EXAMINING HOW SKIN TONE INFLUENCES BLACK FATHER DAUGHTER

RELATIONSHIPS

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

EXAMINING HOW SKIN TONE INFLUENCES BLACK FATHER DAUGHTER

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for the degree of Master of Science,

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables and Figures

EXAMINING HOW SKIN TONE INFLUENCES BLACK FATHER

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ABSTRACT

Previous colorism research has primarily focused on the role mothers and othermothers, who are the extended network of women in the lives of Black girls, have on transmitting messages about colorism to their daughters. Little emphasis has been placed on examining the role of Black fathers and other influential male role models in transmitting such messages. The current study aimed to investigate (1) whether Black men, specifically Black fathers, and other fathers, transmit colorism messages to their daughters or other females in the family (sisters, nieces, mothers) and (2) the influence Black fathers and other fathers have on their daughters or other females in the family (sisters, nieces, mothers) self-esteem and ideas around desirability. Using a phenomenological approach, interviews were conducted with Black female college students (N=26). Iterative coding and thematic analysis revealed that fathers and other fathers do transmit colorism messages to their daughters or other females in the family. Moreover, the impact of these colorism messages on self-esteem and ideas around desirability are illustrated across five themes: a) No 'fun' in the sun, b) No one's first choice, c) What Black men seem to want, d) The willful ignorance of some fathers, and e) Combating negative skin tone messages from Black fathers and other fathers. Results suggest that men affirm females in the family's skin tone via conversations about beauty and desirability while simultaneously undermining those messages by their own dating preferences and the transmission of negative skin tone messages.

Introduction

Colorism— defined as the unequal treatment and discrimination of individuals based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019)— has shaped the experiences of Black people for centuries. The lightness or darkness of one's skin tone has been a determinant of well-being, class, desirability, and worth in a society built to uphold a racist and discriminatory framework (Hall,1992). Colorism is a product of racism that exists globally among various racial and ethnic groups (Hunter, 2016). The system of colorism is one rooted in racial acquisition and ethnic oppression. Lighter skin has been associated with socioeconomic advancement, higher educational achievement, and beauty, while darker skin is deliberately devalued and systemically disadvantaged (Hunter, 2007).

Coard and Breland state, "Historical and contemporary literature reveals that the skin color of Blacks has exerted powerful and persistent influences on societal attitudes toward and treatment of Blacks, within both White and Black cultures" (Coard & Breland, 2001, p.2256). Historically seen during times of enslavement, lighter skin individuals, including the lighter skin children of slave masters who were commonly referred to as "mulattos," would receive special advantages compared to darker skin enslaved people, such as better work conditions, access to more food and the opportunity to be emancipated (Keith & Heering, 1991; Reece, 2018). The belief was that lighter skin slaves were more suited for intellectual domestic and skill-based task and assignments (Gasman et al., 2015). Having darker skin almost indefinitely meant intense physically demanding labor that included tending to the fields (Gasman et al., 2015). Not only were darker skin slaves subjected to intense laborious conditions, but their intelligence and personality traits were based on their proximity to whiteness. Lighter skin female slaves were depicted as smarter, kinder, gentler, more beautiful, and often thought to be more delicate than

darker-skinned Black women (Johnson, 2001). Lighter skin female slaves were also sold much higher than their darker skin counterparts (Hughes & Hertel, 1990). This not only placed a higher economic capital with having lighter skin but placed more intrinsic value on having lighter skin (Gasman et al., 2015).

Currently, these skin tone distinctions continue to place high value on lighter skin in terms of economic advancement, educational achievement, and beauty (Reece, 2018). For example, mechanisms like the brown paper bag test skin were used for decades to assess whether someone was light enough to enter social settings, prestigious organizations, sororities, and fraternities (Giddings, 2007; Hall, 1992; Kerr, 2005; Maddox & Gray, 2002). Taken together, the system of colorism has been an interracial and intra-racial system of oppression, used to divide and set back the Black community by creating social hierarchies that place value on skin tone and the not the content of the ones character. Colorism has not only divided the Black community, but it has caused intragroup friction, animosity, shame and hostility, that still have significantly harmful implications outside and within the family unit.

Colorism is often experienced differently based on gender. Lighter skin females who are close to Eurocentric beauty standards are seen in the family unit as more favorable and receive more warm parental treatment compared to darker skin females (Hill, 2002; Landor et al., 2013). Landor et al. (2013) found that darker skin males and lighter skin females reported higher parenting quality than lighter skin males and darker skin females. Darker skin Black males face discrimination when it comes to attaining a job, their education level, and income compared to lighter skin males (Hill, 2000). In turn Black parents who know the barriers their dark skin sons will face, attempt to provide heightened parental investment (Landor et al., 2013). Whereas lighter skin females have a higher value placed on their beauty and thus are seen as a source of

social capital for the family (Hunter, 2005; O'Connor & Gladstone, 2018). The capital that lighter skin females have in the terms of beauty operate as means to procure other forms of capital ranging from higher economic status, upward social mobility, higher educational achievements and can even indicate type of medical treatment they will receive (Hunter, 2002; Hargrove, 2018).

Thompson and Keith (2001) assert that the disadvantages and emotional hardship of being darker skin are more salient for women than men. For Black men, darker skin has historically been associated with uber masculinity, compared to lighter skin which is seen as more feminine and softer (Hall, 1995; Ferber, 2007), and is perceived as a threat, dangerous and their skin tone is often criminalized. On the other hand, Black men with darker skin are also depicted as an attribute in romantic relationships and a desirable trait for potential partners (Lewis, 2011). Comparatively, Black women face the issue of attractiveness both in society and in romantic relationships. Across all cultures, beauty standards are placed more rigidly on women and these beauty standards are especially difficult to attain for Black women. Society generally favors Eurocentric traits such as light skin tone, straight hair, thin bodies, and light eyes. Within the Black community there is an assertion that darker skin may present an emotional pain and challenge for women and that skin tone may determine attitudes and ideas about self-perception (Mucherah & Frazier, 2013; Thompson & Keith, 2001). This perception of one's self-worth based on skin tone has detrimental impacts on Black women's self-esteem, particularly as changes to one's physical features are difficult, expensive, or impossible. As women face oppression due to race and gender, darker skinned Black women face a "triple jeopardy" lowering self-esteem and overall competence (Taylor et al., 2011).

