

BLACK WOMEN AND COLORISM: THE DARK SIDE

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Black Women and Colorism: Emotional Distress and the Dark Side.

Abstract:

For decades colorism has been an immense issue in the African American community. However, it is a topic that is often ignored because it is an issue that is specific to the Black community. Many forms of research on the topic of colorism have focused on Black women's experiences with colorism. However, my research will be focusing on the subjective and emotional distress that colorism has caused in dark-skinned Black women's lives. It is important for people, especially in the Black community, to be educated on how colorism affects Black women emotionally. My research examined how colorism affected Black women's emotional well-being. I argue that dark-skinned Black women are more likely to endure emotional distress from colorism. Through in-depth interviews with dark-skinned Black women, all who have experienced colorism, I found that these women experienced subjective and emotional distress from colorism.

Introduction

Colorism is an issue unknown to anyone who isn't considered a person of color. However, it is one of the most significant topics in the Black community that often gets disregarded. Colorism is defined as a person of lighter skin tone that is more likely to receive certain privileges and advantages compared to those with darker skin who are discriminated against (Glenn, 2008). It is essential to differentiate the differences between colorism and racism for there to be an understanding of what colorism is. Racism is the prejudice and discrimination against a group of people based on their race or ethnicity. Racism is typically carried out by a person who is not of the same race. The person being racist often believes that they are superior because they are white. However, colorism happens within the same group of people. There is a hierarchy between lighter-skinned African Americans and dark-skinned African Americans in the Black community, specifically between lighter-skinned women and darker-skinned women in the Black community. Within the Black community, lighter-skinned Black women are favored because of their skin tone. Having a lighter skin tone in the Black community has always been synonymous with beauty, while dark skin is synonymous with ugly. Colorism is not a term that is commonly used in the Black community. It is commonly recognized as dark skin versus light skin (Wilder and Cain, 2010).

In Britt Bennett's book *The Vanishing Half*, she highlights the colorism within the Black community. Although the book is fictional, Bennett portrays colorism in the Black community related to real life situations. The first few chapters of the book focus on two women known as the Vignes Twins. The Vignes twins are named Stella and Desire. The Vignes twins grew up in color struck town that holds value to skin tone. In the first chapters of the book, the prejudice

against darker skin is very evident. Desiree comes back to Mallard after running away with her twin sister. She comes back with her child, Jude, who is dark skin.

When one man named Lou sees Desiree walk into town with her, he says, "she was holding the hand of a girl, seven or eight, and black as tar." "Blueblack," he said. Like she flown direct from Africa. (Bennett 2020, p.3)". The people who lived in Mallard feared the idea of being dark skin so much that they tried to prevent themselves from having dark children and only sought out to marry light-skinned partners. Darkness to them was like being infected with an incurable virus. People in Mallard town treated dark skin like a disease. Pregnant mothers didn't drink coffee or eat chocolate out of fear that their child would be born with dark skin. Many people in Mallard were against marrying dark-skinned people. Desiree's mother was immensely color-struck, and it showed when she criticized the men that Desiree chose to date. In this quote, Desiree's mother warns her against dating dark-skinned men, " "Don't even look his way," her mother said, "Boys like that that don't want nothing good." Dark boys in Mallard only wanted to go girl hunting, her mother always said. They wanted to give it to a white girl but couldn't, so they thought a light girl was the next best thing.(Bennett 2020, p.44)"

In comparison, as Jude starts school, we can see how colorism impacts young Black women and how society reacts to young Black women who are dark-skinned. The jokes and names people called Jude were cruel and based purely on the fact that she was a dark skin woman in a town populated by lighter-skinned people. This quote from the book best explains the way discrimination works against dark skin women:

THEY CALLED HER TAR BABY. Midnight. Darky. Mudpie. Said, Smile, we can't see you. Said, You so dark you blend into the chalkboard. Said, Bet you could show up naked to a funeral. Bet lightning bugs follow you in the daytime. Bet when you swim it look like oil. Bet cockroaches call you cousin. Bet you can't find your own shadow. At that party, she forced herself to laugh, even though

she'd found nothing funny at that time. The jokes were true. (Bennett, 2020 p. 83).

Although these experiences are fictional, they are very real for dark-skinned people. Jude didn't just have to hear these comments from her peers but also her grandmother. Her grandmother didn't necessarily call Jude names or makes jokes to insult her appearance; it was evident through her actions that dark skin was synonymous with negativity. Jude's grandmother attempted to keep her out of the sunlight, convinced her to run with a hat on outdoors, convinced her to stay in the shade out of fear she may get darker than she already was. This fear of dark-skinned comes from a profound place within the Black community. Dark-skinned women will often practice these same routines without having to be told to do so. Skin tone should not define someone's worth, especially when talking about skin tone within the Black community. However, it does. It is embedded in the Black community and often goes unnoticed because it has been a practice since colonial times.

