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THE ROLE OF SKIN COLOR IN

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MOTHER/DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS:

A DYNAMIC REVIEW

by

Addette L. Williams

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The City University of New York.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

THE ROLE OF SKIN COLOR IN

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Advisor: Professor Steven Tuber

Clinical literature reveals that an African-American patient's conflict about her skin color may be traced to what she "learned" about skin color in her family of origin, particularly from her primary caregiver. The purpose of this study was to assess empirically the transmission of feelings about skin color from mothers to daughters, as perceived by the daughter, and how this relates to the daughter's view of herself. The researcher constructed a multiple regression model with the following predictor variables: daughter's feelings about her own skin color, her perception of her mother's feelings about daughter's skin color, daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about her mother's own skin color and daughter's experience of her mother; and the outcome variable: daughter's Self-view, defined as Self-regard, Self-criticism, and Striving/Ambition.

Participants were 80 African-American women from age 20 and 29, primarily from New York City. The instruments used in this study were the Assessment of Self-

Descriptions (Blatt, S., Bers, S., Schaffer,C., 1993), the Object Representation Inventory (Blatt, S., Chevron, E., Quinlan, D., Schaffer, C., Wein, S., 1992), two questionnaires the researcher designed for this study, and a demographic questionnaire.

Results indicate that participants perceive themselves and their mothers to have similar feelings about the participants' skin color ($r = .79, p > .001$), and that the participants perceive their mothers to have similar feelings about both of their skin colors ($r = .41, p > .001$). Evidence suggests trends toward two weak relationships: (1) the more positive the mother's feelings are about the daughter's skin color, the more benevolent the daughter is likely to experience her mother; and (2) the more benevolent the daughter experiences her mother, the more Self-critical the daughter. Multivariate analyses failed to show that the predictor variables have the power to explain the outcome variables. Results of the exploratory analyses revealed a difference between skin-color groups, with light-skinned participants seeming less Self- critical than dark-skinned participants ($X^2 = 5.76$, df = 2, $p = .056$). In addition, themes that emerged during skin-color discussions are summarized, including examples and quotes from participants.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	4
	Historical Background	4
	Income and Socioeconomic Status	10
	Skin Color and Family	11
	Racial Socialization	12
	African-American Mothers and Daughters	14
	Skin Color– Gender and Romantic Relationships	18
	Review of Empirical Literature on Skin Color	20
	Racial Identity and Attitudes	20
	Attractiveness and Preference	27
	Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy	29
	Review of Clinical Literature on Skin Color	31
	Statement of Hypotheses	35
III.	METHODOLOGY	38
	Participants	38
	Instruments	38
	Scoring of Self and Mother Descriptions	41
	Development of Questionnaires	42
	Psychometric Properties of Questionnaires	43
	Recruitment of Participants	44
	Procedure and Order of Administration	45
	Data Analysis	46
	Exploratory Analysis	47
IV.	QUANTITATIVE RESULTS	48
	Descriptive Statistics	49
	Preliminary Analyses	53
	Major Analyses	55
	Exploratory Analyses	63
	Summary	69

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONT'D)

V.	QUALITATIVE FINDINGS	71
VI.	DISCUSSION	83
	Overview and Discussion of Quantitative Results	83
	Intersection Between Quantitative and Qualitative Findings	86
	Further Discussion of Qualitative Findings	87
	Limitations of the Study	88
	Instruments	88
	Sample	89
	Research Design	91
	Implications for the Results, Further Study and Closing Remarks	93
	APPENDICES	97
	A Flyer	97
	B Newspaper Advertisement	98
	C Consent Form	99
	D Self Description	100
	E Description of Mother	101
	F Questionnaire 1	102
	G Questionnaire 2	104
	H Demographic Questionnaire	106
	I Debriefing Letter	112
	REFERENCES	114

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Reliability for Blatt ORI Scale and Assessment of Self Descriptions Scales	42
Table 2.	Variables and Instruments	48
Table 3.	Summary of Demographic Information	50
Table 4.	Correlation Between Mother's Feelings About Daughter Skin Color and Self-Regard, Self-Critical and Striving/Ambition	57
Table 5.	Correlation Between Daughter's Feelings About her own Skin Color and her Self-Regard, Self-Criticism and Striving/Ambition	59
Table 6.	Correlation Between Daughter's Experience of her Mother and Daughter's Self-Regard, Self-Criticism and Striving/Ambition	59
Table 7.	Multiple Regression Analysis of Self-Regard on Daughter's Feelings About her own Skin Color, Mother's Feelings About Both of Their Skin Colors, and Daughter's Experience of her Mother	61
Table 8.	Multiple Regression Analysis of Self-Criticism on Daughter's Feelings About her own Skin Color, Mother's Feelings About both of Their Skin Colors, and Daughter's Experience of her Mother	62
Table 9.	Multiple Regression Analysis of Striving/Ambition on Daughter's Feelings About her own Skin Color, Mother's Feelings About Both Their Skin Colors, and Daughter's Experience of her Mother	63
Table 10.	Group Statistics for T-Test Comparing Light/Medium and Medium/Dark on Self-Regard, Self-Critical, Striving/Ambition	64
Table 11.	T-Test Comparing Light/Medium and Medium/Dark on Self-Regard, Self-Critical and Striving/Ambition.	65

LIST OF TABLES (CONT'D)

Table 12.	One-way ANOVA: Comparing Light/Medium/Dark on Self-Regard, Self-Critical, Striving/Ambition– Descriptives	66
Table 13.	Games-Howell Multiple Comparisons for Light/Medium/ Dark on Self-Critical	67
Table 14.	Group Statistics for T-Test Comparing Similar and Different on Self-Regard, Self-Critical, Striving/Ambition and Malevolent/Benevolent	68
Table 15.	T-Test Comparing Similar and Different on Self-Regard, Self-Critical, Striving/Ambition and Malevolent/Benevolent	69

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> One nineteenth-century mother tried unsuccessfully to lighten her unacceptably dark daughter by dunking her every day in a tub of bleach (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992, p. 50).

The issue of skin color for African Americans has a powerful and painful past intricately linked with slavery and their entire history in the United States. The values attributed to certain skin colors historically have created a stratified social and economic system in which lighter skin has been synonymous with privilege and darker skin with low status. This preferential system has had direct implications for access to resources, education, employment and mating opportunities (Hughes and Hertel, 1990; Keith and Herring, 1991). Psychological and sociological research has been conducted to understand issues regarding skin color in relation to racial identity, preference, self-esteem, social/economic status, beauty/attraction, and mate selection.

Intragroup discrimination based on these skin-color distinctions, or colorism, is a charged and sensitive topic within the African-American community. It could even be argued that among the dirty laundry, it is the filthiest, largely because it represents a paradoxical, collective identification with the aggressor/oppressor– an internalization of an oppressive system, consequently inflicted on one's own people. Often African Americans are first exposed to the significance of skin color in the context of their families, where frequently there is a range of skin tones from very dark brown to very

light brown, or nearly caucasoid. While the roots of this issue are embedded in the racism that plagues American society, what exacerbates the conflict evoked is the implication of the family in unwittingly laying the groundwork for such discrimination.

The present study evolved from an interest in the role of skin color in psychotherapy and its impact on transference and counter-transference. In reviewing the clinical literature (Boyd-Franklin, 1991; Greene, 1990a, 1990b; Myers, 1977; and Thompson, 1996), a consistent theme arose. Generally, patients' conflicts about skin color could be traced to what they "learned" about skin color in their family of origin, particularly from their primary caregiver (Williams, 1996). For example, Thompson's (1996) adult female patient revealed that her mother had convinced her that she was ugly. The patient was the darkest of three children and looked most like her mother. Watson (1999), poignantly describes three generations of women– her maternal great-grandmother, grandmother and mother, each the darkest woman in her family of origin– who struggled with her family's internal racism. She reported,

> My dark-skinned grandmother was physically and verbally abused by the lighter members of her family, and had been taught to believe that she deserved such treatment because she was 'ugly.' It had shaped my grandmother's whole life, from how she felt about herself to how she felt about, and treated, her own daughters . . .When she was just a young child, one of her brothers forced her hands into a blazing fire, saying that since she was already black, it wouldn't matter (pp. 52, 53).

The focus of this research is the skin-color "legacy" inherited by adult women from their mothers. Many writers have noted that skin color seems to be more salient for women than men (Neal and Wilson, 1989; Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, and Ward, 1987; Russell et al., 1992; West, 1995), since women traditionally have had to be more

concerned with appearance and beauty– commodities in a sense, in the mating/dating marketplace. Broadly, the intent of this study is to investigate the transmission of feelings about skin color from mothers to daughters, as perceived by the daughter, and how this relates to the daughter's view of herself. This research focuses exclusively on the *daughter's* experience of her mother. Whether or not the daughter's perspective is an accurate depiction of her mother's messages and values, what the daughter has internalized informs how she interprets her experience of her skin color and that of others.

Goals

Clinically, the purpose of this study is to contribute to our appreciation for the complexity of African-American female patients, in all psychotherapy modalities and, hopefully, generate thoughtful questions about African-American female psychological development. Its goal is to enhance the awareness of at least one aspect of the patient's experience that is related to fundamental issues of the self and her relational world. In addition, it will seek to provide a window into the intergenerational transmission process and encourage thinking about interventions when what is transmitted generates conflict.

The significance of skin-color distinctions is not unique to African Americans nor the United States. While the historical backgrounds are not the same, variations of colorism are present in Latin America, India, Israel and the Caribbean.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature domains relevant to this study will begin with (1) Skin color in its historical context, focusing primarily on United States history, to create a context for; (2) African-American families and racial socialization; (3) African-American mothers and daughters; (4) Gender and intimate relationships; (5) Empirical literature; and (6) Clinical literature.

Historical Background

> "When European civilization came into contact with the black world, with those savage peoples, everyone agreed: Those Negroes were the principle of evil" (Fanon, 1967, p. 190).

The visibility of darker-skinned people has facilitated their becoming targets for projections of what is hated, feared and generally, what is considered unacceptable by the dominant (colonial) culture. In everyday language, black or darkness generally is synonymous with what is bad, twisted or dirty; while white or light is associated with that which is good and pure. In the process of being forced to adapt to the norms of the dominant culture, people of African descent have been encouraged to internalize the values of the dominant culture– that whiteness represents all that is good, civilized and valuable. Allahar (1993) points out that the color symbolism in Christianity has conveyed this bias as well, with white representing purity and black associated with sin

and the devil. Further, he notes that contemporary images of Christ depict him as lighter than his Semitic origins would suggest.

The array of browns that resulted from forced and, to a lesser degree, voluntary miscegenation, have had particular meanings and consequences in the day-to-day lives of African Americans. The prevailing belief in the genetic superiority of Caucasian blood historically meant that racially mixed offspring were superior to Africans. These offspring, often called "mulatto," were more likely to have higher status among slaves, i.e., house servants and skilled laborers. Even today, for some people the use of the term "mulatto" still evokes an air of superiority and a wish not to be identified as only of African descent (St. Julien as cited in Harvey, 1995). In slave auctions, this alleged genetic superiority of mixed-race individuals commanded higher profits compared with profits from slaves with "inferior" blood.

Differences in skin color and their meanings led to a preferential system that had direct implications for social and economic class. In general, darker African Americans became associated with lower status and lighter African Americans with higher status. According to Gatewood (1988), the social and economic class structure that evolved during Reconstruction was configured primarily around blacks' status during slavery– whether they had been slaves, their involvement in opposing the institution of slavery and the extent to which their families had been free from slavery. During Reconstruction, some higher status lighter-skinned African Americans took it upon themselves to create social groups to reinforce their separate and coveted status. This elite group, which has been referred to as "aristocrats of color," were contradictory in their beliefs and actions.

While overtly espousing elitism with conscious attempts to distance themselves from people of lower status, they were passionate advocates for racial advancement and equality. It is worth noting that light skin facilitated the assimilation of a subgroup of African-Americans into mainstream society, permitting a more bicultural existence and, for some, even "passing" as Caucasian.

One of the most important admission requirements to these exclusive social clubs was light skin color. Okazawa-Rey et al. (1987), Russell et al. (1992) and others discuss the use of the brown-bag test (as a source for comparison) to screen out who was too dark, as well as the blue-vein test, which involved determining the visibility of purplish and green veins in the wrist. Intragroup skin-color discrimination pervaded most segments of the African-American community, including the church, which has generally been considered the foundation of the black community. Some church doors were painted the darkest shade of brown that was acceptable for its members (Kerr, 1998; Russell et al. 1992). In Kerr's (1998) investigation of "complexion lore" among African-Americans in Washington, D.C., she encountered what was referred to as the "admission picture requirement" at many historically black colleges and prominent black high schools. Light-skinned applicants were believed to receive preferential treatment. According to Gatewood (1988), prior to World War I, Washington, D.C. was considered the mecca of the colored aristocracy.

Parrish (1944, 1946) was perhaps the first to document the extensive vocabulary African Americans use to articulate color distinctions. Within the skin-color hierarchy of fair or "high yellow" to "jet black," the ideal is neither "too" light nor "too" dark. In

addition, Parrish (1946) found that the physical descriptions his participants associated with light and medium skin tones were favorable while darker skin tones were associated with unfavorable descriptions. When analyzing personality traits and skin tones, the strongest attitudes were evoked by the extremes– dark-skinned people were viewed as having quarrelsome dispositions, and light-skinned people were perceived as conceited and snobbish.

During World War II, Lincoln (1967) reports that "passport" parties were held on some college campuses. African-American male escorts paid a color tax based on the skin color of their dates; if light enough, she was admitted for free.

The Civil Rights and Black Power movements during the 1950s and 60s seemed to lessen the overt discrimination based on skin color. The celebration of African heritage and pronouncements that "Black is Beautiful," challenged the prevailing Caucasian standards of beauty. Results from three studies that occurred in the early 1970s, pointed to a shift in attitudes about skin color. In 1970, Goering (1972) replicated a study conducted in 1950 to examine changing perceptions and evaluations of physical characteristics, and compared the results to those from the 1950 study. In 1950, 50% of the sample least wanted to be dark-skinned, while in 1970, almost 80% wanted to have white skin. Goering found an interesting difference by sex– in 1950, women rejected white skin color more strongly than men, whereas in 1970, men were stronger in their rejection of white skin color. Udry, Bauman and Chase (1973) found evidence suggesting that the Civil Rights and Black Power movements had positively affected African-American men. The dark-skinned men in this sample of married couples in

Washington, D.C. were more likely to have high job-mobility orientation, which they define as "the extent to which the man was willing to sacrifice health, friends, family and familiar surroundings to get a better job" (p. 728). This was true especially for newly married/younger dark-skinned men. African-American women, however, did not experience a change in the traditional valuation of light skin. However, Hamm, Williams and Dalhouse (1973) found no preference for light nor dark skin in a small sample of men representing three age groups. Participants in the youngest age group attributed more positive behavioral characteristics to black skin than older participants. These findings were seen as an indication that there had been a shift from negative to neutral in the valuation of skin color.