Literature Review

Colorism and Family Dynamics

Colorism impacts family dynamics due to the intergenerational skin tone trauma transmitted to children through skin tone and colorism messaging (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). Landor and colleagues (2013) found that skin tone was associated with the amount of warmth a parent exhibited toward their child. Parents displayed preferential treatment toward their children not only based on skin tone, but also by gender. Results indicated that darker skinned sons received higher quality parenting and more racial socialization promoting mistrust compared to those with lighter skin. In comparison, lighter skin daughters received higher quality parenting compared with those with darker skin (Landor et al., 2013). Previous research on colorism within the family has also primarily focused on the role of mothers in transmitting messages about skin tone and colorism to their daughters (Matthews et al., 2015). For darkerskinned Black women, there exists a "triple jeopardy" of race, gender, and skin tone. Black women and girls suffer more than men from the severe social and psychological constraints that colorism places on them. Due to this "triple jeopardy," Black women and girls are judged by the lightness or darkness of their skin tone to determine beauty, femininity, and intelligence. Privilege is placed on proximity to whiteness as blackness has been systematically disadvantaged. Additionally, skin tone has created a "halo" effect for light skinned people, attributing their intelligence, confidence, and success to their skin tone, creating a "what's beautiful is good" stereotype, which unequivocally creates the opposite connotations for people of darker skin tone (Thompson and Keith 2001).

The Role of Fathers and Other Fathers in Black Families

As Black mothers have faced hardships related to race and gender, they know what their daughters are up against, and aim to protect and prepare their daughters for similar experiences,

such as negative labeling by society. One way that this is combated is through exposure to the resilient images of their mothers and grandmothers who have worked tirelessly to keep intact their family units all while maintaining a work life balance (Thomas & King, 2007). The examples that Black girls see of real women in their life combat the images society has historically tried to restrict them to. These messages help young women develop positive selfconcepts and a strong racial identity. Black mothers know the barriers their daughters will face, which is why they are widely acknowledged as the primary socializing agents (Greene, 1990; Thomas & King, 2007).

Mothers have also been the primary socializing agent in Black family's because some Black fathers are not in the home due to co-parenting relationships or as a result of mass incarceration and higher death rates (McAdoo,1998; Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). Some Black fathers have the unique challenge of feeling invisible and having little impact on their children's development, this is called the *invisibility syndrome* (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). Black men are often portrayed as "dead beats or absentee fathers" (Dahal, 2022, p.3). Research has habitually examined the roles of Blacks through the viewpoint of the majority which has depicted them from a deficit-based perspective (Tyrell & Masten, 2021). This continuous cycle of being systematically devalued as a Black man not only by society but even within the family can lead to the feeling of being invisible. Franklin & Boyd-Franklin (2000) state that, "symptoms of the syndrome are an outcome of psychological conditions produced when a person perceives that his or her talents and identity are not seen because of the dominance of preconceived attitudes and stereotypes" (p.13). This ideology may trickle down to the way Black fathers feel about their role as socializing agents for their daughters.

However, fathers may also play an important role in transmitting such critical messages to their daughters. Current research has either minimized or completely left out the role of Black fathers in transmitting messages about skin tone and colorism to their daughters. As previously stated, Black fathers are typically seen as uninvolved, inattentive to their children or "deadbeats" (McAdoo, 1998; Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). Despite what previous research has depicted about the Black father, research also suggests that Black father-daughter relationships have been linked to daughter's positive academic engagement, self-esteem, and ideas around respectability and dating (Johnson, 2013). In addition, Black father involvement has been linked to their daughter's self-concept and body image (Doswell et al., 1998; Cooper, 2009). Cooper (2009) suggest that during mid to late adolescence Black girls have a decline in their self-esteem. During this stage, having supportive familial relationships contribute to positive self-esteem for female adolescents. More specifically, having supportive and engaged father-child relationships are associated with higher self-esteem among girls (Cooper, 2009). While conducting a national, cross-sectional study of 287 Black females aged 13-17 years, researchers Cryer-Coupet et al. (2020) found that participants decided to engage in risky sexual behavior, these choices were influenced by the amount of engagement and closeness they had with their father, this demonstrates how influential the relationship between fathers and daughters are. These studies show the impact that Black fathers have on their daughters' decisions and self-esteem but also indicates that because their role is so salient, the transmission of skin tone and colorism messages could potentially have a strong effect on their daughters.

Few studies examine the impact that messages about colorism transmitted by fathers have on their daughters. Wilder and Cain (2010, 2011) found that while the Black family serves as an institution of resilience and a source of Black pride, it simultaneously can cause members of the

family to develop internalized skin tone bias and colorist viewpoints. During this study there were limited responses from participants about the role their fathers played in transmitting messages about colorism. When respondents did have narratives to share, they revolved around their fathers providing affirming and accepting messages around having dark skin. One participant noted that her father was extremely Afro-centric and embraced her dark complexion. The qualitative study revealed that mothers transmitted more negative messages surrounding skin tone. This could be because of the socialization they received as a young girl about the advantages lighter skin brings. Based on the results from this study, Black fathers have the propensity to act as moderators who provide oppositional consciousness to combat the negative messages Black daughters are receiving from their mothers (Wilder & Cain, 2010). This directly relates to my study because although Black fathers have the propensity to act as buffers against the transmission of harmful colorism messages, results indicate that this is not happening for many participants. If fathers are aware that the lightness of one's skin color is more important as a predictor of self-esteem among women than among men then, in theory, they would be able to instill positive ideas regarding skin tone and ideas surrounding desirability (Thompson & Keith, 2001).