In early colonial days, white slave owners were responsible for instilling colorist views and values among African slaves. The skin values have stayed rooted in the African American community. Europeans created the biases surrounding skin tone within the Black community. European colonizers are responsible for the development of racial terminologies such as black and white. These terms were used to show further that whites were superior to African Americans. This ideology has been permeated into the African American community. The sexual exploitation of Black women created ambiguous looking African Americans who often had white phenotypic features (Wilder and Cain, 2010). Fultz (2014) explains that slaves who had darker skin complexion were given more strenuous jobs. Many dark-skinned slaves were responsible for any work that had to be done out in the fields. The idea of lighter slaves being

smarter began to be reinforced, which is why lighter slaves had "jobs" indoors. Europeans enforced this notion that lighter skin African Americans and darker skinned African Americans should be separated. Many light-skinned African Americans joined and formed individual fraternities or groups that separated them from their darker counterparts. Standards like the brown paper bag test began to evoke the division between light-skinned African Americans and dark skin African Americans. Failing to meet these criteria meant that you could not participate in individual social clubs, which worsened the division between light-skinned African Americans and dark-skinned African Americans. Thus, beginning the light skin versus dark skin rivalry among African Americans, aka colorism.

I will be using Black Feminist thought for my theory. Black feminist thought emphasizes the obstacles and difficulties in fighting oppression. Oppressed individuals are motivated to partake in the subordination of others within their group. In Alina Mino's *On Black Feminist Thought* she mentions the term "counter-hegemonic" knowledge. Counter-hegemonic knowledge focuses on how power functions and how it is structured. She focuses on the interconnections of power and subordination that are kept in place to cause others to inflict oppression upon each other, even though it is against their own (Mino, 2015). This theory relates to colorism, considering that colorism is often practiced within communities of color. It is people of color that practice colorism on each other. Colorism is based on hegemonic ideals that have been emerged into the black community. The more Eurocentric features you have as a Black person, the more accepted you will be in terms of colorism and your group of people.

Literature Review

In this section, the effects of colorism will be examined in retrospect to favoritism, discrimination within the Black community, and attractiveness. Many of these areas are

substantial factors in colorism. This literature review will be looking at other studies that have looked at colorism. The literature review will specifically focus on the studies that have focused on dark-skinned women, as it is the central premise of this research. This literature review will focus on family, favoritism, disadvantages, and advantages of having dark skin, and attractiveness.

Colorism and Favoritism

Favoritism is a significant factor in colorism. In the life of dark-skinned Black women, favoritism can affect several aspects of her life. One of these aspects of favoritism is within the family. Although it is common in Black families to teach Black consciousness and Black pride, these same families can simultaneously bring in colorist views that favor one skin tone against another (Wilder and Cain, 2011). Wilder and Cain aim to shed light on the color socialization that often takes place within Black families. Family values are usually revolving around skin tone, a person's sense of self, and self-esteem. Within a family, a child's skin tone can determine how much that child will be favored. This practice begins inside a socio-historical radicalized skin tone hierarchy for Black households. This hierarchy can involve hair texture and facial features, and it is also extremely gender-specific (Wilder and Cain, 2011). Black women are often the ones negatively affected by colorism because it is gendered. The link between skin color and it being synonymous with attractiveness affects women more than it does men. Skin tone can often play a role in the way that women feel about themselves. Women who were of lighter skin tones reported having high self-esteem. There is a social emphasis on women and their beauty. Beauty tends to be influenced by race and ethnicity. The issue is that these beauty standards are defined by white supremacy, which results in lightness being synonymous with beauty and more favorable than dark skin (Wilder and Cain, 2011).

In Wilder and Cains's study, they found that women stated that their family members influenced their thoughts and ideas regarding themselves and other people concerning colorism. Women in their studies were direct about the color categorizations within their families. They mostly used the terms the "light side" or the "dark side" regarding family members. One woman says in her study, " I had an aunt who always equated...dark skin with unattractiveness, so I always heard Black and Ugly, it was like there was one word "blackandugly". "He was blackandugly" (Wilder and Cain, 2011). Many women recognized that any negative connotations that they had about dark skin came from family members. These views specifically came from the women in their families. Many women in their study started to recognize that this internalized colorism within their families affected their self-identity. Minoo says:

"Individuals and groups occupy multiple positions — they may be oppressors in some settings and oppressed in others. For example, Collins points at ' as a historically identifiable population, U.S Black women are simultaneously privileged and penalized' within a global matrix of domination (p.266)... Thus, each group or individual should be aware of and recognize its own part and responsibility in shaping and maintaining domination and social injustice." (Minoo, 2015).

