent depression and low self-esteem. Color consciousness may not be limited to African American or to other minority communities. With media hype surrounding tanned skin and skin whitening, whites may experience a color consciousness. The results of my study support the claim that attractiveness is a status characteristic of great

importance in the United States, where beauty and fitness are highly valued (Umberson and Hughes 1987). Our culture bombards youth with powerful and inescapable messages depicting ideal physical attractiveness standards. Youth internalize these appearance ideals and set personal goals and standards on which they judge themselves and others (Jones, Vigfusdottir, and Lee 2004). For all races, skin color, like, weight, height, and eye color, is used to categorize people according to socially constructed notions about attractiveness and these categorizations have the ability affect psychological well-being.

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Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Variables

Variable	Description	Mean	Standard Deviation
Depression	Bothered by things that don't usually bother me, felt that I could not shake the blues, had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing, felt depressed, thought my life had been a failure, felt fearful, sleep was restless, felt lonely, had crying spells, felt sad, felt like I couldn't do what I needed to do, had trouble getting my breath, and worried about what others were thinking [rarely = 1, some of the time = 2, often = 3, and most of the time = 4]	19.888	7.176
Self-esteem	I am no good at all, I do not have much to be proud of, and I feel like a failure. [strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree or disagree = 4, agree = 5, and strongly agree = 6]	11.797	3.064
Dissatisfaction w/Skin Color	I do not like my skin color [strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree or disagree = 4, agree = 5, and strongly agree = 6]	1.575	1.013
Perceived Physical Unattractiveness	My physical appearance bothers me. [no = 0, yes = 1]	.392	.489
Skin Color Belief	light-skinned people are more attractive than dark-skinned people. [strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree or disagree = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5]	1.798	1.076
Race Color Identity	Self identified skin color as black, medium brown, light brown, dark brown, and white; Self reported racial identity as white, African American, and Hispanic		
	White	.575	.495
	White with brown skin color	.063	.244
	Light brown African American	.075	.265
	Medium brown African American	.155	.362
	Black/Dark brown African American	.067	.251
	Medium brown/light brown Hispanic	.060	.237
Gender	Male, Female [male = 0, female = 1]	.500	.500
Age	11-14 (years)	12.436	.953
Parental Education	Educational level of the parent with the highest degree [high school graduate or less = 1, some college or technical school = 2, bachelor's degree = 3, professional degree = 4]	2.578	1.464
Teacher Yelled at Me	My teacher yelled at me. [0 = no and 1=yes]	.388	.488
Get Along w/Teacher	I didn't get along with one of my teachers. [0 = no and 1=yes]	.575	.495

Table 1 (Continued)

Variable	Description	Mean	Standard Deviation
Picked Last	I was picked last for teams on the play ground or in. [0 = no and 1=yes]	.139	.347
Not Picked	I didn't get on a sports team I wanted to be on. [0 = no and 1=yes]	.119	.324
Perceived Race Discrimination	People act as if you are not smart because of your race, people act as if they are afraid of you because of your race, you receive poor service in stores because of your race, people do not respect you because of your race, and you are called names or insulted because of your race. [(1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often]	7.027	2.991
Perceived Sex Discrimination	People act as if you are not smart because of your sex, people do not respect you because of your sex, and you are called names or insulted because of your sex. [(1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often]	4.075	1.787

Table 2 Mean Scores on Psychological Well-being, Perceived Attractiveness, Belief, and Discrimination,
by Race Color Identity and Gender

	Medium Brown and Light Brown Hispanics (n = 15)	Black and Dark Brown African Americans (n = 17)	Medium Brown African Americans (n = 39)	Light Brown African Americans (n = 19)	Whites With Skin Other Than white (n = 16)	White (n = 146)	Male (n = 126)	Female (n = 126)
Depression	22.200	19.647	19.872	20.211	19.500	19.685	18.468*	21.310*
Self-esteem	10.667	11.941	12.026	11.316	11.688	11.911	12.341*	11.254*
Dissatisfaction w/ Skin Color	1.667	2.000	1.513	1.579	1.250	1.568	1.476	1.675
Perceived Unattractiveness	.4000	.353	.231	.579	.500	.404	.452*	.333*
Skin Color Belief	1.600	1.706	1.949	1.789	2.063	1.76	1.881	1.714
Race Discrimination	8.667**	9.235**	8.564**	8.316**	6.000**	6.137	7.111	6.944
Gender Discrimination	4.200	4.529	4.462	4.474	3.438	3.925	3.643**	4.501**