Some light-skinned African-American women felt the tide had turned against them and felt a need to prove their "blackness," something unnecessary for their darker brothers and sisters. On the other hand, a former Black Panther member, writer Bonnie Allen, recalls being warned by two male Panthers at a rally to free Huey Newton that "things are going to get rough, so you'd better go home. You're too pretty to get your face messed up" (Allen, 1992, p. 67). Allen said she did not detect a similar concern for the darker female Panthers. Poussaint (1975) had also encountered the tension between light- and dark-skinned African-American women in his clinical practice, which he explained in the "Problems of Light-Skinned Blacks." Although there is no conclusive evidence, it seems that the social and political changes during the 1960s and 1970s may have had a greater positive effect on African-American men than on African-American women.

More recently, African Americans contested the issue of intragroup skin-color discrimination in the legal arena. In 1990, two separate discrimination cases were filed. In one, Tracy Morrow, a light-skinned African-American woman filed a lawsuit against her former supervisor at the IRS, a dark-skinned African-American woman (Associated Press, 1990a). Ms. Morrow testified that her former supervisor had made demeaning references to her skin color, like "You need some sun," and "You've had it too easy." Although the federal judge ruled that Ms. Morrow was dismissed as a result of poor performance and attitude, for many African Americans, this validated that colorism is alive and thriving. In another case, a woman who considers herself dark-skinned, filed discrimination charges against the Morehouse School of Medicine. She alleged that her superior, a lighter-skinned African-American woman, gave her an unusually heavy workload and constantly harassed her. The plaintiff stated in the affidavit that her superior ". . . is prejudiced against attractive, dark-skinned/brown African-American women"(Hardie, 1990, B2).

Also, in 1990, the American Civil Liberties Union issued a report based on a court-authorized review of case files and interviews with city workers explaining that skin color and hair texture were considered in foster-care placements to private foster-care agencies (Daley, 1990). The report noted that 72% of the case records reviewed contained the child's skin color, in addition to race. In referring to private foster-care agencies, a caseworker said, 'They want to know if the child is light brown or dark brown. They will refuse children if they think the kid is too dark' (Daley, 1990, B5).

Income and Socioeconomic Status

The etiology of class distinctions among African Americans has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Sociologists and historians have wondered about the degree to which there continues to be significant differences in income and social status by skin color. Two different analyses of 1980 data from the National Survey of Black Americans conducted by Hughes and Hertel (1990) and Keith and Herring (1991) found that African Americans with lighter skin have higher socioeconomic status, and that skin color is a better predictor of occupation and income than parents' socioeconomic status. When Hughes and Hertel compared dark- and light-skin color groups for education and occupation, they found the difference almost the same as when comparing black and white Americans. Regarding income, there is a difference between the light- and dark-skinned respondents but not comparable to the difference in income between blacks and whites. Both studies concluded that differences in skin color continue to have real socioeconomic meaning for African Americans.

More recently, a longitudinal study conducted by Hill (2000) compared childhood census records of 416 southern-raised mulatto and black boys from 1920, to their death certificates in 1980 and 1985, which included their occupation. Hill found that men who had been identified as mulatto had a modestly higher adult socioeconomic status than men identified as black. At the time of the 1920 census, race or color was classified by census enumerators who assessed the visibility of European ancestry in African Americans. Unfortunately, women were excluded from this study because they did not have a labor force occupation listed on their death certificates. Hill suggests that his

findings probably understate the degree of difference between mulatto and black women during this same time period.

In response to the considerable negative attention received by female-headed households of the African-American underclass, Mullins and Sites (1990) analyzed the contributions made by African-American women to the social inheritance and achievement process among upper-class African Americans. Their participants were a random sample of 448 people listed in "Who's Who Among Black Americans." They analyzed particular resources passed down through three generations: skin color, educational attainment and occupational status. They found that women probably contributed more of each of these resources in each generation than the men in their families.

Skin Color and Family

Understanding and discussing the legacy of skin-color differences and their implications is so uncomfortable because it involves a critical examination of the family. As a microcosm of the African-American community, one first learns about skin color's significance within one's family of origin.

> Sam, age 14, was a light-skinned black adolescent who was the third child in a family of six. Although there was a range of skin colors in his family, he was the lightest. From the adults in his family and extended family, he often received many special privileges and comments about how handsome he was. This special attention created an intense sibling rivalry between Sam and his brothers and sisters, who frequently scapegoated him and excluded him from their games. Sam grew up very unsure of himself and very threatened when anyone acknowledged his appearance (Boyd-Franklin, 1989, p. 37).

Despite a family's best intentions, Boyd-Franklin (1989) notes that the darkest or lightest child may be viewed as different and can be "chosen" at an early age for the family projection process, in which the parents unconsciously project their conflicts onto the child. Differences in skin color may even raise questions about the paternity of a child. Explanations for skin-color differences in families also may be connected to closely guarded family secrets (Boyd-Franklin, 1993).

Many African-American parents would be reluctant to admit that for some families there is "color anxiety" before the birth of a child. Harrison-Ross and Wyden (1973), Thompson (1996) and others point out that expecting families sometimes inquire about skin color before asking the sex of the infant. Infants may enter an emotional climate fraught with concern about their skin color. Folklore passed down through generations instructs parents on forecasting the "true" color of an African-American infant, i.e., looking inside the infant's ears, and around the cuticles.

Racial Socialization

Through racial or ethnic socialization African-American families inform and prepare their children for what it means to be African American, and the significance of skin color may be one component of this process. Thornton, Chatters, Taylor and Allen (1990) describes racial and ethnic socialization as providing a buffer between the child and a society whose negative messages and images are at odds with fostering a healthy sense of self. Numerous books for African-American parents (Beal, Villarosa and Abner, 1999; Comer and Poussaint, 1992; Harrison-Ross and Myers, 1973; Hopson and Hopson,

1990; McAdoo and McAdoo, 1985) discuss ways to teach children about racism and prepare them for dangers and potential disappointments in ways that are neither overwhelming nor over protective. Although parenting books for African Americans are a relatively recent phenomenon, racial socialization is not new. Traditionally, black parents have relied on the church, extended family members and storytelling in lieu of formal "book learning" to insure their childrens' survival.

Of the books reviewed for this study, The Black Child - A Parent's Guide (Harrison-Ross and Wyden, 1973) is the most explicit in its discussion of skin color. The authors acknowledge that skin color is emotionally loaded for African-American parents and is a factor that can affect the quality of parental care and love as well as the child's position in the family. Harrison-Ross describes a patient, Nonie, who delivered a healthy baby boy. He was the third child and the darkest of her three children. Apparently, Nonie was visibly disappointed in his skin color and initially did not want to hold her baby. Harrison-Ross inferred that, "Nonie couldn't even like Seth, let alone love him, because Nonie had never come to terms with being black herself" (p. 36). Based on Harrison-Ross's experience as an obstetrician, she reported that Nonie's conflict is quite common. The didactic tone of this book is striking and may reflect the cultural climate in the early 1970s, which perhaps was more conducive for direct and critical discussion of skin color.

Similarly, Thompson (1996) has pointed out that skin color is a factor that can impede or enhance the caretaker's ability to mirror a child. In other words, although a child looks at her mother's face, she may not see herself reflected back. Winnicott

(1982) writes of this experience of mirroring as central to the emotional development of a child.

According to Greene (1990a) and Thornton et al. (1990), it is primarily the mother or female primary caregiver who is responsible for racial socialization. Greene (1990a, 1990b) discusses how the African-American mother may transmit both her conflicts as well preferences about skin color to her child. She warns, however, that it may be hard to distinguish unconscious maternal conflicts from honest attempts to protect a child from a rejecting environment. Author Marita Golden recalls her mother advising her not to play in the sun because "you gonna have to get a light husband ... for the sake of your children" (1983, p. 24). While this kind of message may be devastating for a child, one can also hear a mother's concern for her daughter's future.

African-American Mothers and Daughters

Before focusing on African-American mother/daughter relationships, it is worth briefly considering the mother/daughter relationship, in general. Chodorow's ideas about relationships between mothers and their children are seminal (1978). Chodorow, a feminist psychoanalyst, believes that there are profound differences in the relationships that mothers have with their daughters as compared to mothers and sons. Because mothers and daughters are the same sex they experience their daughters as less separate than their sons. Assuming that the mother is heterosexual, the mother does not think of her daughter as a sexual other in the way she might view her son. Rather, it might be easier for her to experience her daughter as an extension of herself, suggesting more

fluid ego and body ego boundaries. Thus, while a boy's gender identity development hinges on rejecting his mother and identifying with his father, the daughter is able to maintain an attachment to both mother and father. In this way, a comparatively less clearly defined separation occurs between mothers and daughters in the course of normal psychological development.

So, given this unique attachment between mothers and daughters, what is distinct about African-American mother/daughter relationships? Collins' work in the fields of African-American studies and sociology is a useful starting point (1990, 1997). She asserts that African-American mothers have had to teach their daughters how to fit into multiple oppressive systems (race, gender and class) in order to survive, while also instilling the desire to transcend these structures. In other words, a mother's message might convey: *This is what you need to do in order to play the game, however, ultimately, this is what you should strive for.* For example, author Elsa Barkley Brown described the contradictory messages given by her mother, who discouraged her from developing her career as she raised children, while simultaneously sending her daughter tuition for graduate school (1991).

This complicated maternal task presents particular challenges in relationships between mothers and daughters. Collins (1990) points out that sometimes African-American mothers are perceived as overprotective and strong disciplinarians, yet their daughters grow to be self-reliant and assertive women. In addition, the day-to-day struggles of trying to create a life for her children sometimes leaves little time for affection. She posits that daughters understand their mothers' hard work and ability to

provide for her children as signs of their mothers' affection. Nonetheless, it seems there is an important paradox in the way that African-American mothers and daughters relate; as determined as the mothers are to help their daughters thrive, that very effort can deprive the relationship of a crucial ingredient.

Greene, White and Whitten (2000) suggest that recognizing the significance of hair may provide a useful metaphor for understanding the relationships between African-American mothers and their daughters. Like skin color, hair texture and length may be another physical aspect of an African-American woman that does not conform to the Caucasian ideal. Thus a woman's feelings about her hair may be related to issues of racial identity, femininity, sexuality and self esteem. They suggest that since African-American women historically have often had little control over their circumstances, that issues about control may be played out with hair– the most malleable of a woman's physical features. It is not inevitable that hair become an issue between mothers and daughters, yet the potential is often present. A mother's concern about her daughter's hair may convey that her hair is not acceptable in its natural state, and that it needs to be controlled. The daughter may experience this as *she* is not acceptable and that *she* must be controlled. While a daughter's hair is sometimes a reflection of her mother's care– in time, effort and expense, hair care also may be associated with struggle and physical pain (e.g., burns from hot combs, chemical burns from relaxers and the pulling involved in combing hair). Although hair conflicts may seem superficial, there is the mother's reality-based concern about how the majority society will perceive her daughter, and

wanting her daughter's presentation to maximize her potential for achievement and mating.

As with the issues raised in the discussion of hair, in considering African-American sexuality we can see another way in which mothers have attempted to exert control over their daughters. In Wyatt's (1997) historical account of African-American female sexuality, she points out that the goal for African-American parents after emancipation was to protect their daughters from relentless sexual harassment and rape. Families' attitudes about sexuality were quite conservative, as they attempted to regain control over their daughter's sexuality. Mothers, in particular, conveyed information to their daughters about how they should handle their femininity and how to avoid the negative stereotypes of African-American female sexuality given the realities of a racist society.

The concept of shared-mothering responsibilities is central to the institution of motherhood for many African-American women. Collins (1997) describes the permeable boundaries between biological mothers and "othermothers," acknowledging that having only one caretaker for a child may be ill-advised, or simply not possible. Often there is flexibility that permits these kinds of relationships to range from temporary situations to informal adoption. Such fluid boundaries occur not just between mothers and daughters; rather, African-American culture allows for a whole community of women with whom the younger generation can identify. In this vein, Comas-Diaz (1994) writes that mainstream clinical literature has neglected the importance of relationships between grandmothers and granddaughters for women of color. She argues

that grandmothers often help connect their granddaughters to their ethnoracial group and transmit a sense of historical continuity.

The above literature addresses the nature of African-American mother/daughter relationships, in general, without regard to social class. One might wonder to what extent social-class differences affect mother/daughter relationships. Hill (1994) found that there was no significant difference in perceived socialization between adult daughters of working and middle-class mothers. She found that both groups of mothers had similar expectations for their daughters and had the same level of involvement in their education. Hill concluded that the daughters had been expected to earn good grades and go to college regardless of their families' social class. This lends support to the notion that education is seen as crucial to success for African Americans, similar to other ethnic groups, but specifically that African-American women must be able to provide for themselves. What Hill did find, however, was that class background was significant in determining the *father's* explicit encouragement of the daughter's achievement and aspirations– with fathers who hold professional jobs being more active in supporting their daughters' aspirations.

Skin Color– Gender and Romantic Relationships

> "But it's my color that makes him mad. I try to shut my eyes to that, but it's no good. What I am inside, what is really me, he likes okay. But he keeps looking at my color, which is like a wall. He has to jump over it in order to meet and touch what I've got for him. He has to jump away up high in order to see it. He gets awful tired of all that jumping" (Brooks, 1953, p. 87).

Traditionally, skin color has been viewed in the psychological literature as primarily a female concern because of its implications in attracting a mate. Consequently, it is assumed that skin color is more salient for African-American women, many of whom have internalized (and are judged by) Caucasian standards of beauty. Perkins (1996) explored the impact of media, primarily television images, on African American's self-perceptions of physical attractiveness. She provides an overview of the importance of physical attractiveness for women, in general, and points out that family beliefs and messages may be conveyed explicitly to children about their parents' wishes and hopes for their children's skin color, hair texture and shape of facial features. Perkins argues that the majority of African-American women cannot live up to the standards of the ideal Caucasian female (most Caucasian women cannot as well) and cannot live up to the image of the media's ideal African-American woman. This idealized image usually has light skin, light eyes, long straight or wavy hair texture and Caucasian facial features. Within this value system, light skin and long straight hair are powerful commodities, since the stereotype is that many African-American men prefer these characteristics.

Historically, skin color has been a marker of status and, for men, acquiring a light-skinned wife has signified upward mobility. In a study conducted by Freeman, Armor, Ross and Pettigrew (1966) with 250 urban families, men in white-collar positions were found more likely to have married light-skinned women than men in blue-collar positions. Men in blue-collar positions were more likely to have married a woman from a white-collar family if he were lighter than she was. Bond and Cash (1992) found that

70% of the women in their study believed men find light-skin color attractive. This perception that African-American men find light skin attractive is consistent with Ross's (1997) work, which found that men had a preference for dating and marrying light-skinned African-American women. The generalization is that successful darker-skinned African-American men have chosen light-skinned African-American women to help them transcend class boundaries, while also improving their chances for having lighter children.

Review of Empirical Literature on Skin Color

The literature reviewed in this section focuses on the relationship between skin color and racial identity/attitudes, attractiveness/preference and self-esteem/self-efficacy.