In this specific study, many Black women are finding that their family members are inflicting colorist ideas onto them. It has been normalized primarily in black families to hate dark skin. Having dark-skinned or light skin becomes a characteristic. It defines a Black woman's worth and her status within her own group.

Also, studies have found that favoritism plays a role in job selection when concerning colorism. In Thomas and Harrison's study, they aim to determine whether preference is practiced in the job selection process. Not all African Americans are equally marginalized when seeking employment. The problem they face with employment may be deciphered by their skin tone being light or dark. They relate this to slavery and how slaves were often given jobs based on

their skin tone. It further stressed the idea that light-skinned were more appreciated among other groups of people. Colorism affects both Black men and women in the workplace; however, when colorism is involved in the workplace, it is because of the beauty standards Black women are expected to have (Harrison and Thomas, 2009). Both dark skin and Black women can have the same resumes, but a light-skinned Black woman has the advantage of receiving higher pay (Harrison and Thomas, 2009).

Their study used similar resumes with pictures of dark-skinned and light-skinned applicants to see the difference in the rates that light or dark-skinned Black people were hired. They also used the same participants for each resume but altered their skin tone to see if employers had skin biases. This study reveals that even though the resume and participants were consistent, they found skin tone held importance in job selection. There was more of a preference to choose lighter skinned applicants. Even though it is unfortunate that many job selections are being defined by skin tone, it is not uncommon or surprising considering that light skin is ascribed to success (Harrison and Thomas, 2009). One study revealed that customers shopping at Jamaican shops preferred being helped by women with a lighter complexion. Some of these tourists were often Americans with these preferences, while some were lower class. This particular Jamaican shop often had women of "fair" complexion directly serve customers, while women with darker complexions were given jobs that didn't directly involve helping customers (Henriques, 1951).

Discrimination within the Black Community

Colorism is typically practiced within the Black community by African Americans compared to racism, which is inflicted on Black people by White people. Landor's study focuses heavily on African Americans practicing colorism against themselves, specifically among family members. Landor defines colorism as an African American being given a set of privileges or disadvantages

based on their skin tone being light or dark. This study aims to study the quality of parenting among African American families concerning the darkness or lightness of one's complexion.

In the first few years of adolescence, socialization is brought onto children by parents. In the African American community, the family is an essential factor for African American children (Landor, 2013). A child's phenotypic features can also affect the way their parents treat them. It is the same way that a child's body weight, sex, or other traits may affect parents' parenting styles. Preference within the family context shows the ways colorism works (Landor, 2013). Preferential treatment within the context of colorism can also expose how discrimination works with colorism and the Black community. In Landor's study, it was found that daughters with a lighter complexion indicated that they experienced better quality of parents. However, their darker counterparts reported that they received lower quality of parenting. The colorism that children experience is also highly dependent on gender. The way that gender is displayed on boys is very different from girls. This due to gendered and hegemonic ideas of what gender means for Black women (Landor, 2013).

In Wilder's study, they study the discrimination that is practiced among the Black community. They specifically focus on the experiences that Black women experience concerning colorism. Because of slavery's impact on the Black community, many of its ideas and values have remained embedded in many African Americans' thoughts and views. Skin color standards like the brown paper bag test, pencil ruler, and door test were used to measure a Black person's skin color further influenced African Americans' division. As an African American, if your complexion was too dark, you could not participate in certain social clubs (Wilder, 2010). In their study they found color names were incorporated in many Black women's. Many of these names were negative terms used to describe dark skin. Some of these names used to describe

skin are "burnt, charcoal, and watermelon child (Wilder, 2010). Terms like "burnt" and "charcoal" are terms that very common in the Black community to describe dark-skinned people. Furthermore, the terms that are used to describe dark-skinned people are always negative. They make dark skin seem like it should be in insecurity rather than a feature to be proud of. Wilder and Cain's participant says:

"Red girls get more attention." Consistent with many positive terms used to denote light skin tone, many of the internalized scripts related to light skin were positive. When asking respondents to describe the attributes associated with light-skinned women, many used words such as trustworthy, amiable, nonthreatening, and comfortable." (Wilder and Cain, 2010).

These ideas about skin tone are socially constructed and negatively impact dark-skinned women. To always ascribe anything close to white as angelic and in contrast, demonize anything remotely close to Afrocentric is damaging to Black women and the African American community.

Discrimination isn't one-sided; it can display itself in many ways. Certain types of discrimination have played a part in how Black women feel about them-selves (Faultz,). In Faultz's research, they aim to study Black women's experiences with colorism. Faultz (2013) says that many Black women's self-perception depends on the norms of attractiveness in the Black community and skin tone bias within the Black community. Faultz (2013) found that many women felt feelings of unattractiveness because of their complexion. Thus, many dark-skinned Black women felt that they were invisible compared to their light skin counterparts. Participants talked about their experiences concerning backhanded compliments. Black women are likely to experience low self-esteem because of the stereotypes surrounding attractiveness and how light or dark a Black woman should or shouldn't be (Faultz, 2013). Faultz (2013) explains that many women realized that colorism was still extremely prominent. Group participants described

awards being given based on having the lightest or darkest skin at HBCU's, and parties catered to people of lighter complexions, color-struck family members, and more. They explained their experiences with preferential treatment or family members with lighter skin tones.