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

Table 3: Correlation Matrix of Variables

Variable	Y ₁	Y ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅	X ₆	X ₇	X ₈	X ₉	X ₁₀	X ₁₁	X ₁₂	X ₁₃	X ₁₄	X ₁₅	X ₁₆
(Y ₁) Depression																
(Y ₂) Self- esteem	-.661**															
(X ₃) Dissatisfaction w/ Skin	.291**	-.426**														
(X ₄) Perceived Unattractiveness	.278**	-.233**	.096													
(X ₅) Skin Color Belief	.008	-.109	.126*	.075												
(X ₆) Hispanic	.081	-.093	.023	.004	-.046											
(X ₇) Dark Brown	-.009	.013	.113	-.021	-.023	-.068										
(X ₈) Medium Brown	-.001	.032	-.026	-.142	.060	-.107	-.115									
(X ₉) Light Brown	.013	-.045	.001	.108	-.002	-.072	-.077	-.122								
(X ₁₀) Other Than White	-.014	-.009	-.084	.057	.064	-.066	-.070	-.111	-.074							
(X ₁₁) White	-.033	.044	-.008	.027	-.041	-.295**	-.316**	-.502**	-.335**	-.306						
(X ₁₂) Teacher Yells At Me	.218**	-.147*	.061	.125*	.029	-.028	-.052	.054	.050	-.007	-.029					
(X ₁₃) Don't Get Along w/Teach	.092	-.130*	.132*	.115	-.057	.152*	-.021	-.057*	.234**	.123*	-.006	-.195*				
(X ₁₄) Pick Last for Team	.357**	-.303**	.134*	.241**	.129*	-.101	-.017	-.077	.059	.084	.040	.339**	.089			
(X ₁₅) Not Picked for Team	.151*	-.164*	.154*	-.020	.023	.114	.097	.080	-.059	-.045	-.109	.059	.043	.136*		
(X ₁₆) Race Discrimination	.236**	-.232**	.175*	.175*	.029	.138*	.199*	.220**	.123*	-.090	-.350**	.158*	.190**	.134*	.148*	
(X ₁₇) Gender Discrimination	.387**	-.422**	.218**	.134*	-.031	.018	.068	.092	.063	-.093	-.099	.103	.104	.182**	.101	.540**

*indicates p<.05. **indicates p<.001

Table 4: OLS Regression Analyses of Measures of Attractiveness and Skin Color on Symptoms of Depression (n=252)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
<i>Attractiveness/ Skin Color</i>						
Dissatisfaction w/ Skin Color	.272** (.420)	.231** (.425)	.177** (.408)	.168** (.408)	.148** (.398)	.149** (.399)
Perceived Physical Unattractiveness	.255** (.865)	.270** (.874)	.193** (.848)	.176** (.860)	.177** (.824)	(.181)** (.838)
Skin Color Belief	-.045 (.394)	-.012 (.392)	-.026 (.372)	-.023 (.371)	-.012 (.361)	-.012 (.362)
<i>Ascribed Characteristics</i>						
Medium Brown and Light Brown Hispanics		.060 (1.815)	.072 (1.727)	.051 (1.765)	.061 (1.675)	.067 (1.723)
Black and Dark Brown African Americans		-.021 (1.76)	-.020 (1.662)	-.046 (1.721)	-.045 (1.619)	-.037 (1.677)
Medium Brown African Americans		-.001 (1.260)	-.008 (1.222)	-.038 (1.274)	-.037 (1.192)	-.028 (1.241)
Light Brown African Americans		-.038 (1.638)	-.036 (1.544)	-.054 (1.561)	-.052 (1.499)	-.047 (1.520)
Whites With Skin Other Than white		-.033 (1.744)	-.038 (1.633)	-.036 (1.628)	-.021 (1.587)	-.020 (1.590)
Female		.124* (.848)	.175** (.819)	.177** (.817)	.117* (.821)	.112 (.835)
<i>Peer and Teacher Stressors</i>						
Teacher Yells at Me			.171** (.850)	.162** (.851)	.157** (.825)	.158** (.829)
Don't get Along w/ Teacher			-.053 (.888)	-.058 (.886)	-.056 (.860)	-.054 (.863)
Picked Last for Teams			.244** (1.222)	.235** (1.224)	.214** (1.193)	.215** (1.197)
Not Picked for a Team			.128* (1.288)	.124* (1.286)	.105 (1.254)	.105 (1.256)
<i>Discrimination</i>						
Race Discrimination				.099 (.149)		-.034 (.169)
Gender Discrimination					.231** (.229)	.247** (.268)
<i>Model F</i>	14.56**	5.03**	6.57**	6.40**	7.49**	7.11**
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.140	.183	.286	.290	.330	.381
<i>Constant</i>	15.929	25.468	21.316	19.347	18.187	18.642

Standardized regression coefficients are presented with standard errors in parenthesis.