Racial Identity and Attitudes

The most famous and earliest studies addressing skin color were conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark beginning in the late 1930s. Initially, their interest was in the development of consciousness of self and race consciousness in preschool children (1939a). The Clarks found that children (3, 4 and 5 year-olds) use the physical characteristic of skin color to identify themselves as members of a racial group rather than identifying with a particular racial category; the latter is a more sophisticated and abstract concept. Using the same data from their first study and dividing the research participants into three groups based on the skin colors, light, medium and dark, the Clarks looked at how skin color influences racial identification (1940). Certain patterns

emerged by skin color. The extreme groups of light and dark tended to identify themselves based on the concrete reality of their own skin color, thus selecting a white or black boy in response to the examiner's request "Show me which one is you." The medium group, which the Clarks admit was harder to define, was more heterogeneous in skin color and had less stable responses. To explain why some dark-skinned children identified with the white boy, the Clarks suggested these children may be engaged in "wishful thinking," or wanting to be white. They cautioned that more evidence would be needed to support this claim, since this was not a significant response pattern.

The Clarks also investigated racial identification and preference in black children (1947, 1950). Ranging from ages three to seven, 253 participants from segregated southern and mixed northern nursery and public schools were shown four identical dolls, two black and two white. The experimenter asked that a doll be selected in response to certain requests, i.e., "Give me the doll that is a nice color." The goal was to determine whether participants understand the concept of racial difference, particularly with regard to the concepts "white" and "colored." Overall, participants had a tenuous grasp of the concept "Negro" until age five. When responses were analyzed by skin color of participants, the dark group was found to be consistently more accurate in choosing the appropriate doll for a given question. The Clarks speculated that "the dark group is slightly more definite in its knowledge of racial differences" (1947, p. 554). While the response pattern of the different skin-color groups was similar for knowledge of racial differences, there was a noticeable difference in their self identification. In response to the request "Give me the doll that looks like you," only 20% of the children classified in

the light group identified themselves with the colored doll compared with 71% of the medium group and 83% of the dark group. The Clarks concluded that there are different dynamics involved for children in the light-skinned group. One possible explanation is that the white doll was in fact closer in skin color to the light-skinned children than was the colored doll.

These areas of inquiry and the Clark's conclusions with regard to preference and racial identity sparked numerous investigations, and attempts to replicate their findings. Researchers have since raised questions about the Clark's methodology, their conclusions and whether their research findings, based on child samples, can be generalized to adults. Cross (1991), in particular, has conducted a thorough analysis of the ways that African-American identity has been researched.

Other researchers concerned with racial identity and attitudes have sought to understand the effects of negative majority stereotypes of race on intraracial attitudes. Averhart and Bigler (1997) worked with 56 African-American children from ages five to seven, who attended a predominantly African-American elementary school in Austin, Texas. Researchers asked the children to recall information in stories that they had heard that either confirmed or disconfirmed cultural stereotypes of lighter- and darker-skinned African Americans. The procedure also included measures to assess interracial attitudes, self-perceived skin color, skin color selection (e.g., who would he or she most like to have as a teacher, having the child pick between the lighter and darker photograph) and classification skills (to determine ability to categorize items). Overall, they found that children had better memory for stereotypic information about skin color. Specifically,

children demonstrated better memory for stories that depicted darker-skinned people negatively, and similarly, lighter-skinned people in a positive light. In addition, they associated higher-status occupation roles with light-skinned African Americans. The older children in this study gave fewer stereotyped responses than the younger children indicating that certain intra-racial and interracial attitudes are related to age. Averhart and Bigler suggest that longitudinal research is needed to understand this.

Several studies consider racial identity and attitudes in adulthood. Using data from a 1968 survey of racial attitudes of more than 2,800 blacks aged 16 to 69, in 15 urban cities, Edwards (1973) found certain demographic characteristics of skin-color groups. More light-skinned blacks had attended college, more were holding white-collar jobs and were in upper-income groups. He found that darker-skinned blacks were more aware of racial discrimination, felt more hostile toward whites, had a greater sense of ethnic identification and had more frequent reports of racial discrimination than lighter-skinned blacks. Edwards notes the differences are small but consistent in direction. Differences are minimized when income level was held constant.

Ransford (1970) explored the relationship between skin color, opportunity and anti-white feelings among 312 black men who were interviewed after the Watts riot in Los Angeles, California. Dark-skinned men were found to feel more hostility toward whites, were more willing to use violence and were less accepting of integration than light-skinned men. These attitudes were less pronounced and sometimes nonexistent among middle-class respondents, regardless of skin color. When social contact with whites was taken into account, the relationship between skin color and white antagonism

weakened. Regarding opportunity, like other studies, Ransford found that darker-skinned men were in lower occupational and income categories than light-skinned men, except for those who have a college degree.

In another study, using Helms and Parham's (1985) Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS), Robinson (1992) looked at the roles of racial identity and physical attributes in African-American body images. The RIAS is an instrument designed to describe the development of racial identity for African Americans. It includes four psychological stages: (1) *Pre-encounter*, referring to the tendency to view the world from a Eurocentric or white perspective, and espousing anti-black views; (2) *Encounter*, a period in which a pivotal experience causes one to question his or her existing world view, and the development of a black identity begins; (3) *Immersion-Emersion*, referring to an intense overt embrace of blackness and denigration of whiteness, with an insecurity regarding one's blackness; and (4) *Internalization*, marked by a secure internalization of blackness and nonracist perspectives. Questions reflecting each stage correspond to a particular subscale. Subjects were queried about the attributes– skin color, hair texture, lips and nose size– using scales to measure satisfaction, self-assessment, desire for change, preferences for attributes in the opposite sex, and perceptions of the opposite sexes' preferences. Pre-encounter attitudes were negatively correlated with male and female satisfaction with skin color, and negatively correlated with participants classified with medium-skin tone. The desire for darker skin by light- and dark-skinned participants was correlated with Immersion-Emersion attitudes but negatively correlated with Immersion-Emersion attitudes for medium-skinned participants. With regard to

gender differences, women tended to rate their skin color as lighter than the skin color they preferred for men. Most men and women reported satisfaction with skin color. However, about one-third of both men and women reported a desire for change.

Malvin (1995) used a sample of 110 African-American adults to investigate differences between African-American men and women with regard to skin color, racial identity, the impact of geographical differences and age. Malvin found that when participants perceived that they were seen as darker than they would rate themselves, they tended to espouse anti-black or Pre-encounter attitudes. When there was a discrepancy between the self-rating of skin color and how others perceive their skin color, women scored higher on the Immersion-Emersion scale, yet when there was no discrepancy, women scored lower on the Immersion-Emersion subscale.

In reviewing empirical research on the relationship between skin tone and racial identity, Brown, Ward, Lightbourn and Jackson (1998) found that research typically focuses on two aspects of racial identity: (1) private and public regard (i.e., how one views African Americans and one's perception of how other ethnic or racial groups view African Americans); and (2) ideology (broadly, how African Americans should act in different arenas, specifically, political/economic development, cultural/social interactions and interactions with the dominant group). Using data from the National Survey of Black Americans collected in 1979 and 1980, Brown and colleagues applied Sellers' Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity, which assesses four aspects of racial identity: (1) regard; (2) ideology; (3) racial salience (the relevance of the identity); and (4) centrality of racial identity (referring to one's hierarchical ordering of identities).

Brown et al. (1998) found no significant difference between five skin-tone groups (very dark brown, dark brown, medium brown, light brown and very light brown) for racial salience, public regard and cultural/social interactions. Persons categorized as light brown indicated that they were more likely to say being black is most important to them (rather than American). However, very light-brown respondents expressed that being black was least likely to be high in their hierarchy of identities. In addition, no significant differences were found between skin-tone groups for measures of racial salience, public regard and cultural/social interaction ideology.

Hall (1989) developed an instrument, the Cutaneo Chroma Correlate (CCC) to measure skin-color attitudes with regard to education, occupation, income, personal values and environmental assessment. Using a sample of 200 college freshmen, Hall found significant relationships between light- and medium-skin-color groups and occupation and income. In addition, there was as an association between light- and medium-skin-color groups relative to personal values, like preference for lighter- and medium-skin tones for mates, friends and family members. None of the skin-color groups reported a preference for dark skin. Finally, Hall found that light- and medium-skin-color groups generally were mindful of skin color when assessing their personal and social environments. When assessing the environment, the preferred skin color for the light- and medium-skin-color groups was medium. In subsequent articles (1992, 1996), Hall reported significant differences between light- and dark-skin-color groups; with people of lighter-skin color valuing lighter-skin tones more and aspiring to more

prestigious occupations relative to people with darker-skin color. This latter finding raises questions about how educators and employers may perpetuate colorism.

Attractiveness and Preference in Relation to Skin Color

In studying the influence of facial features and skin color on perceptions of physical attractiveness of black women, Neal (1988) showed slides of women varying in attractiveness, facial features (Negroid and Caucasoid), and skin tone and asked 80 men and women to rate the women in the slides on several dimensions. Neal found that unattractive women were perceived to have darker skin than attractive women, and women with Negroid features– broad noses and full lips, were perceived to have darker skin.

In Bond and Cash's (1992) study of the relationship between skin color and several body-image measures, they found that black college-age women generally reported satisfaction with their skin color, however, an idealization of lightness was present. Of the respondents who wanted a different skin tone, the majority wanted to be lighter rather than darker. Most women (70%) believed that black men find light-skin color most attractive.

Wade's study (1996) addressed skin color and its relationship to self-esteem and self-perceived attractiveness (physical, sexual and global) in African-American men and women. He expected to see a difference between light- and dark-skinned women but found no difference in perceived sexual attractiveness; however, there was a difference between light- and dark-skinned men, with dark-skinned men rating themselves higher in

sexual attractiveness than light-skinned men. There was no significant difference in the self-esteem of men between skin-color groups. One way of understanding the difference in sexual attractiveness between light- and dark-skinned men is to consider hooks' (1995) idea that darker skin represents a code for masculinity, which may enhance the looks and desirability of an African-American man. Darker skin for men is seen as an asset. Hooks cites numerous famous African-American male entertainers and athletes who have darker-skin colors, like Denzel Washington, Michael Jordan and Wesley Snipes.

Using a sample of 113 undergraduate and graduate students from the Northeast, Coard (1997) found no self preference for lighter-skin color among the women or men. The sample as a whole, which ranged in age from 17 to 41, preferred a medium-skin color regardless of skin color. Lighter-skin color was positively related to higher levels of racial identity attitudes. Paradoxically, she also found that the more satisfied darker-skinned participants were with their skin color, the more likely they were to have lower self-esteem. Coard speculated that satisfaction with one's skin color may mean acceptance but not necessarily liking one's skin color, and that these participants may have unconscious negative feelings about skin color. Higher self-esteem was related to lower Pre-encounter attitudes (viewing the world from a Eurocentric perspective/ espousing anti-black views) and conversely, to higher Internalization attitudes (secure internalization of blackness and nonracist attitudes).

Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy

There have been numerous studies exploring levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy with regard to skin color. Building on the work of the Clarks, Butts (1963) studied the relationship between self-esteem and perceived skin color in 50 African-American children between the ages 9 and 12, hypothesizing that children with impaired self-esteem would have a less accurate perception of their skin color. This study confirmed this in a subgroup of the sample.

Holtzman (1973) investigated whether there had been any changes in what she called the "color caste system" after the political movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Holtzman found that medium range of skin color was correlated with personal competence and feeling able to effect change. Very dark skin was correlated with the lowest scores on personal competence and very light skin was correlated with feeling able to effect change.

Robinson and Ward (1995) studied the relationship between skin color and self-esteem and dating relationships among African-American adolescents in Massachusetts, California and Maryland. Using a questionnaire that they developed, which incorporated several items from Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Inventory (1979), they found a positive relationship between satisfaction with skin color and self-esteem. Persons who identified themselves as more toward the extremes of the skin-color spectrum reported the least satisfaction with their skin colors compared to participants who identified their skin color as "somewhere in between." This finding supports the notion that African Americans generally prefer neither to be very light nor very dark (Neal and Wilson,

1989; Parrish, 1944, 1946; Russell et al., 1992). Robinson and Ward found a significant difference by sex in perceived importance of skin color when boys date girls, with more boys than girls believing skin color is not an important factor. In addition, they found a significant regional difference among adolescent Californians regarding their agreement with the statement, "Skin color makes a difference to guys when they date girls," when compared to adolescents from Maryland and Massachusetts. The researchers speculated that the large Latino and Asian populations in California may add to the significance of skin color for adolescents in this region.

Alford (1997) examined the relationship between skin color and self-esteem in eighty-five women in the Northeast, between the ages of 18 and 25. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory, while skin color was assessed by three judges. No significant differences in self-esteem were found when comparing skin color groups-- light, medium and dark.

In a sample of 194 young adults in southern California, Boykin-Johnson (1996) found significant relationships between skin color and certain aspects of self-concept using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. People who identified themselves as having light skin had a significantly higher sense of self-worth, followed by medium, then dark skin. Persons who identified themselves as having the darkest-skin tones had significantly lower family self-concept. She hypothesized that families may transmit messages intergenerationally conveying that light skin is an asset. There was no main effect found between skin tone and social competence. Also using the RIAS in this study, Boykin-Johnson found no significant relationship between skin color and racial identity.

Review of Clinical Literature

The clinical literature on African-American patients illustrates the ways in which skin color presents in psychotherapy and how it has shaped the sense of self and experience of others. In working with psychotic patients, Myers and Yochelson (1948) note the prevalence of delusional material related to skin-color conflicts. In part, they understand this material as the patient's attempt to "solve the problem of color and the difficulties in living associated with being Negro" (p.46).

In a 1977 paper, W. Myers examines black and white patients' associations to the colors black and white in dreams and found that splitting of self- and object representations are often in accord with unconscious associations to specific colors, and that patients sometimes internalize primary objects along color lines. A vignette from Harvey's work (1995) illustrates this:

> The girlfriend of a light-skinned man asked him to begin therapy because he seemed to be sabotaging the relationship. He agreed with her impression and recognized it as a pattern, yet did not understand why it occurred. In the course of treatment, the patient described his mother as a light-skinned woman, who was controlling, and not particularly attracted to dark-skinned people. The patient was eventually able to recognize that while in a relationship with a light-skinned woman, he soon found fault with her personality and their sexual relationship. The patient was not critical of the dark-skinned women he dated, however, he could not bring those women home to meet his mother (p.7).

With more neurotic patients, the significance of skin color for a particular patient may be more subtle and difficult to address. Boyd-Franklin (1991) has found that skin color is often an element of the transferential process among group members and toward herself, the facilitator, in her work with African-American women in therapeutic support

groups. Although differences in skin color and other physical characteristics have created divisions among African-American women, with the assistance of the group, women gain insight from each other into unconscious triggers in current relationships. In this treatment modality, Boyd-Franklin believes that women have been able to explore how their attitudes about skin color have affected feelings of self-worth, relationships with women and sexual relationships, and their reactions to their own children. In addition, Hall (1995) summarizes the psychological and political issues raised by hair, weight and body size, in addition to skin color, and offers intervention strategies for mental health practitioners.

West (1995) points out that another theme in the treatment of African-American women is their feeling different from the images of beauty prevalent in the media. Often women who have struggled to feel good about themselves and attain a positive racial identification can recall an earlier time when issues related to skin color were quite painful. West describes three stereotypes of African-American women. She documents their historical significance, ways in which each image continues to have repercussions in the present, and how each affects the psychological functioning of African-American women. Of the three images outlined– Mammy, Sapphire and Jezebel– the Mammy image is most closely associated with a particular skin color. Mammy is characterized as a dark-skinned, bandana-clad, obese woman who is self-sacrificing, hardworking and desexualized. Interestingly, Hattie McDaniel was the first African American to win an Oscar (for her performance as the quintessential Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*). West advocates openly discussing conflicting standards of beauty and possible identification

with these negative images. Further, West encourages therapists to be mindful of what may inform their reactions to their African-American female patients.