In addition to biological fathers, Black girls receive support and guidance from "other fathers." Other fathers are Black men, often uncles, grandfathers, male cousins, older brothers, and family friends, who share the fathering responsibilities, that are critical for the development of children (Hunter et al; 2006; Hicks Tafari, 2018). Historically this was a way of survival for Black families, who needed the support of their community to raise their children. Traditionally in African heritage the child is seen as a collective responsibility who everyone in the community sows into to provide an important network of support (Everet, Marks & Clark

Mitchell, 2016). This communal network provides Black females a wide framework of men who will serve as secondary attachment figures. These men are role models and, in most cases, provide a secure and safe space for females to explore their environment. Through otherfathering Black men combat dominant views on what fatherhood is and provide mentorship and guidance to successfully navigate systems of oppression that Black children will indubitably face (Tafari Hicks, 2018). Typically, research focuses on other-fathers and their role in developing young Black boy's ideas around the transition to respectable manhood, but this extended network may also play a critical role in the way Black girls create ideas of skin tone and colorism which may ultimately influence their feelings of desirability and self-esteem.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The two frameworks that will guide this study are the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory and the skin tone trauma model. The phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST), coined in 1995 by Spencer, is a developmental theory that provides a frame of life course, human development, and cultural influences (Swanson et al., 2003). PVEST consists of five components linked by bidirectional processes; and is conceptualized as systems theory (Swanson et al., 2003). PVEST is a cyclic, recursive model that focuses on identity development throughout the life cycle. By focusing on the entire life cycle, utilizing PVEST helps researchers understand the meaning and underlying identity processes that are linked to coping outcomes (Spencer Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). The first layer is the vulnerability level that represents the relationship between risk contributors and protective factors (Swanson et al., 2003). Certain factors may predispose individuals to adverse outcomes. For example, minority youth might experience socioeconomic hardships like living in high poverty and crime ridden areas. They may also deal with racial and sociocultural

stereotypes that present more instances to be judged prematurely solely based on discriminatory and racist processes (Swanson et al., 2003). In such cases, a person's temperament may act as a protective factor. As self-appraisal is a key factor in identity formation, how minority youth view themselves depends on their perceptions of these conditions, expectations, and processes (Swanson et al., 2003).

Moreover, experiences of racial discrimination and colorism are salient events that increase stressors for racial and ethnic minorities. In response to the 'net vulnerability' given protective compared to risk factors, reactive coping methods are developed to resolve stressful events (Swanson et al., 2003). Based on the successfulness of the protective strategy created the person will preserve the response, and it collectively becomes a part of one's identity (Swanson et., 2003). This in turn defines how the individual views themselves in a multitude of contextual experiences. PVEST suggests that "self-system development is reciprocally determined from self–other appraisal processes" (Spencer et al., 1997). The way one thinks other people think about them is inextricably linked to experiences of stress. This means that through this theoretical lens there is a reciprocal relationship between perceptions and attitudes. Ones perceptions of how other people see them influences their expectations, responsive actions, and behaviors. Which can in turn influence how others perceive, respond, and react to us (Spencer et al., 1997). PVEST suggests that these perceptions are sources of stress, and influence behavior even if such behavior is not rooted in "fact". What matters the most is not the actual behavior, but how one perceives such behavior.

This directly translate to the current study because the messages that Black daughters are receiving from their fathers about who they should date, their self-worth, and who society deems valuable based of the shade of their skin may all be based on stereotypes stemming from

intergenerational transmission of skin tone trauma, but unfortunately present real consequences and influence social outcomes. Daughters' perception and internalization of the messages being transmitted may be more important than the actual message itself because as previously stated salient stressors define how the individual views themselves and that one's self-system development is reciprocally determined from self–other appraisal processes . In other words the perception of how daughters believe people view them may alter their decisions, in terms of the jobs they pursue based on if they believe someone of their skin tone would secure the job, how they approach potential partners solely based on how they believe men will accept or reject a person of their complexion, the activities they decide to engage in and even the amount of time they decide to spend in the sun to limit the likelihood of getting darker to avoid the public ridicule and rejection due to having darker skin .

In addition to PVEST, this study uses the skin-tone trauma model to explain how skin tone messages transmitted by fathers and other fathers to their daughters and other female family members can elicit painful stress induced responses in the form of skin tone trauma. Messages that fathers transmit to their daughters about skin tone may be internalized and lower their selfesteem, negatively impact their body image, and influence ideas around desirability as well as who they choose to date. The skin tone trauma model examines how historical and current experiences of colorism in turn lead to traumatic stress induced responses (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2013). The constant stress caused from painful experiences of colorism directly and indirectly lead to adverse health conditions, and life outcomes of Blacks (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2013). Skin-tone trauma begins with the system of colorism. Historical events like slavery, the civil rights era and the 'new' racism of color blindness then led to traumatic stress reactions. A person can experience skin-tone trauma directly, vicariously or through mass

collective experiences from others stemming from the individual all the way up to institutional levels (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2013. Individuals who experience skin-tone trauma have reported having feelings of humiliation, irritability, resentment, pride about skin tone, inclusion, rejection, distrust, frustration, anger, and shame (Russell-Cole et al., 2013; Wilder, 2015). This translates directly to the current study because fathers and other fathers are continuously transmitting messages about skin tone and colorism throughout the span of their daughter's and other female family members lives. This means that daughters and other female family members likely have had an influx of traumatic skin tone related events and stressors not only directly from their family's but also from messages and images seen widely in society.

Current Study

The current study investigated the influence of Black fathers' skin tone and colorism messages on their daughter's self-esteem and idea around desirability (see Figure 1). Guided by the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems (PVEST; Spencer et al., 1997) theory, which integrates individual intersubjective experiences with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and the skin tone trauma model, the goal of this qualitative study is to extend colorism literature by incorporating the role of fathers in transmitting messages about skin tone and colorism in the family unit.

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Research Questions and Hypotheses

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Research Questions

Question 1: Do Black fathers and other fathers transmit skin tone and colorism messages to their daughters?

Question 2: Do skin tone and colorism messages from Black fathers and other fathers impact their daughter's self-esteem and ideas around desirability?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Black fathers and other fathers will transmit skin tone and colorism messages to their daughters.