*p<.05 ** p<.001

* Comparison Category-- (Skin Color: White; Gender: Male)

Controls for age and parental education not shown

Table 5: OLS Regression Analyses of Measures of Attractiveness and Skin Color on Self-Esteem (n=252)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
<i>Attractiveness/ Skin Color</i>						
Dissatisfaction w/ Skin Color	-.401** (.172)	-.380** (.177)	-.331** (.174)	-.320** (.174)	-.295** (.167)	-.296** (.167)
Perceived Physical Unattractiveness	-.192** (.353)	-.163** (.363)	-.103** (.362)	-.083 (.366)	-.083 (.346)	-.090 (.351)
Skin Color Belief	-.044 (.161)	-.067 (.163)	-.053 (.159)	-.055 (.158)	-.069 (.151)	-.069 (.153)
<i>Ascribed Characteristics</i>						
Medium Brown and Light Brown Hispanics		-.084 (.754)	-.090 (.737)	-.066 (.752)	-.076 (.702)	-.084 (.722)
Black and Dark Brown African Americans		.024 (.735)	.026 (.709)	.057 (.733)	.056 (.679)	.046 (.703)
Medium Brown African Americans		.002 (.524)	.017 (.521)	.053 (.543)	.052 (.499)	.040 (.520)
Light Brown African Americans		-.040 (.681)	-.039 (.659)	-.021 (.665)	-.020 (.629)	-.026 (.673)
Whites With Skin Other Than white		-.030 (.725)	-.025 (.697)	-.027 (.693)	-.046 (.665)	-.047 (.666)
Female		-.139* (.353)	-.184** (.350)	-.186** (.348)	-.112 (.344)	-.105 (.350)
<i>Peer and Teacher Stressors</i>						
Teacher Yells at Me			-.102 (.363)	-.091 (.363)	-.084 (.346)	-.087 (.347)
Don't get Along w/ Teacher			.007 (.379)	.012 (.377)	.010 (.361)	.008 (.361)
Picked Last for Teams			-.193** (.522)	-.182** (.521)	-.155** (.500)	-.157** (.502)
Not Picked for a Team			-.130* (.550)	-.124 (.548)	-.101 (.526)	-.102 (.526)
<i>Discrimination</i>						
Race Discrimination				-.118 (.063)		.047 (.071)
Gender Discrimination					-.283** (.096)	-.301** (.112)
<i>Model F</i>	23.39**	6.22**	6.58**	6.49**	8.23**	7.82**
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.211	.226	.286	.294	.354	.352
<i>Constant</i>	14.409	18.578	19.866	20.864	21.506	21.237

Standardized regression coefficients are presented with standard errors in parenthesis.

*p<.05 ** p<.001

* Comparison Category-- (Race: White; Gender: Male)

Controls for age and parental education not shown

Table: 6 Interaction Effects for Dissatisfaction with Skin Color on Depression

Moderator Variable	Effect on Depression
Race Color Identity	
Black and Dark Brown African Americans	1.331
White	.772
Gender Discrimination	
Low	1.887
Moderate	2.695
High	3.503
Race Discrimination	
Low	1.915
Moderate	2.756
High	3.596

The conditional effects were calculated using standardized coefficients.

APPENDIX

Notes

1. Although the disadvantages associated with light skin may not be economic, the social psychological effect of outsider treatment on light-skinned members of minority groups can be high (Hunter 2004). The 1960s and 1970s spawned an era of Black pride and racial consciousness (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2004) causing light skin to become associated with whites, assimilation, and a lack of racial consciousness. Light-skinned people of color were often treated as outsiders within their communities (Herring 2004), while women and men with dark skin were more likely to be viewed as legitimate members of their particular ethnic groups, less likely to have their group loyalty questioned, more likely to be perceived as racially conscious, and less likely to be accused of trying to be white (Fears 1998; Hunter 2004). Interestingly, despite the “black is beautiful” message of the black power movement, light-skinned African Americans continue to be considered more attractive than dark-skinned African Americans (Hunter 2004). A paradox appears to exist where light skin is considered attractive, but not ethnically authentic (Hunter 2004).

2. After the Spanish were overthrown, Mexico began to create its own national identity in a historical period dominated by the discourse of European scientific racism, which posited that Europeans were biologically superior to darker races (Hunter 2004:28). Jose Vasconcelos, a famous Mexican philosopher, developed the theory of “la raza cosmica,” the cosmic race, which envisioned an inclusive model of social-racial integration and embraced all of the races in Mexico (Hunter 2004). However, once European Americans took over parts of Mexico under the Manifest Destiny rhetoric, they incorporated their notions of white superiority over all people of color.

3. There are three principal stages to the process of the looking-glass self: the imagination of our appearance to another person, the imagination of his or her judgment of that appearance, and an outcome of pride or mortification due to the imagined effect of our reflection on another's mind (Cooley 1902:17).