Therapists find that women with lighter-skin color may feel a sense of superiority and privilege, in addition to guilt about the benefits associated with light skin and its connection to the sexual exploitation of African and African-American women. Boyd-Franklin (1993) has referred to this as a "double bind." Okazawa-Rey et al. (1987) point out that dark-skinned African-American women sometimes are motivated by a need to compensate for their devaluation through education or some other activity through which they regain self-worth. Of course, these are just some of the feelings and reactions to one's skin color and there can be a variety of experiences and meanings attached to skin color. The following example shows how the issue of skin color arose during the first session with this researcher and a patient:

> An African-American woman in her 20s speculated that her low self-esteem was related to her upbringing. When asked to expand on this idea, eventually she explained that she was much darker than everyone else in her family and had never felt close to her mother. This patient recalled that her siblings received more favorable treatment and she acknowledged feeling unwanted by her mother. While she is proud of her achievements, and her academic accomplishments surpass those of her parents and siblings, she consistently finds herself in unhealthy romantic relationships.

Neal and Wilson (1989) have discussed the anger and resentment evoked by group discussions on skin color and the frustration that the black community itself practices such discrimination. Some people feel this issue has been imposed on them by the black community, and that the conflicts about skin color did not arise from within themselves. Since psychotherapists in the United States operate within a society imbued

with both subtle and overt racism and colorism, clinicians are cautioned to be careful not to allow their own values and feelings about skin color to interfere with treatment (Neal and Wilson, 1989; Thompson,1996; Williams,1996).

Harvey (1995) has observed that skin color affects African Americans both consciously and unconsciously. His clinical vignettes of children and adults show how skin color may present in treatment. For example, "An extremely dark or light child might be excluded from peer activities, or teased by his or her African-American peers, causing the child to feel isolated and abandoned" (p. 6), and adds that teachers may even react toward children differently depending on their skin color, i.e., a light-skinned child might be perceived as more intelligent, more hygienic and nicer.

Harvey underscores the confusing and dynamic nature of colorism, pointing out that the same person in the context of a nurturing environment may not treat other African Americans differently because of their skin color but may discriminate in other settings. This suggests that attitudes about skin color are not only a set of fixed beliefs but biases that may be situational.

Summary of Clinical Literature

Throughout the clinical literature, there is a consistent theme in the history of the patients who present this issue. These patients often have a pivotal childhood experience involving skin color with his or her primary caregiver. Skin color and, especially, differences in skin color acquired particular meanings during these experiences. These events raise questions about the quality of these early relationships and the extent to

which skin color may function as a mediating variable in an individual's internal experience of self and others.

Statement of Hypotheses

This study will explore the idea that a daughter's feelings about her own skin color, her perceptions of her mother's feelings about both of their skin colors and the daughter's experience of her mother will affect how the daughter views herself. This idea will be operationalized by testing the following hypotheses:

Bivariate Hypotheses– Between Predictor Variables

Hypothesis 1

The daughter's perception of how her mother feels about the daughter's skin color will be positively correlated with the daughter's feelings about her own skin color.

Hypothesis 2

There will be a positive correlation between the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about both the daughter's skin color and her mother's own skin color.

Hypothesis 3

The daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color will be correlated with the daughter's experience of her mother.

Bivariate Hypotheses– Between Predictor Variables and Outcome Variable

Hypothesis 4

The daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color will be positively correlated with the daughter's self-view.

Hypothesis 5

The daughter's feelings about her own skin color will be positively correlated with the daughter's self-view.

Hypothesis 6

There will be a positive correlation between the daughter's experience of her mother and the daughter's self-view.

Multivariate Analysis

A multiple regression analysis will be performed to determine how much each predictor variable contributes to the outcome variable, the daughter's self-view. There are no hypotheses for this analysis.

Exploratory Analysis

- To understand the impact of the daughter's actual skin color, participants were divided into three groups based on their rating of their own skin color in the

Demographic Questionnaire: Light (scores of 1 and 2), Medium (score of 3), Dark (scores of 4 and 5). Using these three groups, the hypotheses previously stated were tested.

- To understand the impact of the difference between the mother and daughter's skin colors on the daughter's self-view, the data were analyzed according to the degree of difference between mother and daughter's skin color as reported in the Demographic questionnaire. The groups consist of those who report their skin color to be roughly **Similar** to their mothers' skin color, and those who report their skin color to be **Different** from their mothers' skin color. The cut-off points for the groups are based on the actual distribution of responses.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The Participants

The sample consisted of 80[1] African-American women from the New York City area. In order to take part in this study, the women met the following criteria:

1) They were between the ages of 20 and 29 (to limit my study to one social/political climate in which they have come of age).

2) They identify as black or African American and were born and raised in the United States.

3) They were raised by their biological mothers.

4) Their mothers' identify as black or African American and were born and raised in the United States.

5) Their mothers are still living (to prevent possible idealization that might result from loss).

The Instruments

The researcher used four instruments in this study. To assess the daughter's self-view, the Assessment of Self-Descriptions developed by Blatt, Bers and Shaffer (1993) was used. Based on the psychoanalytic assumption that unconscious experience can be accessed through conscious verbal material, as with projective measures such as the Thematic Apperception Test or the Rorschach, Blatt et al. (1993) created 19 scales,

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[1] According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Blatt (1995), 10-15 observations are recommended per predictor variable.

representing six categories to assess various dimensions of the sense of self. This instrument asks the participant to respond to the directive, "Describe yourself." The self-description can be written by the participant or given orally and tape recorded. This instrument was selected because of the unstructured nature of the task, with the hope that a fuller self-representation would be elicited. In addition, participants were unaware of the dimensions that were assessed, which should have helped bypass some of the potential bias typically associated with self-report measures.

Inter-rater reliability between a clinical psychologist involved in the development of these scales and a trained undergraduate ranged from .74 - .99 (Blatt et al., 1993). Bers, Blatt, Sayward and Johnston, 1993 found significant differences between psychiatric patients and nonpatients on many of the scale variables, providing evidence of criterion validity. In this same study, Bers et al. reported that changes in the self representation of one patient during intensive treatment corresponded with changes reported independently in the patient's treatment reviews. Also, this technique has been used to assess aspects of the self-representation that are related to measures of depression (Blatt and Bers, 1993). This instrument has been used in both clinical and nonclinical samples.

This study focused on the Self-view category, which includes three scales: (1) Self-regard; (2) Self-critical; and (3) Striving/Ambitious. Negative/positive Self-regard measures the degree to which the self is viewed critically or in a disparaging way or viewed with feelings of assurance, acceptance, and pride. To measure Self-regard, the self-description was rated from 1 = negative to 7 = positive. Self-critical describes the

extent to which the self description conveys dissatisfaction or reflects harsh judgments. For the self-critical scale: 1 = noncritical; 3 = moderately critical; and 5 = highly critical. The highest score means a person feels driven by unattainable standards. The Striving/Ambitious scale rates the extent to which a person strives for goals or is invested in achievement, whether internally or externally motivated. Scores of 1 = nonstriving; 3 = moderately striving; and 5 = highly striving. A score of 9 is given when there is no mention of this dimension in the self-description. Each self-description will be rated using the three scales, and a total Self-view score will be calculated for each participant.

Using the Assessment of Qualitative and Structural Dimensions of Object Representations, also known as the Object Representation Inventory (ORI) (Blatt, Chevron, Quinlan, Schaffer and Wein, 1992), the researcher obtained the participant's experience of her mother. This procedure measures qualitative characteristics and structural aspects of object representations; in other words, this attempts to quantify how an individual has internalized significant others, like parents. This measure asks that the participant respond to the statement "Describe your mother," followed by a request to "Describe your father." Five minutes are allowed for each response, which may be written or given orally and tape recorded. For the purposes of this study, participants were asked only to describe their mothers. The description of the mother was rated using the Malevolent/Benevolent scale. Scores on this scale reflect a global rating of the respondent's view of the person's effect on others as positive or negative. According to this scoring system, malevolent is defined as having ill will, and benevolent is defined as well intentioned, or expressing good will. By applying the malevolent/benevolent scale

(1 = malevolent; 7 = benevolent), this researcher inferred the quality of the participant's experience of her mother.

Like the Assessment of Self-Descriptions, the Assessment of Qualitative and Structural Dimensions of Object Representations has been used with clinical and non-clinical samples, and has shown sound psychometric properties. Blatt et al. (1992) have reported inter-rater reliability of .45 - .92 (Pearson correlation coefficients) between experienced raters on qualitative dimensions, and .87 and .88 for the remaining dimensions. When studying the relationship between parental representations and orality, Bornstein, Galley, and Leone (1986) obtained inter-rater reliability greater than .80 for 8 of the 12 qualitative dimensions, and correlations greater than .70 for the remaining dimensions. In Bornstein and O'Neill's (1992) study of parental perceptions and psychopathology, they obtained Pearson correlation coefficients greater than .80 for all qualitative dimensions, and the correlations for the remaining dimensions were comparable to those reported previously by Blatt and his colleagues as well as by Bornstein et al. (1986). Assessments of parental descriptions using these scales have been found to be unrelated to intelligence, years of education, socioeconomic and marital status (Blatt, Wein, Chevron, and Quinlan, 1979; Bornstein et al., 1986; Bornstein and O'Neill, 1992).

Scoring of Self and Mother Descriptions

An expert rater, a clinical psychology graduate student, blind to the true nature of this study, scored the self and mother descriptions, according to the guidelines outlined

in the ORI and Assessment of Self-descriptions scoring manuals by Blatt et al. 1992 and Blatt et al. 1993, respectively. Reliability was achieved by having this researcher, an expert rater, score a sample of 20 (25%) of the protocols. Before establishing inter-rater reliability, the scoring systems were discussed at length and many practice narratives, collected for practice purposes only, were scored. When the rater and researcher agreed that there was sufficient agreement, a sub-sample of the actual data was scored independently by the rater and researcher. Scores were checked for inter-rater drift after half the data had been scored– none was found. The reliabilities are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliabilities for Scoring of ORI and Assessment of Self-Description Variables

Assessment of Self-Descriptions - Self-View	Reliability
Self-Regard*	.91
Self-Critical**	.46
Striving/Ambitious***	.80
Object Representation Inventory (ORI)	
Malevolent/Benevolent*	.81

*The intraclass correlation coefficient was computed for Self-regard and Malevolent/Benevolent
** In theory, this is a continuous variable, however since only three categories were endorsed, this was treated as a categorical variable.
***A Kappa coefficient was computed because this variable is both continuous and categorical.

Development of Questionnaires

To obtain information about skin color in mother/daughter relationships, the researcher created two questionnaires with a Likert-type response format. Both

questionnaires were reviewed by eight experienced clinical psychologists who are familiar with the goals of this study. Questionnaire1 (see Appendix F), which contains six items, is designed to assess the participant's feelings about her own skin color (QDSC). Questionnaire 2 (see Appendix G) consists of two subscales: items 1 through 4, assess the participant's perception of her mother's feelings about the participant's skin color (QMDSC), and items 5 through 8 assess the participant's perception of her mother's feelings about her mother's own skin color (QMMSC). Each variable is calculated by averaging the scores of the items that correspond to the variables. The instructions for the questionnaires ask that participants circle the response that most closely fits her experience, choosing from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

The researcher conducted a pilot study to measure the internal reliability of both questionnaires and to determine the distribution of responses for each item. Participants were 22 African-American female Hunter College students who met the criteria for participation in this study. Each participant was paid one dollar for her time. For scoring purposes, numerical values from 1 to 4 were assigned to the responses, with 1 indicating negative feelings and 4 positive feelings. The numerical values were flipped, depending on whether the statements convey positive or negative feelings.

Psychometric Properties of Questionnaires

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated for each question to determine internal reliability or the degree to which the items in each questionnaire are correlated.

For Questionnaire 1, the coefficient is .58 and for Questionnaire 2, .64. Overall, participants' responses to the items tended to be positively skewed. The items that elicited the best distribution of scores were ones in which the participant was not commenting directly on her own feelings about her skin tone. One possibility is that statements like, "I wish my skin color were different," may evoke discomfort and pull for more defended responses that reflect what the participant believes she *should* say and feel.

Recruitment of Participants

This researcher recruited participants using fliers (see Appendix A) posted at City University of New York colleges and other universities in New York City, various neighborhoods throughout the city, hair salons, community centers, markets and churches. In addition, an advertisement (see Appendix B) ran in two free weekly newspapers, *The Village Voice* and *New York Press*. After completing the instruments, many participants volunteered to take fliers and refer other women. The fliers and advertisements asked that women leave a phone message on the study voicemail. Respondents were screened over the phone to insure that they met the criteria for participation in the study. After explaining that this study explores African-American women's feelings about their skin colors and their perceptions of what their mothers think about this issue, and assuring potential participants of confidentiality, if the prospective participant was still interested, the researcher explained that she needed to ask some questions. The questions are on the next page:

"Are you between the ages of 20 and 29?"
"Do you identify as black or African American?"
"Were you born and raised in the United States?"
"Were you raised by your biological mother?"
"Does your mother identify as black or African American?"
"Was she born and raised in the United States?"
"Is she living?"
"Do you believe this topic will be upsetting to think about or discuss?"

If after meeting the criteria she was still interested, an appointment was scheduled to administer the instruments. The appointments were conducted individually in a public setting convenient for each participant, e.g., coffee shops, parks, classrooms, the participant's place of employment and, when possible, at the Psychological Center at City College. Appointments ranged in length from 30 to 45 minutes, largely depending on the participant's interest in sharing her experiences.

Procedure and Order of Administration

After reading and signing the consent form (see Appendix C), participants wrote their responses to the statement, "Describe yourself" (see Appendix D), and then, "Describe your mother" (see Appendix E). The women had five minutes for each response. Next, they were instructed to complete Questionnaires 1 and 2, which were designed to assess the participant's feelings about her own skin color, the participant's perceptions of her mother's feelings about the participant's skin color, and the participants perceptions of her mother's feelings about the mother's own skin color. Then, participants completed the Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix H), which

includes questions about the participant and her mother's skin colors and the degree of difference between their skin colors. Finally, the researcher offered participants an opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences with regard to skin color. This researcher used participants' responses to the last question in the Demographic Questionnaire, which inquires about the nature of skin color discussions women may have had with their mothers, as a starting point. In addition, this time was used to follow up on comments participants made during the administration of materials. Each woman received $10 for her participation in this study, and had the option of writing her name and address on an index card (kept separate from the data) so that she could receive a summary of the results. See Appendix I for the summary of debriefing letter sent to participants.

Data Analysis

Six correlations were performed to evaluate the relationships between the following variables: (1) the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about her mother's own skin color; (2) the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color; (3) the daughter's feelings about her own skin color; (4) the daughter's experience of her mother; and (5) the daughter's self-view. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict the daughter's self-view (a composite of Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambitious) from the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about both of their skin colors, the daughter's feelings about her skin color and the daughter's experience of her mother.