Hypothesis 2: Black fathers and other father's messages will influence their daughter's self-esteem and ideas around desirability.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Qualitative interview data was collected from 26 Black female college students between the ages of 18 and 24 years old who attended a midwestern university in 2021. This project was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (#2026812). Students were on average, 21 years old (SD=1.5); 100% of students self-identified as a women/female. The highest level of education ranged from "First year or freshman" to "fourth year or senior." Most participants (16%) identified as freshman or first year students, (24%) identified as juniors or third year students, and (60%) identified as seniors or fourth year students. Yearly household income ranged from "less than $10,000" to "at least $100,000," but most reported household income of at least $100,000 (27%). Participants were also asked how they would describe their skin tone, options were: light, medium light, medium, medium dark, and dark.

Study participants were recruited using flyer postings across campus, canvasing the university student center and other heavily populated areas of the campus (e.g., the multicultural center), and through brief presentations in diversity-related courses. Before participants joined interviews, they were emailed confidentiality and consent forms that needed to be reviewed and signed before participating. Eligible students then received a link for the zoom interview, where they were required to complete a brief demographic survey. Twenty-seven students consented,

and of those 26 students all 26 completed the survey and interviews. Students received a $25

Amazon gift-card for participating in the 90-minute interview focusing on their experiences with

colorism. Qualitative methodology is useful for gathering rich descriptive data, particularly

among racial and ethnic minoritized groups. Interview participants were asked questions from a

script in order to provide consistency throughout each session. For example, participants were

asked questions like, '*Based on the messages you received from your family about skin tone and

colorism, how have you internalized or rejected those messages?'*. Participants were also asked

questions like*, 'How has your family given meaning to lighter and darker skin in terms of

personality traits, behavior and attractiveness?'*. A total of eleven interviews were conducted

and each interview had one to four participants present at a time. All interviews were audio

recorded using zoom recording system. In addition, participants answered demographic

questions (i.e., gender, age, income, education level) and provided their skin tone identification

based on their perception of how light or dark they were (e.g., perceived skin tone from

colorcoded figures representing dark to light skin tones).

Data Gathering

In phenomenological studies, interviews are one of the most common research methods

as they reflect the experiences that exist in a situational context. To understand the

commonalities of the experiences, events should be depicted orally and in writing. Interview

questions were jointly created through a team of four graduate students and the Principal

Investigator (PI). Team members self-identify as African American/Black, Afro-Latina, Latina,

and white. Questions were created to address the issues focused on how the messages

surrounding colorism and skin tone from family members are internalized and to what degree

those messages impact ideas around daughters' desirability, self-esteem, health, and racial

identity. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a phenomenological approach to understand the subjective, lived experiences and perspectives of participants (Edwards et al., 2006). Before interviews proceeded, a team of three graduate students and the PI reviewed each question as a group to become familiar with study questions and to make sure questions would accurately reflect the premise of the research.

Analytic Approach

The analyses was completed using a phenomenological approach and guided the specific steps that were took to complete an in depth and rigorous analyses : (1) Members of the lab included three graduate students and one undergraduate McNair student, individually typed two to three transcripts per person (2) All four individuals then came together as a lab that was comprised of four graduate students, and the PI to listen to the video recording of each interview, while having the transcript written to double check any inconsistencies. Three of the four graduate students who transcribed also assisted in the original interview process as well as took notes throughout interviews. (3) All four individuals and the PI played the video recording of each interview multiple times to better understand the experiences of participants, while also efficiently making sure the transcript most adequately reflected the responses from the videos. (4) The first author then categorized each phenomenon and experience and separated them into unified descriptions based on shared meaning. Guided by the steps provided above, I induced thematic codes through a repeated process of negotiation, and revision. The first author was present for original interviews, the transcribing of original interviews, and the group process of revising interview data (Guest et al., 2012)**.** The thematic analysis in the study was conducted by using an in-depth coding process. The first author became familiar with the data, began generating initial codes, developed themes based on codes, reviewed, defined, and named themes

(Chang & Wang, 2021). Next, the first author examined and then re-examined the completed transcript data to refine and provide meaning to themes. The techniques for generating meaning include coding for patterns, which are somewhat stable indicators of the ways human beings live, operate, and find meaning in their worlds. Patterns help confirm the "five Rs" which are routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationship (Saldana, 2021). The last technique to generate meaning was clustering similar portions of the data, making comparisons between different phenomena, partitioning variables, and subsuming ideas (Carver, 2014).

Results

The interview transcripts, skin color chart selections, and researchers' notes were integrated to identify consistent topics in the data. From this analyses, five themes emerged: a) No 'fun' in the sun, b) No one's first choice, c) What Black men seem to want, d) The willful ignorance of some fathers, e) Combating negative skin tone messages from Black fathers and other fathers.

No 'Fun' In the Sun

Participants expressed how their self-esteem took a major decline in adolescence because of all the messages they were receiving about darker skin. Participants who were of a darker complexion shared sentiments of not wanting to stay in the sun too long in fear of getting darker and the ridicule and judgement that would come along with something as simple as going to the pool in the summer or playing a sport. The idea of 'preserving' one's skin tone was present in many participants responses and remained a constant worry that some of them are still struggling with as young adults. Participants referred to constantly checking their arms and other areas of their body to make sure they weren't getting "too dark" as well as the intersection of being dark skinned and having a curvier body type and the struggles that inherently came with that

combination. Participants who were in predominantly white K-12 schools especially dealt with intensified levels of self-criticism and doubt when it came to how beautiful or confident, they saw themselves. Participants *A.M* who identified as a medium *and AR* who identified mediumdark both indicated the overwhelming challenge having dark skin and having dark skin in a curvier body impacted their self-esteem and perceptions of being desired. When asked 'how have the messages your family have given about skin tone impacted your self-esteem,' two of the participants made explicit reference to their father's influence on their lowered self-esteem. Participants stated the following:

AM:

> *I relate to that kind of like worrying about getting too dark or like during the summer or I had a pool when I was little in my backyard and so my mom was lighter skinned than my dad. My dad's darker skinned and so and so I'm more like closer to my mom skin tone and my brothers, he's older and he's closer to my dad's skin tone. And so, my dad will always make these jokes between the distinction between my brother, and I like color wise and how, like, kind of with a brown paper bag thing about how I would have it, a little more easier than my brother would because of our skin tone. And then that like caused me to be like more scared like when I go went out to like be at the pool and then I would get darker and then be like, "oh no" and be scared of that darkness, almost.*

AR:

> *I think for sure hundred percent. I mean, I was always like a bigger girl, um, and so I think I learned like "Let me try to stay as light as possible," because I already know that I am a bigger girl. And my dad would like to make little comments like, "Oh, that's a big Black girl," or like it was like big and Black always like went together. Um. So, I think*

it's like when you're bigger and you're darker it's like you have two strikes, like you can't

be both. It's kind of like one of those things where they say you can't be ugly and mean

like you can't be big and Black and so that was like the message that I definitely got

growing up.