Exploratory Analysis

The exploratory analyses investigated several areas: (1) whether there were significant differences between skin color groups with regard to how the daughter views herself; (2) whether the degree of difference between the daughter and her mother's skin colors affects the daughter's view of herself; and (3) whether the degree of difference between the daughter and her mother's skin colors affects the daughter's experience of her mother. The statistical software used for data analysis was SPSS Version 10.

Results of the quantitative and qualitative data collection are in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER IV

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to explore the idea that a daughter's feelings about her own skin color, her perceptions of her mother's feelings about both of their skin colors and the daughter's experience of her mother affects how the daughter views herself. The following table provides a list of the variables and the instruments used to measure them.

Table 2. Variables and Instruments

Variable	Instrument
Daughter's feelings about her own skin color (QDSC)	Questionnaire 1
Daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about daughter's skin color (QMDSC)	Questionnaire 2 (items 1 - 4)
Daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about mother's own skin color (QMMSC)	Questionnaire 2 (items 5 - 8)
Daughter's experience of her mother (MALEV/BENE)	Object Representation Inventory Malevolent/Benevolent scale
Daughter's Self View (SV)	Assessment of Self Descriptions Self-regard scale Self-critical scale Striving/Ambition scale

The predictor variables are: (1) the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color (QMDSC), as measured by questions 1 - 4 on

Questionnaire 2; (2) the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the mother's own skin color (QMMSC), as measured by questions 5 - 8 on Questionnaire 2; (3) the daughter's feelings about her own skin color (QDSC), as measured by Questionnaire 1; and (4) the daughter's experience of her mother (MALEV/BENEV), as measured by the Object Representation Inventory (ORI) (Blatt et al., 1992).

The criterion variable, Self-view (SV), is a composite of three scores obtained from the Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition scales from the Assessment of Self Descriptions (Blatt et al., 1993).

This chapter summarizes the results in terms of descriptive statistics, then preliminary, major and exploratory analyses.

Descriptive Statistics

Eighty African-American women between the ages of 20 and 29 ($\underline{M} = 24.80$) participated in this study. The majority of women were born in New York City, are single and/or in committed relationships, heterosexual and had at least some college education. It is important to note that this sample is skewed toward medium brown ($n = 39$) and medium dark brown ($n = 23$) skin color. This occurred by chance, since women did not know when responding to flyers and advertisements that the study is about skin color. In addition, most women reported having talked with their mothers about skin color. Please refer to Table 3 for a complete summary of the participants' demographic information.

Table 3. Summary of Demographic Information

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
AGE	Mean = 24.8 SD = 3.1	
PARTICIPANT'S SKIN COLOR		
Very light	1	1.3
Light	9	11.4
Medium	39	49.4
Medium Dark	23	29.1
Dark	7	8.9
MOTHER'S SKIN COLOR		
Very light	7	8.9
Light	21	26.6
Medium	23	29.1
Medium Dark	23	29.1
Dark	5	6.3
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PARTICIPANT'S AND MOTHER'S SKIN COLORS		
Same/almost same	20	25.3
Slightly different	17	21.5
Moderately different	27	34.2
Different	7	8.9
Very different	8	10.1
PLACE OF BIRTH		
West	3	3.8
Midwest	3	3.8
South	5	6.3
East	9	11.4
New York City	59	74.7

Note. N = 80

Table 3. Summary of Demographic Information (cont'd)

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
REGION RAISED		
West	4	5.0
Midwest	2	2.5
South	7	8.8
East	67	83.8
PARTICIPANT'S EDUCATION		
High School diploma/GED	6	7.5
Some college	34	42.5
College degree	24	30.0
Some graduate school	6	7.5
Graduate school degree	10	12.5
CURRENTLY A STUDENT		
Yes	35	43.8
No	45	56.3
PARTICIPANT'S PROFESSION		
Student	17	22.7
Education	10	13.3
Social services	11	14.7
Creative arts	15	20.0
Law	1	1.3
Health care	4	5.3
Business	6	8.0
Science	3	4.0
Clerical	8	10.7
RELATIONSHIP STATUS		
Single	43	53.8
Single, in committed relationship	27	33.8
Married	10	12.5
Divorced	0	0.0

Note. N = 80

Table 3. Summary of Demographic Information (cont'd)

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
SEXUAL ORIENTATION		
Heterosexual	70	87.5
Bisexual	8	10.0
Homosexual	2	2.5
CURRENTLY LIVES WITH MOTHER		
Yes	30	37.5
No	50	62.5
MOTHER'S EDUCATION		
Some High School	11	13.8
High School diploma/GED	18	22.5
Some college	19	23.8
College degree	20	25.0
Some graduate school	4	5.0
Graduate school degree	8	10.0
MOTHER'S WORK		
Did not work outside home	11	13.8
Worked outside home	69	86.3
STATUS OF PARENTS' RELATIONSHIP DURING CHILDHOOD		
Married, living together	36	45.0
Separated	6	7.5
Divorced	18	22.5
Never married	11	13.8
Father deceased	9	11.3
SIBLINGS		
Yes	70	88.6
No	9	11.4

Note. N = 80

Table 3. Summary of Demographic Information (cont'd)

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
PRIMARY CAREGIVER		
Mother	49	62.0
Father	1	1.3
Mother/Father	24	30.4
Grandmother	5	6.3
Other	0	0.0
OTHER CAREGIVERS		
Yes	51	64.6
No	28	35.4
PSYCHOTHERAPY OR COUNSELING HISTORY		
Yes	32	40.5
No	47	59.5
SKIN COLOR EVER DISCUSSED WITH MOTHER		
Yes	64	81.0
No	15	19.0

Note. N = 80

Preliminary Analysis

Variables Comprising Self-View:

The three components of the criterion variable were examined for normality by looking at the skewness statistic. Two of the three variables (Self-regard and Striving/ Ambition) were normally distributed. Attempts to transform the third variable (Self-critical) were unsuccessful. In addition, the low correlation between these three variables indicates that they are not assessing the same concept. Considering these

factors, the researcher decided to accept the data as is and not aggregate these variables into the composite variable Self-view. The hypotheses were revised to reflect this.

Item Analysis for Internal Consistency - Questionnaires 1 and 2:

The initial assessment of inter-item reliability for Questionnaire 1, which measures the daughter's feelings about her own skin color (QDSC) was somewhat low (alpha = .61). The diagnostics available in the program indicated that if the two items with the lowest item-total correlation were eliminated, the reliability would improve. After removing items #3 and #6, reliability increased to .81. Thus, the variable QDSC will consist of items 1, 2, 4 and 5.

Similarly for Questionnaire 2, the original assessment of inter-item reliability for questions measuring the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color [QMDSC (items 1 - 4)] was somewhat low (alpha = .68). By deleting item #2, which has the lowest item-total correlation, reliability improved to .81. Thus, the variable QMDSC will consist of items 1, 3 and 4. Finally, in the initial assessment of inter-item reliability for questions comprising the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the mother's own skin color, [QMMSC (items 5 - 8)] the reliability was low (alpha = .56). After omitting the items with the lowest item-total correlations, items 6 and 8, the reliability increased to .75. Thus, QMMSC will consist of items 5 and 7. To summarize, only the items that survived this item analysis were used to calculate the actual variables.

Major Analyses

Three bivariate analyses were performed to assess the relationships between the predictor variables: (1) the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color = QMDSC; (2) the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the mother's own skin color = QMMSC; (3) the daughter's feelings about her own skin color = QDSC; and (4) the daughter's experience of her mother = MAL/BEN. Next, three bivariate analyses were performed to assess the relationships between the predictor variables QMDSC, QDSC and MAL/BEN, and the disaggregated criterion variables: Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition. Then three multiple regression analyses were performed to evaluate whether QDSC, QMDSC, QMMSC and MAL/BEN predict Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

Hypothesis 1

The daughter's perception of how her mother feels about the daughter's skin color will be positively correlated with the daughter's feelings about her own skin color.

To evaluate hypothesis 1, a Pearson correlation was performed using variables from Questionnaires 1 and 2. Results of the analysis confirm the hypothesis ($r = .79$, $p > .001$, $N = 80$). There is a strong positive relationship between the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color and the daughter's feelings about her own skin color.

Hypothesis 2

The daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about both the daughter's skin color and mother's own skin color will be positively correlated.

To evaluate hypothesis 2, a Pearson correlation was performed using the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about both daughter's skin color and mother's own skin color, as measured in Questionnaire 2. Results confirm this hypothesis ($r = .41, p > .001$, N = 80). The daughters perceive their mothers to have similar feelings about both of their skin colors.

Hypothesis 3

The daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color will be correlated with the daughter's experience of her mother.

To evaluate hypothesis 3, a Pearson correlation was performed using the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color as measured in Questionnaire 2 and the daughter's experience of her mother as measured by Blatt's ORI Malevolent/Benevolent scale. This analysis did not yield significant results at the .05 level ($r = .19, p = .10$, N = 80); however, these results suggest a trend toward a significant relationship. In other words, there may be some relationship between the daughter's perception of how her mother feels about the daughter's skin color and the daughter's experience of her mother.

Hypothesis 4

The daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color will be positively correlated with the daughter's Self-regard, Self-criticism and her Striving/Ambition.

To evaluate hypothesis 4, a Pearson correlation was performed using the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color, as measured by Questionnaire 2, and the three variables measured using Blatt et al.'s Assessment of Self-Description scales (1993): Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition.

Table 4. Correlation Between the Mother's Feelings About her Daughter's Skin Color and Self-Regard, Self-Critical and Striving/Ambition

Variable	Self-Regard	Self-Critical	Striving/Ambition
The mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color	$r = .01$ $p = .96$	$r = .17$ $p = .14$	$r = -.08$ $p = .48$

Note. N = 80

As seen in Table 4, this analysis yielded insignificant results. Of the three correlations, the relationship between the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color and the outcome variable, Self-critical is the only one that approaches significance. This relationship is worth differentiating also because the Self-critical variable has such limited variability– responses were primarily 1s and 2s with no 4s and 5s (the scale ranges from 1 to 5). Essentially, there is no relationship between the

daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color and the daughter's Self-regard. The daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color was not significantly correlated with the daughter's level of Striving/Ambition.

Hypothesis 5

The daughter's feelings about her own skin color will be positively correlated with the daughter's Self-regard, Self-criticism and her Striving/Ambition.

To evaluate hypothesis 5, a Pearson correlation was performed to assess the degree to which the daughter's feelings about her own skin color are associated with her Self-regard, Self-criticism and her Striving/Ambition. Questionnaire1 and Blatt's Self-Description scales measuring Self-regard, Self-criticism and Striving/Ambition were used for this purpose. Results of this analysis can be seen in Table 5, on the next page.

Table 5. Correlation Between the Daughter's Feelings About her own Skin Color and her Self-Regard, Self-Criticism and Striving/Ambition

Variable	Self-Regard	Self-Critical	Striving/Ambition
The daughter's feelings about her own skin color	$r = -.06$ $p = .57$	$r = .04$ $p = .76$	$r = -.07$ $p = .57$

Note. N = 80

As Table 5 shows, the results were insignificant. The daughter's feelings about her own skin color appear to be unrelated to her Self-regard, Self-criticism and Striving/ Ambition.

Hypothesis 6

There will be a positive correlation between the daughter's experience of her mother and the daughter's Self-regard, Self-criticism and her Striving/Ambition

To evaluate hypothesis 6, Blatt'S ORI Benevolent/Malevolent scale and Blatt's Assessment of Self-Description scales that measure Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition were utilized. Relationships were analyzed using Pearson's corr la ion. The results of these analyses are in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Correlation Between the Daughter's Experience of her Mother and the Daughter's Self-Regard, Self-Criticism and Striving/Ambition

Variable	Self-Regard	Self-Critical	Striving/Ambition
The daughter's experience of her mother	$r = .08$ $p = .51$	$r = .19$ $p = .10$	$r = .02$ $p = .89$

Note. N = 80

As seen in Table 6, the results were insignificant at the .05 level. There seems to be no relationship between the daughter's experience of her mother and the daughter's Self- regard and Striving/Ambition; however, the results suggest a trend toward a significant positive relationship with respect to the daughter's level of Self-criticism. This trend is counterintuitive- one would think that experiencing one's mother as more benevolent would be related to *less* Self-criticism for the daughter. One possibility is that higher scores on the Malevolent/Benevolent scale might represent defended responses, given the cultural prohibitions in the African-American community against expressing negative feelings about one's mother. This will be explored further in the Discussion chapter.

Multivariate Analyses

To assess the degree to which the daughter's feelings about her own skin color, her perception of her mother's feelings about both of their skin colors, and her experience of her mother predict the daughter's Self-regard, Self-criticism and Striving/Ambition, three multiple regression analyses were performed. Questionnaires 1 and 2, Blatt's ORI Malevolent/Benevolent Scale and Blatt's Self-Description scales for Self-regard, Self-criticism and Striving/Ambition were used to evaluate these relationships.

Self-Regard:

Table 7. Multiple Regression Analysis of Self-Regard on the Daughter's Feelings About her own Skin Color, the Mother's Feelings About Both Their Skin Colors and the Daughter's Experience of her Mother

Variables	Standard Beta	t-Value	*p*	R-Squared	F-Value	*p*
QDSC	-.16	-.88	.38			
QMDSC	.04	.20	.84			
QMMSC	.22	1.72	.09			
MALEV/ BENEV	.03	.23	.82			
				.06	1.10	.37

Note. N = 80

As seen above, the overall F- test was insignificant ($R^2 = .06, p = .37$). The four variables– the daughter's feelings about her own skin color, the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color, the daughter's perception of mother's feelings about mother's own skin color and the daughter's experience of her mother– do not have the predictive power to explain the daughter's Self-regard. The insignificant Standardized Beta values for all variables support this finding. QMMSC, or the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the mother's skin color shows a weak positive association with the outcome variable Self-regard, when controlling for the other variables in the model.

Self-Critical:

Do the daughter's feelings about her own skin color, the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color, the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about mother's own skin color and the daughter's experience of her mother predict the daughter's Self-criticism? The results of this multiple regression analysis are illustrated below.

Table 8. Multiple Regression Analysis of Self-Critical on the Daughter's Feelings About her own Skin Color, her Mother's Feelings About Both Their Skin Colors, and the Daughter's Experience of her Mother

Variables	Standard Beta	t-Value	*p*	R-Squared	F-Value	*p*
QDSC	-.26	-1.47	.15			
QMDSC	.41	2.16	.03			
QMMSC	-.17	-1.38	.17			
MAL/BEN	.20	1.7	.09			
				.10	2.06	.10

Note. N = 80

As Table 8 indicates, this analysis did not yield significant results ($R^2 = .10$, $p = .10$). These four variables, which account for 10% of the variation do not significantly predict the daughter's degree of Self-criticism. Although the overall F-test is insignificant, there appears to be a positive relationship between the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color and the daughter's level of Self-criticism.

Striving/Ambition:

Do the daughter's feelings about her own skin color, the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about the daughter's skin color, the daughter's perception of her mother's feelings about mother's own skin color and the daughter's experience of her mother predict the daughter's sense of Striving/Ambition?