Participants responses demonstrate a fear to get darker, not because having dark skin is wrong but because of the rigid guideline's society has placed on lighter skin in terms of beauty and desirability. Participants responses reveal that fathers, unconsciously and consciously are transmitting messages that inadvertently fracture their daughter's self-esteem and dictate the activities that they choose to engage in. These guidelines have infiltrated the ability for darker skin girls to truly look in the mirror and find beauty in themselves, when the world is continually demeaning and demoralizing who they are.

No One's First Choice

Participants were asked questions about how their family members and members of the community define what it means to have lighter or darker skin in terms of personality traits and behaviors as well as how those messages have been internalized. Participants, *L and A.R* who identified as medium dark, *A.M* who identified as medium and *Syd* who identified as light, all stated that their families and more specifically their fathers, grandfathers, and brothers typically talked about darker skin derogatorily and lighter skin in terms beautiful, and what they desire. Participants noted that instances where 'other fathers' in their family mentioned negative terms about Black people 'jokingly' or wasn't meant in a 'negative way. Other participants mention that although the messages that were transmitted were covert, they still were being transmitted and internalized by them regardless of their fathers' intentions. Participants stated the following:

AR:

I think for me like I definitely noticed that like my dad would be like if like a woman was like darker, he would be like "oh that's like, oh that girls like Black" or something like that or "she's so Black." So, I think I noticed really early that like -my dad thought lighter skinned women were more attractive to him and he would- he wouldn't just say it out, but he would be like very kind of covertly. You can tell like the compliment difference between like, oh, this person is attractive and this person. like, oh he thinks like this person is more attractive than this one. And my mom is lighter skin so it's kind of like reinforced like, "Oh, like I need to not get too dark." Um, as far as like in my family.

Kateri:

Um, for mine, yes, um, they always thought I, personally -they always thought that I was always mad, or they always say, Oh, "[participant's name], why are mad?" I'm just sitting there being quiet. "Why you have an attitude?", "You got an attitude problem?", um, "Fix your face", or something like that. Um, I was always the one that had the problem, even though I really didn't, so in terms of personality, it was more they were just they were putting things on me instead of just telling me "Dark skin people are this, dark skin people are this", they just started, they had these assumptions about me, which sort of... inadvertently had me thinking, "Okay, Well, I guess that's just what it is". So, yeah.

AM:

Yeah, so I definitely think that, for me, my family, view lighter skin as more attractive, or, um, even recently because my brother, my sister, or my sister-in-law is white so my family made comments about when they have a baby, it will be lighter skin or will be so pretty and things like that. And like they're associating that lighter skin to being more

attractive and even though I do have family members who are darker skin, especially on my dad's side, it's like those who've had babies they don't really say anything about their attractiveness since they're more on the darker skin side.

Syd:

So, on my grandfather's side, my grandparents raised me, so on my grandfather side, it's, they're very light and then my grandmother's dark skin and her side of the family, they are darker tone…I know sometimes like, it was, I know they didn't might have like, harm be-behind it but like, my grandfather will make this joke towards my god mom like, he would call her like, "darkie" sometimes or like, it was some cartoon character that was like, very, very dark skin that he will call her, I can't remember, but he would call her that character, so those are two things.

L:

I have something to say based off what she said. Like, my dad like, often like, he like, uses that, that as a joke, but like, we all say as a joke, not towards like, a skin tone but like, just as like, referring to us as like, Black people in general. And in like, it's never met with any like, malice, but he always references like that character and like, why was it called like, "darkie", was like now it's like a joke.

Other fathers referred to dark skin women as "darkie," and some participants acknowledged that even though the men in their life made these comments they interpreted them as "jokes" or not said with malice intent. Participant *AM* expressed that her brother who is Black and married a white woman had conversations about whether or not his new baby would be so pretty, but she assumed pretty meant lighter skin. Participant *AR* also mentioned that comments from her father were internalized, and she began to think that getting "too" dark was a deficit and something to

avoid. One common theme among participants is that messages and assumptions about women who look like them were covertly diminished, and these messages were coming from men in their own families. Darker skin females received degrading messages about their skin tone from deeply rooted societal beauty standards and are also having to create coping mechanisms from negative messaging their own family's and more specifically their fathers and other men in the family transmit.

Black men in the family also affirmed their dark skin daughter's beauty while simultaneously undermined these positive messages with harmful "jokes," innuendos, and their own dating preferences that did not reflect their daughters skin tone. For example, when asked how she feels as a dark skin woman that her father is only finding beauty in women who don't look like her, participant "Kateri "who had also stated that her father has said that all his children are beautiful while also nicknaming her the "Queen of Darkness" stated,

> It's sort of odd where it wasn't like a physical pain, it was more like, I was so used to hearing and seeing these messages, so it was just like okay, well it's just another message that I'm seeing and hearing. As I get older and I'm dating and seeing other people date, I'm like hmm… is that a thing or is it just a coincidence (darker skinned men with lighter skinned women)? But it doesn't make me feel good, it doesn't make me feel beautiful it doesn't make me feel like a desirable woman but I'm getting older and finding ways to combat that.