Table 9. Multiple Regression Analysis of Striving/Ambition on the Daughter's Feelings About her own Skin Color, the Mother's Feelings About Both Their Skin Colors, and the Daughter's Experience of her Mother

Variables	Standard Beta	t-Value	*p*	R-Squared	F-Value	*p*
QDSC	-.01	-.04	.97			
QMDSC	-.06	-.30	.76			
QMMSC	-.06	-.44	.66			
MAL/BEN	.04	.36	.72			
				.01	.19	.94

Note. N = 80

As seen in Table 9, results of this analysis are insignificant ($R^2 = .01, p = .94$). These variables taken together, do not appear to predict the daughter's sense of Striving/ Ambition.

Exploratory Analyses

The initial exploratory analysis performed the Pearson correlations outlined in the major analysis by the skin color groups light, medium and dark. Since the light

subgroup, consisting of those who identified themselves as very light and light, is so small (n = 10), the results are too unreliable to report.

Additional analyses were conducted to examine whether the criterion variables, Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition, differed significantly by skin color. In the first analysis, participants were divided into two groups to approximate a median split. The medium-skin-color group was randomly split into the light and dark groups. In the **light/medium** group, those who classified themselves as "very light" or "light" in the Demographic questionnaire were combined with approximately half of those who classified themselves as "medium." The **medium/dark** group consists of participants who classified themselves as "medium dark" or "dark" on the Demographic questionnaire, in addition to half of those who classified themselves as "medium." This was done to create groups more equal in size. A t-test was performed to assess whether there is significant difference between these two groups.

Table 10. Group Statistics for T-Test Comparing Light/Medium and Medium/Dark on Self-Regard, Self-Critical, Striving/Ambition

	Skin Color	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Self-Regard	light/medium	35	5.37	.88
	medium/dark	44	5.39	1.02
Self-Critical	light/medium	35	1.06	.24
	medium/dark	44	1.27	.54
Striving/ Ambition	light/medium	35	1.86	1.78
	medium/dark	44	1.52	1.68

Note. N = 79 (One participant did not report her skin color.)

Regarding the assumptions underlying the independent samples t-test, the preliminary analysis showed that the variable Self-critical is not normally distributed, and results from the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances showed that the variances of the two groups for Self-critical are significantly different. So equal variances are not assumed for this variable. Both Self-regard and Striving/Ambition are normally distributed, and equal variances are assumed. Results of the t-test are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. T-Test Comparing Light/Medium and Medium/Dark on Self-Regard, Self-Critical, Striving/Ambition

Criterion Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Self-Regard	-.07	77	.95
Self-Critical	-2.37	61.34	.02
Striving/Ambition	.86	77	.40

Note. N = 79 (One participant did not report her skin color.)

This test was significant for the variable Self-critical (t = -2.37, df = 61.34, p = .02). The women in the light/medium skin color group are significantly less Self-critical than women in the medium/brown-skin-color group. This finding is noteworthy given the small variability of scores on the Self-critical scale. Results were insignificant for Self-regard (t = -.07, df = 77, p = .95) and Striving/Ambition (t = .86, df = 77, p = .40). The light/medium and medium/dark groups do not appear to differ significantly with respect to Self-regard and Striving/Ambition.

In the second analysis, participants were divided into three skin-color groups: "**light**," which includes those who identified their skin color as "very light" or "light;" "**medium**," encompassing those who identified their skin color as "medium;" and "**dark**," encompassing those who identified their skin color as "medium dark" or "dark." This information was obtained from the Demographic Questionnaire. A one-way ANOVA was performed to determine whether there is a significant difference among the three skin-color groups with respect to the outcome variables Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition. Results of this analysis are shown in Table 12.

Table 12. One-way ANOVA: Light/Medium/Dark on Self-Regard, Self-Critical, Striving/Ambition– Descriptives

Criterion Variable		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-Regard	light	10	5.70	.67
	medium	39	5.26	.91
	dark	30	5.43	1.07
Self-Critical	light	10	1.00	.00
	medium	39	1.10	.31
	dark	30	1.33	.61
Striving/Ambition	light	10	1.50	2.01
	medium	39	1.79	1.73
	dark	30	1.57	1.65

Note. N = 79 (One participant did not report her skin color.)

The results of the F-tests for the variables Self-regard and Striving/Ambition were insignificant, [F = .94, df = (2,76), p = .40] and [F = .20, df (2,76), p = .82], respectively. These groups do not differ with respect to Self-regard and Striving/Ambition. For the variable Self-critical, there was found to be a significant difference between skin color

groups ($F = 3.37$, $df = (2,76)$, $p = .04$). The results of the Games-Howell post hoc test were used since it does not require the variances to be equal. Table 13 illustrates the comparisons for the variable Self-critical.

Table 13. Games-Howell Multiple Comparisons for Light/Medium/Dark on Self-Critical

Variable	Skin-color Groups		Significance
Self-Critical	light	medium	.11
	light	dark	.01
	medium	dark	.15

Note. N = 79 (One participant did not report her skin color.)
[light (n = 10); medium (n = 39); dark (n = 30)]

As Table 13 indicates, there is a significant difference between the light- and dark- skinned groups with regard to Self-criticism. Women in the light-skinned group seem to be less Self-critical than those in the dark-skinned group.

To account for the non-normal distribution of the variable Self-critical, a nonparametric test, Kruskal-Wallis, was conducted to evaluate differences among these same three skin-color groups. Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test indicate an "essential" significant difference between the light- and dark-skin color groups ($X^2 = 5.76$, $df = 2$, $p = .056$). This approximates the findings of the Games-Howell post hoc test.

How can we understand whether differences between the mother and daughter's skin colors affects the daughter's sense of self and her experience of her mother? A t-test was performed to evaluate whether there is a difference between participants who reported the same or almost the same skin color as their mothers' and participants who

reported a moderate or greater difference between their skin color and their mothers' with respect to Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition and the daughter's experience of her mother (based on the ORI Malevolent/Benevolent scale). In the Demographic Questionnaire, participants rated the degree of difference between their skin color and their mothers' on a five-point scale; "1" represented the same or almost the same skin color, and "5" represented very different skin color. Participants were divided into two groups, called "**Similar,**" which includes responses 1 and 2, and "**Different,**"which includes responses 3, 4 and 5. Results are below.

Table 14. Group Statistics for T-Tests Comparing Similar and Different on Self-Regard, Self-Criticism and Striving/Ambition

Difference b/t Skin Color		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-Regard	Similar	37	5.24	1.04
	Different	42	5.50	.86
Self-Critical	Similar	37	1.19	.46
	Different	42	1.17	.44
Striving/Ambition	Similar	37	1.49	1.82
	Different	42	1.83	1.64
Malevolent/ Benevolent	Similar	37	5.43	1.34
	Different	42	5.40	1.45

Note. N = 79 (One participant did not report her skin color.)

The results of the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances indicate that all variables are normally distributed, so equal variances are assumed.

Table 15. T-Tests Comparing Similar and Different on Self-Regard, Self-Critical, Striving/Ambition and Malevolent/Benevolent

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Self-Regard	-1.20	77	.23
Self-Critical	.22	77	.82
Striving/Ambition	-.89	77	.38
Malevolent/Benevolent	.09	77	.93

Note. N = 79 (One participant did not report her skin color.)

As seen in Table 15, the results of the t-test fail to show a significant difference between the **Similar** and **Different** groups, with respect to the criterion variables: Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition; and the predictor variable: the daughter's experience of her mother. Thus, whether the participant's skin color is similar to or different from her mother's, it seems to have no significant effect on the daughter's Self-regard, Self-criticism, Striving/Ambition and her experience of her mother.

Summary

The major quantitative findings indicate that the participant perceives herself and her mother to have similar feelings about the participant's skin color, and that she perceives her mother to have similar feelings about both of their skin colors. In addition, there is evidence suggesting trends toward two significant weak relationships: (1) a positive relationship between the participant's perception of her mother's feelings about the participant's skin color and the participant's experience of her mother. In other words, the more positive the mother's feelings are about the daughter's skin color, the more benevolent the daughter is likely to experience her mother; and (2) a positive

relationship between the daughter's experience of her mother and the daughter's level of Self-criticism, meaning the more benevolent the daughter experiences her mother, the more Self-critical the daughter. This counterintuitive finding will be discussed in detail in the final chapter. The multivariate analyses failed to show that the predictor variables have the power to explain the outcome variables– the daughter's Self-regard, Self-criticism and Striving/Ambition. Finally, the exploratory analyses revealed a difference between skin- color groups, with participants in the light-skinned group seeming less Self-critical than those in the dark-skinned group.

These findings and their implications will be discussed in the final chapter. The qualitative results will be reviewed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

When the researcher designed this study, the goal was to devise a way to quantify the role that skin color may play in African-American mother/daughter relationships. As data collection progressed and it quickly became apparent that most participants were eager to share anecdotes about skin color, the researcher decided that the richness of this data was too compelling to omit. What follows is a summary of the major themes that emerged during the "skin-color discussions." Each participant had the option to talk about her skin-color experiences and observations after completing the materials described in the Methodology chapter. To illustrate these themes, which were culled from more than 50 discussions, examples and quotes from participants are included. All names are pseudonyms.

Major Themes of Skin-Color Discussions

Evolving Views on Skin Color

As women began to answer the questionnaires, they asked if they should respond the way they think and feel at that moment, or should they report what they used to think and feel. The researcher asked that women respond according to where they were at the moment with regard to this issue and, if their views have changed, that could be discussed at the end. During these discussions, many women reported that their opinions

and feelings about their skin color had changed since childhood. Generally, their current views were more accepting of their own and others' skin colors, and many no longer had preferences as they did when younger.

Examples are:

- "Jill" said she used to feel very bad about her skin color. As the darkest in her family, she felt ugly and stupid, and did not expect others outside her family to accept her. "It influenced who I married," as she did not want her children to know what she has experienced.
- "In the past, I had more issues (with skin color)," "Stephanie" commented. She remembers being teased in school by classmates, and her mother's extended family having color problems. Someone in her mother's family remarked in recent years, "I thought you were going to be ugly, you've turned into an attractive woman."

The researcher wondered if the participants could identify what precipitated the change in their views. "Jill" credits becoming a Christian with making skin color a "nonissue;" realizing "God makes us in his own image, and God is pleased with what he made." She said she speaks to other women in her church about this and tells them "You are boldly and wonderfully made." For "Stephanie," positive feedback and reassurance from her parents helped her to realize that her skin color should not affect how she feels about herself. Another participant, who identified herself as dark skinned, recalled mentioning the negative comments she received about her skin color. Her mother told

her that her skin color is something to be proud of, adding "It (skin color) means your ancestors weren't raped." Most often participants believed that learning about their African-American history and reading African-American literature had facilitated the change.

Not Looking African American

Most of the lighter-skinned participants have been told that they do not look African American. Often in these interchanges, the women felt there was the expectation that they should offer an explanation for their light skin color, namely the racial background of their parents or grandparents or where they were born. In addition, implicit in these remarks is often a compliment– that they should feel fortunate and pleased not to look like a "typical" African American. Several women described angry and defensive reactions in these situations, and refusing to succumb to their feelings of obligation to explain. On several occasions "Lisa" had been told emphatically "You are not black," especially since living in a Latino neighborhood. Similarly, another participant said Latinos generally assume she is Dominican and approach her speaking Spanish. Not looking African American can be compounded by attributes and interests that some sadly consider non-African American, i.e., the use of standard English without a regional accent or even earning good grades. Another participant believed being the lightest of her friends coupled with sounding educated contributed to her being called "white girl."

The Significance of Skin Color With Regard to Majority Culture

Women of all skin colors voiced an awareness of and speculation about how they are perceived by the majority culture. Questions such as these were raised: Do Caucasians feel more comfortable with a light-skinned African American because she stands out less? Does a lighter skin color mean advantages in the workplace where African Americans are a minority? Are light-skinned African Americans perceived as "less" African American?

Examples are:

- "Sandra," who identified herself as light-skinned speculated that her skin color may enable her to function better in a white world.
- "Yvette," who identified herself as light skinned, wishes she were darker. She described suntanning without sun screen as often as possible during summer months– well aware of the health warnings against this. "Yvette" said that she wanted darker skin because she finds darker skin more attractive, stating, "It's beautiful, it represents Africa"; she also wants to distance herself from Caucasians by making a clear distinction between her color and theirs. As she talked, "Yvette" brought out her make-up bag that contained foundation that was noticeably darker than her actual skin tone; she explained that this was how she achieved her darker color during winter months.

When the Mother and Daughter Have Significantly Different Skin Colors

Participants whose mothers have distinctly different skin colors generally have experienced a barrage of questions and comments from peers and strangers about the difference in their skin colors. What was most striking in these discussions was how ill equipped the participants felt as children responding to these questions and remarks. Most were alone in trying to make sense of these communications and often had their *own* questions about the differences in the skin colors they saw around them. An example is "Alexa," who remembered as a child asking her mother if her mother were Caucasian.

Other examples are:

- Some participants reported being asked jokingly, and sometimes seriously, if they were adopted. Many are now familiar with the look of surprise and puzzlement when someone sees their mother for the first time.
- "Roxanne," who had been mistaken for a caregiver of her very light-skinned grandmother, recalled that other mothers looked like their children at parent/teacher night.
- Another participant discussed her dark-skinned mother's painful feelings when people did not think she looked like her daughter because of the difference in their skin colors; people assumed, "Oh, your dad must be really light," to explain her color.

- "Cassandra" recalled visiting her family during a college break. Her mother was excited and proud to introduce her to a new neighbor. The neighbor's first comment was "You don't have your mother's color!" "Cassandra" became tearful as she talked about this, remembering and reliving how upsetting this had been and realizing that she had never told her mother how painful this experience was.
- "Denise's" most powerful skin-color memory is her mother saying to her as a child, "Mama's gonna have to give you a lot of love 'cause no one else is gonna want you," because of her light skin as a child. "My mother wanted a tar baby," "Denise" said lightheartedly. She reported that her skin color became darker as she grew up. "Denise" rated her skin color and her mother's as "medium."

It is important to note here that approximately 25% of the sample reported that their skin color was the same or almost the same as their mothers'. Many women who had not discussed skin-color issues with their mothers assumed this was because of their similar skin colors and or little variation in skin color among family members.

Skin Color and Other Family Relationships

While a number of participants reported that there was little or no difference between their skin color and their mothers', many reported significant distinctions and particular biases that existed in other family relationships.

Examples with siblings are:

- "Alexa," mentioned earlier, described feeling competitive with her lighter-skinned sisters while growing up and her desire as a child for lighter skin. "Alexa," who rated her skin color as "medium," stated that, "Lightness is a measure of attractiveness in our family." In thinking back, she acknowledged that, "Skin color was a source of insecurity and probably exacerbated bad feelings I had about myself, in general."
- In "Pam's" case, she said people often did not think that she and her sister were related because of their different features and skin color. She believes peoples' comments about their difference in skin color exacerbated their already conflict-ridden relationship.
- "Tracey," a dark-skinned participant, recalled noticing that her mother did not want her younger brother to go outside because she did not want him to become darker, but there was not a similar concern about "Tracey."

Examples with other relatives are:

- "Adrienne" said, "My mother's relatives didn't like me. People would say, 'Oh she thinks she's cute [because she is light-skinned]." She felt her relatives were nicer to her darker-skinned sister. "Adrienne" speculated that her skin color reminded relatives of her lightest maternal aunt, who was the wealthiest in the family, and the object of envy.