What Black Men Seem to Want

Participants were asked questions about the conversations they've heard in the Black community around the relationship between dating and skin tone. Most participants voiced how they believed Black men usually found partners who did not resemble them in terms of skin tone

and hair texture. Participants expressed that some Black fathers and other fathers deliberately degrade, harmfully label, and do not support Black women and more specifically dark skin Black women. Participants recalled experiences with Black fathers and other fathers on three levels:1) men in the family and extended family, 2) men on their college campus and 3) men in society have exhibited behavior that suggested they preferred lighter skin women and did not find dark skin women attractive or worth picking as a romantic partner. These perceptions have in turn influenced the way participants approached dating as well as how they view themselves. Participants *Kateri* who rated herself dark, *PC* rated herself medium light and *JMW,* who rated herself as medium-dark, shared similar views about how they thought Black fathers and other fathers viewed skin tone and dating, they stated the following:

JMW:

> *My parents had me later and my parents are both like, on the baby end of all their siblings. So, all my cousins were like, late, early 30s and up. Um, so when I was younger, hearing them like, dating and talking about like, oh, "I would never date a Black girl" like "They're angry, they're loud", they're this or they're that and like them being dark skin like, I'm sitting there as like, a little girl and I'm like, okay, well, um, and then seeing that in action and almost all of my cousins, their kids are either light skinned or mixed. Um, and so like constantly seeing that and like seeing like, people in my own family like choosing someone else is very disheartening. And then having that same experience of like, I've never been in a relationship, never was picked, so like, never was asked to prom, never asked for this thing from other Black guys in my school and like, always wondering like, oh if "I was lighter" like, for sure, like I would've been asked and dated by now and all the other things.*

Kateri:

> *Um, from what I see online and also on campus, and just being around, um, you really, I don't, I don't see anything good, um, I don't, it's not a lot of praise. Usually, it's a lot of negative talk um, like PC said. It's sort of um, you sort of, labeled, you're sort of labeled as aggressive, or, or "Are you really a woman or are you a man?", like this or like you, you're, they put masculine traits onto you… in which they label as unattractive which makes you feel unattractive. And so, you don't really feel, well I don't really feel um, supported, or loved or seen as desirable from them as a dark-skinned woman. Um, or don't hear anything—sometimes I do sometimes but it's mostly um, about lighter skin women. So-.*

PC:

> *Well, for the Black men in our community, they mostly go for like, outside of our race, or lighter skin women, because they view darker skin women as not attractive, which I don't agree with. And I just always like in high school, I would always hear the Black boys, talking down on dark skin women when like, they were, when they would be dating them, or anything like that.*

In all three responses, participants have either personally been impacted by the way Black men in their family, in college, or in society view darker skin women like themselves. Whether that is in the form of never being asked out on a date or to the prom solely based on the darkness of one's skin tone, hearing conversations as a little girl from men in the family about how they would never date a woman who resembles them, to hearing messages from men while in an educational setting about how darker skin women aren't considered attractive. T

The Willful Ignorance of (Some) Fathers

Skin tone for darker skin Black men has historically been associated with masculinity, and is perceived as a threat, dangerous and their skin tone is often criminalized. Darker skin for men is also an attribute in romantic relationships and a desirable trait for potential partners (Lewis, 2011). Whereas for Black women, higher social capital in terms of education, beauty and educational achievements are tied to having lighter skin. This distinct gender difference in romantic relationship dynamics could be a reason why *some* Black fathers are not having conversations with their daughters about colorism or skin tone. A few participants expressed that their fathers and grandfathers either intentionally do not talk about colorism even when they overhear conversations between women and their daughters in the family or believe that the conversation does not apply to them because of their skin tone. Research states that attractiveness, as a result of skin color, is not as important for judgments of men compared to women (Wade & Bielitz, 2005). Participants *NS* who rated herself as medium and, participants *PC* and MedZou who both rated themselves medium light stated the following:

PC:

> *Well, I remember having a conversation with my father about colorism, and he said he thought it was stupid and that… (shakes head) yeah, that it doesn't really apply to him. Because he's lighter skin, almost like, white but he's Black. And he doesn't really view skin tone, as like, different skin tones is attractive or not attractive, so-.*

NS:

> *My mom would. My mom would, my mom would, I think she noticed those things. Cause even my mom she was a bit darker than me so I know she would always, I'm sorry for the background noise, but um she would always truly like she was an encourager and just*

reminded them like "You are still so beautiful" um no matter what skin tone you look

great you know she would be very um adamant about keeping their hair done just as

much as the next however that may look. And my dad I don't think he ever really

acknowledges the difference in skin tone but like he doesn't also correct my grandma or

anything I don't think. Like he'll kind of just let her talk and say what she says and maybe

we'll try to move on and change the subject uh-.

Medzou:

He's, he's not really taught like he doesn't really talk like, about like, issues like that. I

feel like I could ask him, he's actually here but um, that's an interesting question to ask,

my grandmother is no longer here but um, I feel like she's the one that always made it a

big deal like I feel like, I don't know because he's a man he doesn't really care. Um, as far

as the skin tone thing, but he was always like he's extremely light skinned and even

around his eyes is blue, and we always tell him that and he's like, "No it's not, it's just the

sun" but it's, he has blue eyes and um, yeah, he hasn't made any comments about

colorism at all, like ever.

Participant *PC* stated that her father believed that because he was light skin, conversations

around colorism did not apply to him at all, and in turn this potentially could translate to how his

daughter feels as well as invalidate her experiences with colorism. Other participants also stated

that the other fathers in their life also did not have conversations surrounding colorism even

when women in the family made hurtful and harmful comments.

Combatting Negative Skin Tone Messages From Black Fathers and Other Fathers

Results from this study indicate that Black women, and more specifically dark skin Black

girl, are receiving negative messages about skin tone from their network of fathers and other

fathers as well as from society. These messages have been internalized by participants which has in turn impacted their self- esteem, how long they think they should be in the sun, and ideas around finding potential partners. These messages are so deeply ingrained in fathers and other fathers, even when fathers believe colorism does not impact them or talk about it with their daughters. Although messages that participants in the study received were intensely harmful and detrimental to their self-esteem, they were able to make efforts to combat them by implementing self-love and confidence. Participants *AR and JB* who rated themselves as medium dark, *AM who* rated herself as medium dark and *Med* Zou who rated herself medium light stated the following:

AM:

> *For me, it was being surrounded by more people of color, because I grew up in a PWI like all of elementary through high school. And so, most of my friends were white and so I never really got a reinforcement of anything other than what my family said, like I never got any validation of like, "Oh, just because you're one skin color doesn't make you or darker just make you worse than being white," like I never got that because I wasn't surrounded by that. Whereas in college, I'm surrounded by more friends of different, like, different skin tone to different colors and to where I'm like, I get different viewpoints and different perspectives on it to where it made me more confident in myself because I had people who look like me or who were different than me or darker than me or lighter than me, who did-- who felt confident in who they were, like, and it wasn't based on their skin tone. Like my darker friends like they like everyone I know does have like problems with their skin tone still but that's not solely based on it, they're not like, "Oh, I'm not attractive because I'm darker," or "I'm more attractive because I'm lighter." Like it has*

more to do with their personality and their growth or their confidence instead of so-

solely their skin color or skin tone.

AR:

Yeah, I would pretty much agree with AM like, pretty much same exact thing. Uh,

just being around more people who are different skin tones and a lot of times my darker

friends are actually the most confident, um, and didn't really care much about what people

said about them. So, I was like, "Oh, I should be that way." JB:

I agree, it was more so for me coming in, even as a freshman, I had a senior mentor, that

was Black, and it encouraged me a lot because she was darker skin, and she was just so

confident that like it made her glow and like she rubbed that confidence off on me, like

made me like know like "Hey girl, like you're just as beautiful," things like that. And then

I started to see more and more Black women express like basically like knowing that

they're beautiful no matter what skin tone they were. And it was just like wow I've never

seen that cause even in high school like there was a lot of girls that still, you were more

so like feeling like you weren't as beautiful and it's like, like when I got to college and just

like everyone saying that they were beautiful, especially those that said that they struggle

with it when they were freshmen, and like in high school, it kind of made you know like

you weren't alone. So, kind of made you feel better that like "oh I can be like them" and

made you want to push to be more confident in yourself. And that was my main thing was

like seeing other people be confident made me want to be confident.

Medzou:

And I don't know if this started from like um, my grandma or not, but I just remember

like, I don't know if it was like, high school or college, maybe high school, and I noticed

like there are like, um, cause I went to a Christian school at first as well, and so I was usually like the only Black student like me, or a couple other people. So, when I went to like a bigger school, public school, and there's like, you know, mixed kids and things like that, I was like oh, they're, they're, maybe look more attractive and you know they're the ones that always get guys and things like that. And then like going into college um, like, I feel like there was this fad of were like being light skin was cool, like everybody like wants to be fair and like, you know, you will get more attention if you are fair. And um, I feel like the way that that has impacted me, it's like made me not want to appreciate, like my Blackness and my color and when I talk about this with people, that I went through this phase, they're like, like, "[participants name] you're already light skin", like "Why do you want to become more light?", because like I feel like I'm dark, especially like my face obviously if these get the most sun. So, I like always wear sunscreen like more also like for health reasons but like I walk around campus like with an umbrella, like I just did not want to get dark. And not because I, being dark was bad, but more so, maybe because like I wanted that like aesthetic and attention of being like, fair and being beautiful, so, I thought like you know being light skin was more beautiful. And so, I wanted to get lighter and then there's even a time I considered like, you know, using like whitening cream, like not bleaching, but like whitening lotions and stuff. Um but then, like, after like, like doing research online like, I was like, "Okay, I don't know, like what the side effects will be," like, they say oh, "You can get cancer from doing the [brand] stuff", because you know when you go to like, um—I'm from Nigeria, so, like when I go back home sometimes, a lot of people use bleaching cream like Caro White and things like that. And then you'll see like their knuckles will be dark, and I'm just like, "No, I don't want to look like that."

So, like, I just like, accepted like the way that I am, and I feel like I still like, have this unconscious like, uh, I don't want to be in the sun, I don't want to get like too dark and things like that. Like I just feel like I learned to appreciate the skin tone that I have now, but I have noticed that like, there has been like favoritism. And as far as like, people that are fairer versus like people are dark, and I noticed it like growing up with my sister as well, like treatment that both of us get. So, I think it's something that has been internalized um, growing up and now like, I'm aware of it and I'm trying to like to get that stigma like, out like all shades are beautiful right, because like, maybe that just— like she talked about effects like maybe that will affect you will want to be. Back to the fad and social media, like, "I want my baby to have curly hair", oh, "I want like a light skin baby" like, oh, "You know when the baby comes out while I was hoping the eyes will be this kind of color", like, it's kind of ridiculous to think like you just brought a child, and then they complain about like the hair or the eye color the skin color like you shouldn't be disappointment. So, we have to learn how to love our Blackness and like, to love like any shade that we are, because all of the shades are beautiful.

One key aspect that participants stated to help discover their confidence and self-love was surrounding themselves around more Black women who exuded self-love that was contagious. Participants expressed how having Black mentors and diverse friend groups showed them that they are beautiful no matter the lightness or darkness of their skin. These pivotal examples of Black women thriving in the skin they were in gave them to confidence to embrace who they were and begin the work to repair the wounded little girls who endured painful experiences of skin tone trauma. While many participants expressed, a newfound sense of confidence some participants still grappled with unlearning the internalized messages from their fathers,

otherfathers and society, while also accepting themselves and loving who they are. Medzou's response clearly depicts the difficult struggle to abandon old mind sets and develop genuine confidence.

Discussion

This study examined the colorism and skin tone messages that fathers and other fathers transmit to their daughters and other female family members, as well as the impact that these messages have on their self-esteem and ideas around desirability. Based on the interview transcripts, skin color chart selections, and researchers' notes I was able to identify consistent topics that existed within the data. From this analyses, the study identified five emerging themes emerged: a) No 'fun' in the sun, b) No one's first choice, c) What Black men seem to want, d) The willful ignorance of some fathers, e) Combating negative skin tone messages from Black fathers and other fathers. Results from this study indicate that although not all fathers transmit harmful messages regarding skin tone, some may unconsciously transmit them without knowing the implications of their words and messages. Nonetheless, messages that were transmitted by fathers, other fathers and society as a whole have diminished their daughter's self-esteem and their perception of their own beauty, influenced what they believed men wanted in a partner and based on that impacted how they pursued romantic partners.