- Another participant, "Jennifer," was aware of her father's preference for light-skinned African Americans. In fact, he has told her only to associate with lighter African Americans, warning, "Don't bring home a dark-skinned man." "Jennifer" believes given her own preference for darker-skinned men, she is prepared that this could mean losing her father in order to protect her future children.

Trendiness and Popularity of Particular Skin Colors

Just as one might talk about the current hem length or new colors for a fashion season, several woman spoke about the perceived current trend for a certain skin color for African-American women. There was general agreement that dark skin is in vogue, although light skin is not completely passe. One participant noted, "Brown women have become the fad, you know, 'brown sugar."

An example of this trend follows:

- "Beverly," a student at a historically black college, remarked that, "In general, there is a color complex at my school," with the ideal woman being light skinned with long hair, adding, "But dark is in right now. We're popular now. In general, it used to be a burden." Several women noted that this popularity is true especially for men, thanks to icons like Michael Jordan and the popular male model Tyson Beckford.

Skin Color is Just One Part of the "Package"

As noted earlier, skin color is just one salient feature of importance among African Americans when discussing the physical package; others include hair texture and length, eye color as well as the shape and the size of the nose and the mouth. Skin color is arguably the feature most loaded with meaning, particularly since most other features can be altered by using hair-straightening and texturizing techniques, hair weaves, colored contact lenses and plastic surgery. Skin color, to some degree, can also be altered with the aid of bleaching cremes and chemical peels.[2] Often, women are sensitive about how their features may deviate from the Western ideal.

Examples are:

- "Angela" reported that she had been told by a friend that she would be really pretty if she were lighter since she had nice features, which she understood to mean white features.
- "Crystal," a light-skinned participant whose hair is naturally kinky, or coily, was most aware of distinctions made about hair texture while growing up, with those with naturally straight hair considered more attractive. She denied feeling any particular status associated with her skin color but felt that naturally straight hair would have made a significant difference in how she was perceived.
- Another participant, a professional make-up artist who identified her skin as

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[2] The lightening of skin color among pop icons seems to be directly related to their success– Michael Jackson is probably the most notable example.

medium dark, talked about frequent requests from models to have their noses and mouths contoured and/or minimized using make-up, and sometimes requesting lighter foundation to alter their skin color. She has observed that in large shows where there are several make-up artists from which to choose, that most models seem to prefer make-up artists who look more exotic because of their skin color, hair texture and facial features (not just of African descent), as if this will have implications for the models' make-up.

- For some people, there is also the idea that certain types of features go together in creating the package. The mother of an ex-boyfriend of one participant could not believe a dark-skinned woman could also have long hair. Similarly, another participant has been asked if she is African American because of her curly hair.

Daughters Know Their Mothers' Skin-Color Stories

Even when participants had little to say about their own skin-color experiences or observations, often they could discuss what they had learned about their mothers' experiences. Several participants with light-skinned mothers, for example, knew how much their mothers did not want to be seen as light skinned, which they attribute to the "Black is Beautiful" 1960s. Another woman knew her mother, who had used creams to lighten her skin, had been raised differently from her mother's darker sister. The mother of another participant had reported to her daughter that she had been subjected to a paper-bag test when she pledged a prominent African-American sorority. Other participants reported that their mothers were teased while growing up because they had

dark skin. Similarly, one participant explained that her light-skinned mother also had been teased but with names such as "yellow watermelon" and "albino." Indirectly acknowledging the power of her mother's stories, the last woman interviewed for this study wondered whether offspring would still have skin-color issues if mothers did not initiate discussions about this.

Less Prominent Themes

Compensating for One's Skin Color

In an earlier chapter, it was noted that both lighter- and darker-skinned women have felt the need to compensate for their skin colors. Whether it is a darker-skinned woman who feels compelled to excel academically and professionally to prove her worth and intelligence, or a lighter-skinned woman feeling that she must convey that she is "Down with her people," these sentiments are a response to powerful stereotypes and projections about dark and light skin. Two light-skinned women wondered if their activism and political views were unconsciously related to their skin color. When discussing dating lighter men in the past, a dark-skinned woman remarked, "I felt like I had to compensate to get more status, this felt like social access." Similarly, "Jill," mentioned earlier, consciously chose to marry a light-skinned man, hoping that her children would be spared her pain.

Regional Differences and Skin Color

Although the majority of women in this study were born and raised in New York City, those who had lived in the South and in the Mid-Atlantic region commented on the geographical differences in others' perceptions of their skin color and the relative importance of skin-color distinctions in those areas. Participants who had lived or spent time in the South, in particular, generally believed that skin-color issues are more salient there.

The final chapter will address issues raised by these findings, and their relationship to the quantitative results.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

A nonclinical sample of 80 African-American women took part in this study, which was designed to explore the idea that a daughter's feelings about her own skin color, her perceptions of her mother's feelings about both of their skin colors and the daughter's experience of her mother affect how the daughter views herself. This final chapter includes: an overview and discussion of the quantitative and qualitative results, limitations of this study, and implications for clinical practice and further research.

Overview and Discussion of Quantitative Results

The major quantitative findings reveal that daughters perceive themselves and their mothers to have similar feelings about the daughters' skin color, and that they perceive their mothers to have similar feelings about both of their skin colors. This supports the idea that the daughter has "learned" how to feel about her skin color from her mother.

There is evidence suggesting trends toward two weak relationships: (1) a positive relationship between the daughters' perception of their mothers' feelings about the daughters' skin color and the daughters' experience of their mothers– in other words, the more positive the mother's feelings are about the daughter's skin color, the more benevolent the daughter is likely to experience her mother; and (2) a positive relationship between the daughters' experience of their mothers and the daughters' level of Self-

criticism, meaning the more benevolent the daughter experiences her mother, the more Self-critical the daughter. This second trend is counterintuitive. One might think that experiencing a mother as benevolent would be associated with *less* Self-criticism. This trend should be interpreted cautiously, given that most participants were rated as 1s and 2s on the Self-criticism scale, which ranges from 1, representing non-Self-critical to 5, representing highly Self-critical. This means that as a sample, these women were rated primarily as non-Self-critical or exhibiting low Self-criticism.

One possible explanation for this second trend– the seemingly positive relationship between maternal benevolence and the daughter's Self-criticism– could be the idealization of the mother in the daughter's description. During the scoring of the protocols, the researcher and expert rater noted a significant number of what appeared to be idealized descriptions of mothers, in which they were portrayed as very strong, self-sacrificing, and hardworking. Some participants even used the word "superwoman." Here are excerpts of descriptions of mothers matched with the participants' self descriptions:

> "My mother is a 60-year-old retired, married [mother] of two. She is that superwoman type of mother and wife. She has always done everything for her family . . ." #34
>
> "I'm a 29 year old black professional woman. I consider myself intelligent but often wonder if others do. . . I am probably more financially successful than other black women my age [but] I feel like I should be doing better with a master's degree . . ." #34

> "My mother is my role model. She is SO strong. She's dealt with things in her life that I don't believe I would've had the strength and faith to endure. She's very spiritual and very giving . . ." #63
>
> "I'm very ambitious, free-hearted, caring and sentimental– at times my kindness is mistaken for weakness. I'm rather insecure sometimes. I'm always afraid of hurting some else's feelings, so much sometimes that I neglect to consider my own feelings . . ." #63

One could speculate that this idealization might be a reaction formation against a sense of maternal loss. As discussed in the review of the literature on African-American mothers and daughters, these descriptions evoke the image of mothers determined to help her daughters thrive, yet as mentioned before, this determination may have deprived their daughters of a particular kind of maternal presence. As a result, it might be easier for the daughters to glorify strength and determination rather than lament a more unarticulated absence. For a more detailed and contextualized discussion of some of the qualities the participants used to describe their mothers, the reader may refer to Romero (2000) for elaboration of the "Strong Black Woman"and Thompson (2000) for a discussion of moral masochism.

In the multiple regression analyses, the independent variables failed to predict the daughter's Self-regard, her level of Self-criticism and her Striving/Ambition. Admittedly, this multiple regression model oversimplifies the complexity of one's Self-view. With unlimited resources, a more comprehensive regression model would include variables such as the internalization of the majority culture's values regarding physical beauty, the influence of the media, ethnic identity, the effect of attitudes of peers

and other family members in addition to mothers, and feelings about other salient physical attributes.

The exploratory analyses evaluated the effect of differences between skin color groups and the degree of difference between the mothers' and daughters' skin colors with respect to Self-regard, Self-critical and Striving/Ambition. A difference between skin-color groups was found, with participants in the light-skinned group less Self-critical than those in the dark-skinned group. This finding supports previous research that has studied self-esteem and self-concept (Boykin-Johnson, 1996, Holtzman, 1973, Robinson and Ward, 1995), although results of these studies are not unanimous (Alford, 1997). The degree of difference between the mother's and the daughter's skin colors did not relate to the daughter's Self-view, nor her experience of her mother. This finding was somewhat surprising since the qualitative data suggests that mothers and daughters have been made painfully aware, in some instances, of the differences between their skin colors.

The Intersection Between Quantitative and Qualitative Results

It was expected that some of the qualitative data would lend support for the quantitative findings. Interestingly, there was not much overlap. For example, the participants' anecdotal information about their experiences of having distinctly different skin colors from their mothers', and having their relationships questioned suggested that the exploratory analysis might yield significant results. However, none were found. Similarly, with another theme– the need to compensate for one's skin color, which has

been noted in the clinical literature– one might anticipate a significant difference between skin color groups with respect to the outcome variable Striving/Ambition, but none was found. In the most general sense, the qualitative data confirms an assumption the researcher used in designing this study, which is that daughters tend to know, through inference or explicit discussion, their mother's own history with respect to skin color. The absence of a more substantial overlap between the quantitative and qualitative results probably speaks to the limitations of the instruments, the research design and more generally, to the limits of quantitative analysis in capturing the complexity of inner experience. Further, this can be understood as an endorsement for multimodal research design. The limitations will be discussed in more detail after a few additional comments about the qualitative results.

Further Discussion of Qualitative Findings

Particular themes from the skin-color discussions warrant additional elaboration. Many participants pointed out that their attitudes and feelings about their skin colors have changed over time. Several stated that in the past they would have responded differently to Questionnaires 1 and 2; and although they did not state this, it is possible that they may have described themselves differently, as well. That one's views on skin color may change over time suggests that one's feelings and attitudes about one's own skin color may evolve on a developmental path, which contributes to the formation of a person's identity (C. Thompson, personal communication, November 6, 2000). In light

of this, researchers should be more cautious in their interpretations of research focusing on skin color, in which children and adolescents are the participants.

Another salient qualitative theme concerns participants' experience of ethnic identity in relation to skin color. Some have had their ethnicity questioned (e.g., You don't look black") while others have speculated about how Caucasians perceive the range of African-American skin colors (e.g., whether Caucasians might feel more comfortable with skin color more similar to theirs). One wonders, then, if ethnic ambiguity may permit some measure of escape or at least distance from the racial stigmatization these participants would experience if they were darker. This ethnic ambiguity has been thought of as a kind of "universal skin color," which affords one the ability to "pass" in a sense, simultaneously among multiple ethnic groups (White, 1997).

Limitations of the Study

The Instruments

Before addressing the instruments individually, it would help to offer a few words about the type of instruments used. The researcher used three self-report measures for this study, including the Demographic Questionnaire. We know that consciously reported information is mediated by defensive processes, and social desirability, which affect the quality of the data and its depth. Self-report instruments allow participants to represent themselves in the most favorable light, which may be a distortion of more candid responses. Given the sensitive nature of skin color for African Americans, one

can imagine a participant's desire to present herself and her mother as comfortable and perhaps even unaffected by this issue.

The researcher attempted to balance the self-report measures with the unstructured tasks of describing oneself and one's mother. Since these were projective instruments, participants were blind to the true nature of these tasks, and the Blatt scales that were used. Interestingly, with the mother descriptions, the expert raters and researcher noticed that many of the descriptions had an idealized quality. One possibility is that this may be a function of the cultural prohibition against speaking critically of one's mother, however honest and accurate this may be. Clearly, without a formal way to assess possible idealization, this is speculation.

Since Questionnaires 1 and 2 were created specifically for this study it is worth considering how well they operationalize the variables; and whether further research on these questionnaires could yield more sensitive instruments that elicit a wider distribution of feelings and attitudes.

The Sample

As a self-selected sample the participants are probably more psychologically-minded and, at least consciously, have a greater degree of comfort with the issues investigated, than a random sample. Their self-selection, in addition to other characteristics of this sample, e.g., the level of education, that 40% have some prior history of psychotherapy or counseling, and the particular region of the United States in which they reside, suggest that these findings may not generalize to other populations. It

is also worth noting that a significant portion of the sample (more than 35%) was living with their mothers when data were collected. It is unclear whether this may have facilitated thoughtful discussion of their mother/daughter relationships with regard to skin color or whether responses were more defended because of this.

Considering the idea that feelings about one's skin color may evolve on a developmental path, and that 40% of the participants had some prior history in psychotherapy or counseling, one wonders whether participants' more recent feelings about skin color may be related, even indirectly, to their experience in treatment. It would be interesting to know more about their experience with mental health professionals, like the duration of treatment, orientation of therapist, and certainly whether skin color was discussed explicitly.

A striking feature of this sample is the skewed distribution of the participants' reported skin colors. The participants identified their skin colors as follows: "very light" (n = 1); "light" (n = 9); "medium" (n = 39)[3]; "medium dark" (n = 23); and "dark" (n = 7). The researcher did not obtain an objective assessment of the participant's skin color– as the primary concern of this study is the *participant's* perception and experience of her skin color, regardless of whether this is fantasy or reality. Since women initially were unaware that skin color was a part of this research (it was not mentioned in the flyers and advertisements), this occurred by chance. This characteristic of the data presented certain

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[3] Almost 50% of the women identified themselves as "medium," which is what the literature says African Americans generally prefer (Neal and Wilson, 1989; Parrish, 1944, 1946; Russell et al., 1992).

limitations for statistical analyses that required a more even distribution of participants across skin-color categories.

While the participants' reported skin colors are skewed toward "medium" and "medium dark," their reports of their mothers' skin colors represent a more even skin-color distribution (refer to Table 3., p. 50). Given this discrepancy, one might expect reporting of a greater degree of difference between mothers' and daughters' skin colors, yet few participants indicate that their skin color is "different" or "very different" from their mothers'. This discrepancy reminds us that the perception of skin color and perceptions of differences between skin colors are remarkably subjective and relative, arguably even more so between mothers and daughters. Based on some of the skin color discussions summarized in Chapter IV, having skin color different from one's mother can be loaded with meaning, and there may be a wish or need to minimize differences.

The Research Design

Given the subject I have chosen to investigate, I knew that my physical appearance, which includes light skin and long locked hair, would affect the data collection process. In the initial design of this study, I planned to collect data via mail to eliminate myself as a confounding variable. However, both in the interest of time, and because I wanted to be an active participant in the data collection process, I decided to meet with each participant. In designing this study, I wondered to what extent my skin color would inhibit or disinhibit candid responses to the questionnaires, and facilitate or discourage participants from speaking freely about their experiences. Often there are

trade-offs associated with decisions about research design. In this study, what was sacrificed by not eliminating myself as a confounding variable was gained in the many interesting and poignant skin-color discussions.