In some instances, results also show that fathers affirm their dark skin daughters and other female family members beauty while simultaneously belittling and dishonoring dark skin women by explicitly stating that they would never date a would never date a dark skin woman because of her skin tone. Consistent with the skin tone trauma model (Landor & McNeil, 2019), participants experienced multiple and continuous experiences of skin tone trauma based on experiences within their family unit, conversations with friends in school settings and broadly

from the ideals and messages broadcast by societal values, standards, and norms. Although messages that participants received were intensely harmful and detrimental to their self-esteem, they were able to begin making strides to combat them by implementing self-love, confidence and by changing the people that they surround themselves with. While participants have begun implementing self-love, they admit that there is still an internal struggle to abandon outdated and damaging ideologies and instead try to embrace their authentic self and love the skin that they are in.

By training counselors, practitioners, psychologist and community advocators about the depth and immense magnitude of skin tone trauma helps them provide the proper tools and resources to extend to their Black clients who experience skin tone trauma is essential. This will elicit conversations around colorism and skin tone trauma in the community and in therapeutic settings. Most participants did not have the words to express their experiences and feelings that they have gone through, having trained practitioners who can provide an operationalized definition of the trauma they're enduring begins the process of destigmatizing their experiences because there is validness in an experience being named. This demonstrates that people experiencing skin tone trauma are not the only people going through this stressor, there is a name to capture their experience will hopefully bring forth more awareness and change on the micro and macro level because more people will be able to label what they have been through and recognize it is more common than some may think.

Results from this study will advance knowledge in family science by offering much needed insight into colorism research that is understudied and often misrepresented. Understanding the influence fathers and other fathers have on their daughter's self-esteem and ideas around desirability is critically important for research and practice. Researchers and

practitioners must better recognize the ways in which skin tone and colorism plays a role in father-daughter relationships because the life outcomes of Black girls and women may be greatly impacted dependent on how their fathers transmit messages about skin tone and colorism. Understanding how fathers were socialized is imperative to fully understand the full magnitude of skin tone trauma intergenerationally.

Limitations

Although this study focused on the messages fathers transmit to their daughters, this was solely based on the participants first-hand experience and does not consider the fathers' firsthand experience. In order to capture the true magnitude of intergenerational skin tone trauma, future research should also interview fathers to understand the colorism messages that the father received, his dating preferences and track their perceived skin tone before and after looking at the skin tone chart. Another limitation of the study is that questions asked to the participants were focused on the influence of colorism messages from family members, in general, which could have limited the responses participants provided about fathers and other fathers specifically. The final limitation to this study was because it was conducted during Covid-19 interviews were conducted via zoom. Although conducting interviews on zoom was the safest option, it increased the likelihood of technical issues to occur which disrupted the flow of the conversation and body language and facial cues that typically aide in conversation are hard to interpret in zoom calls which can cause misinterpretation from participants and interviewer.

Recommendations

Developing interactive workshops and interventions, where recruitment takes place in heavily populated community centers, doctors' offices (pediatricians and OBGYN), and churches that focus on recruiting new parents to be proactive and prevent the damage from even

happening is imperative. The program will not only focus on teaching fathers how vital it is to transmit healthy messages about skin tone differences and colorism to the development of their daughters, but also aims to address the intergenerational transmission of skin tone trauma that fathers may also be suffering from, from their own upbringing and experiences. Workshops will foster safe environments for families to proactively learn about colorism while acquiring tools to heal from this deeply rooted sociohistorical system. By dually focusing on preventative measures for the father's parenting approach as well as reactive measures to work through the skin tone trauma that the father has endured will provide optimal results.

While this first suggestion will directly influence the father present, there is also a responsibility to address the skin tone biases that other fathers also have, because they are equally impactful and influential. This begins by dissecting the harmful messages that other fathers are transmitting either directly or indirectly to Black women. One way to do this is by conducting workshops at local organizations like the Boys & Girls Club of the Columbia area and Black churches, which are both places that are heavily populated with Black men of all ages. Collaborating with entities like the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion at the University of Missouri to create university wide colorism workshops is another way to elicit major change not only at the university level but for the surrounding community. Creating spaces in the community and on campus where conversations about the systemic repercussions of colorism are openly and safely discussed will enable this typically taboo topic to become more widespread and approachable.

Another way to prevent future generations of continuing the cycle of transmitting harmful messages about colorism is to work with legislation to implement programs as young as preschool to teach children about the beauty and diversity in differences. Providing age-

appropriate workshops that teach children about why everyone should be respected, valued, and more importantly not judged solely off of the color or tone of their skin is imperative for larger systematic change. Education systems have a responsibility to commit to culturally relevant curriculum and programming. Educators must provide other examples not rooted in whiteness when coming up with course work, readings, and assignments. Providing examples of different, races, ethnicities, skin tones will create culturally tolerant children who will learn to embrace differences and not see them to judge a person's competency, ability, beauty, or character. The current study is not without limitation despite the insightful implications regarding how impactful colorism messages transmitted from Black fathers and other fathers to their daughters and other females' ideas around desirability and their self-esteem.

Conclusion

Equipping Black families and specifically Black fathers and other fathers with the proper tools to protect their daughters and other female family members from harmful messages around skin tone and colorism is imperative to begin healing deeply rooted intergenerational skin tone trauma. Black women's self-esteem and ideas around desirability along with many other important life outcomes like educational attainment, career choices, medical care, and even decision making around something as simple as the sports one will play are related to the messages, they receive not only from society at large but their fathers. Improving the way fathers interact and speak to their daughters with interventions and programs to address the issue of colorism head on will not only improve the relationship between them but also begin to fix the societal issue of colorism. Researchers and practitioners have a duty to bridge the gap between Black fathers and daughters to create a generation who is no longer operating on colorist views

and ideologies and instead see the value of a person based on who they are and not the pigment of their skin.

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Figure 1

Conceptual Model