After seeing the look of surprise on the faces of participants when I greeted them at the appointed meeting place, and commenting on their expressions, I learned that many thought they had spoken with a Caucasian woman on the telephone. Some were more forthcoming than others in disclosing this. Soon, I encountered direct questions about my ethnicity while screening prospective participants, with one woman exclaiming in disbelief, "You really don't sound black!" I began to wonder if the outgoing message on the study voicemail (with my voice) had prescreened prospective participants before I had had a chance, and if this accounts for some women who had agreed to participate but did not show for their appointments. I believe some participants were responding to the fact that I do not have a regional accent, nor vestiges of a southern accent, which has often been a racial or ethnic marker, and that I speak standard English. Then I began to wonder if, for some participants, my presumed Caucasian identity had been something that was desired or preferred. In addition, in person, I was asked whether both of my parents are African American, why I am interested in this subject and what my experience has been as a light-skinned African-American woman. I answered these questions in what I believe to be an appropriate and honest manner.

While this was a very rich and engaging process for me, I cannot know how or to what degree my skin color affects the data, but clearly it is a factor. To minimize the effect of the researcher, one might use three interviewers, each with a different skin

color, representing light, medium and dark, who would administer the instruments to participants in their own skin-color group. However, the subjectivity of skin-color categorization would make such an interviewer assignment very difficult.

Implications for the Results, Further Study and Closing Remarks

The most immediate application for these findings and, perhaps more importantly, the questions that they raise, is in the clinical settings in which African-American women present. For African-American women in the United States, it is very difficult to remain consciously or unconsciously unaffected by the significance of skin color– nearly impossible if one's skin color is near the extremes of the skin-color spectrum. Daniel (2000) points out that an African-American woman's racial memories are often traumatic, although racial trauma has not been included in mainstream literature on trauma. For some of the participants in this study, I believe their skin-color memories are traumatic. Like racism, colorism's "big sister," it is a difficult topic for patients to raise in treatment. Even the most experienced psychotherapists of all backgrounds can stumble with this issue; either because of their own skin-color legacy, which may be understood and processed but nevertheless create occasional blind spots or anxiety, or because of colorism's close connection to race– and no psychotherapist wants to misspeak for fear of their comment being heard as racist. Psychotherapists are urged to create therapeutic environments where both patient and therapist can take these risks, as there is much that we can learn about a woman's sense of self, her experience of her

mother and family, and how she moves in the world, through exploring how she has internalized her skin color.

Certain additions to the existing research protocol and design might yield important information about the participants. For example, a question added to the demographic questionnaire such as, *To what extent are you conscious of your particular skin color during the course of your day?* might tell us more about a participant's emotional investment in skin color issues, and would allow the awareness of one's skin color to be used as an independent variable. As noted earlier in this chapter, social desirability plays a role in this data. Quantifying this phenomenon by including a measure of social desirability could provide another way to compare participants' responses, in addition to determining the degree to which the instruments used in this study are affected by social desirability. Given the sensitive nature of skin color for African Americans, a positive correlation between social desirability and the skin color questionnaires would be expected. Interviewing several mother/daughter pairs of varying skin colors and skin-color combinations would complement this data. Inquiries into areas such areas as: the significance of skin color in their relationships, whether skin color has been discussed and in what contexts, mothers' and daughters' fantasies about the others' feelings about skin color, and factors outside their relationship that inform their attitudes, could be fruitful. Separate interviews with mothers might include questions about her fantasies during pregnancy about her daughter's skin color.

I find the evolution of feelings about skin color intriguing as well as encouraging. A longitudinal study, in which participants are administered the same instruments every

few years, could elucidate this developmental process. Also, if this means one might identify a developmental arrest, for example, it is conceivable that a timely intervention might prevent larger, more intractable issues later. For example, Alexis de Veaux (1982) recounts interactions she had with an aunt while growing up:

> Red, you instructed me, was a color I should never wear. I was absolutely "too dark" you said. "Whose little black child are you?" you'd tease. "Who knows who you belong to." Did you know then that your teasing mirrored my own apprehension? Who did I belong to? Who does a dark-skinned child belong to in a family where light skin is predominant, in a society where dark can't mean anything positive? (p. 67)

Until adolescence, parents, family, and other caregivers are usually in the most powerful position to intervene; however, because of their own conflicts about skin color this may not be possible.

Finally, reading the mother descriptions raised interesting questions for me about maternal representations, and relationships between African-American mothers and daughters, apart from skin color. When I read a recent psychoanalytic article by Gump (2000), in which she discusses the residual effects of slavery on African-American parenting, I wondered about affect in the mother/daughter dyads in this study. I was particularly curious about the role of negative affect, which is often discouraged and punished, even though ideally one of the mother's primary tasks is to teach her child to tolerate and contain unpleasant emotions. This interplay between the universal experience of mothering and the specific characteristics of African-American culture and history deserves far more attention.

This study has attempted to give psychological attention to a specific dimension of African-American history and how it has affected our experience of ourselves as daughters. The women in this study were in their 20s at the time of data collection; and were born and raised after the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements ostensibly had rendered colorism irrelevant. Yet this study reveals that skin color remains a significant and, even at times, a traumatic issue. Many women continue to be affected profoundly by skin color, perhaps in more subtle ways than their mother's were. Although I hope that skin color will some day have less of a negative affect on the lives of African-American women, it seems that the intensity of these issues will give them dynamic significance for some time to come.

ARE YOU AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE

20 - 29 YEARS OLD?

A psychology doctoral student at CUNY seeks participants for a study on Mother/Daughter Relationships.

- If you and your mother were born and raised in the United States, and
- Your mother is living,

Please call (212) 894-3701 x8124.

Participants will be paid $10 for their time.
Note: Only daughters are needed for this study.

Mothers/Daughters (212)894-3701 x8124

AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALES
20-29 WANTED for a study on mothers and
daughters. Stipend. Call 212-894-3701 ext. 8124

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

I am working on a research project that explores the role of skin tone in African-American mother/daughter relationships. This study is performed as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for my Ph.D. in clinical psychology at The Graduate School and University Center of CUNY.

If you are between the ages 20 and 29, identify yourself as black or African American, you and your mother were born and raised in the United States, you were raised by your mother, and your mother is living, you qualify for participation in this study. You will be given four short tasks, in addition to a demographic questionnaire. Approximately 30-40 minutes are needed to complete these tasks, and you will be paid $10 for your time. By participating in this study you may learn something about yourself and your mother, while contributing to psychological research on African-American women. You may request a summary of the results of this study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and in no way affects your academic standing if you are a student. You should not put your name on any of the materials, except this consent form. The original copy of this consent form will be sealed in an unmarked envelope and kept separate from your responses in a locked file. A copy of the consent form is yours to keep. The information you provide will be used for research purposes only. This study presents minimal foreseeable risks to you. I will be available should you need to discuss any feelings you may have about these tasks or issues they may evoke. Additional professional help will be arranged, if necessary.

If you have any questions regarding this research, you may call Professor Steve Tuber at (212) 650-5674. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this study should be directed to Ms. Ethel Breheny, IRB Administrator at (212) 650-7903.

Addette L. Williams, M.A.
City College
138th Street & Convent Avenue, NAC Building, 8th floor
New York, NY 10031
Voice mail: (212) 894-3701 x8124

I agree to participate in a study on the role of skin tone in African-American mother/daughter relationships. My participation in this study is voluntary and I may stop at any time if I do not wish to continue. I have read and understand the information above, and the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction.

_____ _____

Participant's signature *Date*

_____ _____

Researcher's signature *Date*

Please write your response to the request below. If you need more space, you may continue on the other side of this page. You have 5 minutes.

Describe yourself.

Please write your response to the request below. If you need more space, you may continue on the other side of this page. You have 5 minutes.

Describe your mother.

QUESTIONNAIRE #1

This task involves thinking about your ***skin tone***, meaning where your particular color falls on the continuum from very light brown to very dark brown.

Please circle the response that most closely fits your experience.

1. I like my skin tone.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

2. I might feel better about myself if my skin tone were different.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

3. My skin tone is an asset, or helps me in some way.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

4. I wish that I had a different skin tone.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

5. My thoughts and feelings about my skin tone have had a negative impact on how I feel about myself.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

Please continue on the next page.

awilliams10/31

6. I have had positive experiences within the African-American community because of my particular skin tone.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

awilliams10/31

QUESTIONNAIRE #2

This task involves thinking about your mother's skin tone and your own. ***Skin tone*** refers to a particular color on a continuum, from very light brown to very dark brown.

Please circle the response that most closely fits your experience.

1. My mother likes my skin tone.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

2. My mother thinks my skin tone is an asset for me.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

3. My mother would like my skin tone to be different.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

4. My mother's feelings about my skin tone have had a negative impact on how I feel about myself.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

5. My mother likes her own skin tone.

   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

Please continue on the next page.

awilliams10/31

6. My mother thinks her skin tone is a liability.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

7. My mother would like her skin tone to be different.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

8. My mother believes she has had positive experiences within the African-American community because of her particular skin tone.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

awilliams10/31

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please place an "X" in the blank to indicate your response or fill in the information requested for the following questions. Please do not leave any questions blank. Thank You.

1. How old are you? _____

2. Where were you born? _____
City, State

3. In what part of the United States did you spend most of your childhood and adolescence?

_____ West

_____ Midwest

_____ South

_____ East

4. How much formal education have you had?

_____ Some high school

_____ High school diploma/GED

_____ Some college

_____ College graduate

_____ Some graduate school

_____ Graduate degree

5. Are you currently in school?

_____ Yes If yes, where? _____

_____ No

6. What is your profession? _____

7. What is your relationship status?

_____ Single

_____ Single, in a committed relationship

_____ Married

_____ Separated

_____ Divorced

8. What is your sexual orientation?

_____ Heterosexual/Straight

_____ Bisexual

_____ Homosexual/Gay

9. Do you live with your mother?

_____ Yes

_____ No

Please continue on the next page.

10. How much formal education does your **mother** have?

_____ Some high school

_____ High school diploma/GED

_____ Some college

_____ College degree

_____ Some graduate school

_____ Graduate school degree

11. What was your mother's occupation while you were growing up?

_____

12. What was the status of your parents' relationship during most of your childhood and adolescence?

_____ Married, or living together

_____ Separated

_____ Divorced

_____ Never married

_____ Father deceased

Please continue on the next page.

13. Do you have any siblings?

_____ Yes

_____ No

14. Who was the caregiver with whom you spent most of your childhood and adolescence?

_____ Mother

_____ Father

_____ Mother and Father

_____ Grandmothers

_____ Aunts

_____ Sister

_____ Other

15. Did you have any significant female caregivers **besides your mother** who you feel played an important role in raising you? (i.e. grandmothers, aunts, sisters, cousins or a close family friend)

_____ Yes

_____ No

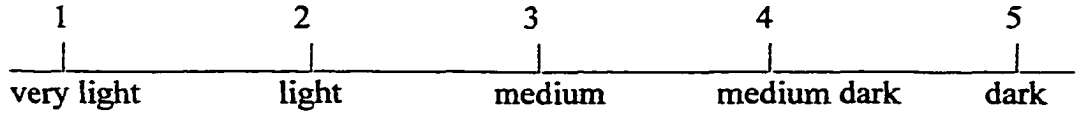
16. Have you ever been in psychotherapy or counseling?

_____ Yes

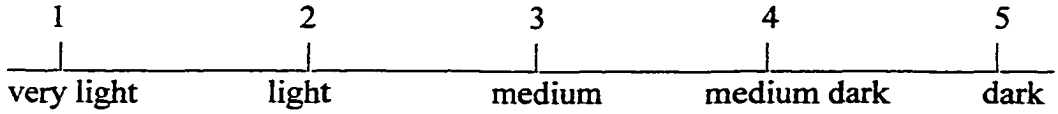
_____ No

Please continue on the next page.

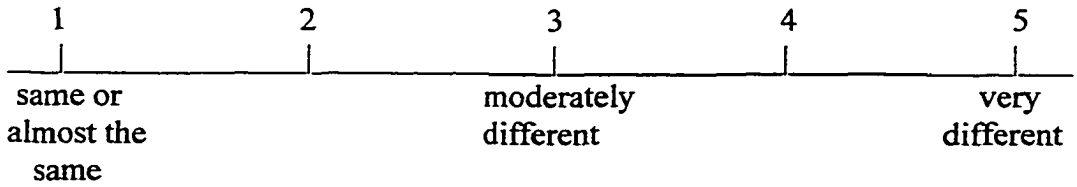
17. Please circle the number that most closely corresponds to **your** skin tone.



18. Please circle the number that most closely corresponds to **your mother's** skin tone.



19. Please circle the number that most closely corresponds to **the difference between your skin tone and your mother's.**



Please continue on the next and last page.

20. Have you and your mother ever talked about skin tone as it relates to (please check all that apply):

_____ Your mother/daughter relationship

_____ Your family and relatives

_____ Opportunities and achievement

_____ Intimate relationships, dating or marriage

Thank you for participating in this study!

December, 2000

Dear Mother/Daughter Study Participant,

Thank you again for participating in the study on The Role of Skin Color in African-American Mother/Daughter Relationships. Now that I've met with all of you and I've analyzed the data, here is a summary of the results:

Eighty African-American women between the ages of 20 and 29 took part in this study. The majority of you were born and raised in New York City, are single and/or in committed relationships, are heterosexual, have had at least some college education, and many of you have been in psychotherapy or counseling (40%). Additionally, the majority of you identified your skin color as medium brown (49%) and medium dark brown (29%), and you reported having discussed the significance of skin color with your mothers. I note these characteristics because the results of this study may not generalize to other groups of African-American women who may be less educated, less psychologically-minded, live in different regions of the United States, or be of a different generation.

The findings indicate that you perceive yourselves and your mothers to have similar feelings about your skin colors, and that you perceive your mothers to have similar feelings about both of your skin colors. Overall, most of you report having positive feelings about your skin colors and in general, feeling good about yourselves. When participants were divided into three skin color groups (light, medium and dark), participants who identified themselves as dark-skinned were found to be more self-critical than those who identified themselves as light skinned. Keep in mind, as a group, you were found not to be very self-critical.

After considering the discussions I had with many of you about your skin color memories and experiences and those of your mothers, I distilled the information you shared with me into 10 themes:

- Feelings and attitudes about skin color have evolved since childhood
- There is meaning associated with not looking like a "typical" African American
- The majority culture also notices and interprets an African American's skin color
- Particular feelings may be evoked when mothers and daughters have significantly different skin colors

- Skin color plays a role in other family relationships
- Currently, dark skin is popular
- Skin color is just one part of the physical package– hair (texture, length, style), the shape and size of the nose and the lips, and eye color also may be loaded with meaning
- Participants may consciously or unconsciously compensate for one's skin color to overcome stereotypes
- There are regional differences with regard to skin-color attitudes
- Daughters know their mothers' skin-color stories

This study sought to explore the transmission of feelings about skin color from mothers to daughters, as perceived by the daughter. Clearly, there are other important influences, in addition to mothers, like other family members, the media, and the dominant culture's values regarding physical beauty, which may not always affirm our physicality– in all its wonderful variety and colors.

Thank you again for your help. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (212) 894-3701 x8124.

Sincerely,

Addette L. Williams

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