Colorism and Attractiveness

Many literatures about colorism tend to focus on the topic beauty standards in the African American community. The beauty standard surrounding colorism is vital to understand how colorism negatively affects Black women. In Sumo's (2019) study, many women in her study felt that being a dark-skinned woman came with many downsides. Dark-skinned women spoke of lighter skin women always being perceived as more attractive due to their lighter skin tone. Although they've noticed that there has been an uprise in appreciation of dark-skinned Black women, this particular participant felt like the appreciation given was not the same as the ones lighter-skinned women received. Light skinned women spoke of darker skinned women being seen as invaluable in society's eyes because of that influence of white beauty being the norm for Black women. Participants then talked about their experiences with the dating and friendship world. One woman spoke about her experience of dating. She explained that many times her lighter-skinned friend would be chosen over her because she was lighter. Based on her skin tone, she was judged. Overall, a recurring theme for these women was that in the dating world, their chances were slim when it came to men being attracted to them because of their dark skin.

Other women in this study felt that Black men mainly enacted the act of colorism. They concluded that Black men put Black women against each other with this idea of light skin vs. dark skin. Many women believed that Black men's standard plays a role in the way Black women are treated. It is their white standard of beauty that affects the way Black women view themselves. Sumo (2019) also explains the way stereotyping affects dark-skinned Black women.

Many dark-skinned Black women spoke of the assumption that they were rude, ratchet (ghetto), or had a bad attitude based on their skin tone. There's this idea that dark skin is negative; therefore, all negative traits tend to be ascribed to darker skinned women.

Furthermore, these same stereotypes are often displayed in children's tv shows. The media is known for reproducing colorist stereotypes and pushing certain cultural expectations (Steel, 2016). Steel (2016) says even though we are in a time where there are more Black characters on tv shows, it is still uncommon to see Black tv shows. Steel (2016) focuses on TV show that aired on Disney Channel from 2000-2005. While the creators did try to display positive images of black culture and the Black experience's importance, there were many colorist views expressed in the show. Steele (2016) states that the physical representation of African American characters can adversely affect the children viewing these shows. Looking at the differences between how lighter-skinned and darker skinned African Americans get treated, specifically women, shows that Black women who possess these Eurocentric features are more likely to be socially accepted by white people and Black people.

The Proud Family had many stereotypical images of Black women in this cartoon. Penny and her mother Trudy were the two main characters of the show. These two characters are depicted to have lighter skin than their father and husband named Oscar. Both their hairstyles are rarely in a natural state but always straight. These characters are the characters that are expected to be most relatable to even though they have the most Eurocentric features. It's the secondary characters of the show that portray the most colorist stereotypes. One of these characters is the Gross sisters. One of the most noticeable features of the Gross sisters is their skin tone. The animated TV show depicts their skin tone as a deep blue complexion, which is supposed to correspond with the derogatory term "blue-black". The Gross sisters are characterized as the

school bullies that everyone is afraid of. The Gross sisters are the complete opposite of the white societal norms of beauty. The illustrators are subconsciously trying to portray that people should fear and associate their skin color with unattractiveness. Hence their names being the Gross sisters, they should be unappealing to anyone who crosses their path. The Gross Sisters fail to abide by the typical hegemonic ideals that black women are expected to adhere to (Steele, 2016).

Dijonay is another dark-skinned character in the show. Her character is meant to add an aspect of comedy to the show. She is depicted as the character that no one is ever attracted to. She is always drawn to men who aren't attracted to her. Dijonay is given the typically stereotypical characteristics of a Black woman. She is characterized as being loud, ghetto, and aggressive. Steele explains that people argue that her characteristics are factors in why she may not be seen as attractive. Still, these characteristics are only ever given to the show's dark skin characters. Her character negatively portrays dark-skinned Black women and shows us that dark skin should always be associated with negativity. Any Black woman that does not adhere to certain hegemonic ideals is deemed unattractive.

Hill (2002) studies the differences in color preferences in Black men and Black women. African Americans have been given specific opportunities from institutions or individuals based on Eurocentric features (Hill, 2002). Hill (2002) explains that women's typical American paintings are typically painted at delicate shell pink. This has to do with the ideology that light skin portrays more femininity in a woman. The notion of "sacred white femininity" was carried out by white supremacist constructs and associated white femininity with godliness and purity. During slavery, Black Women were given the same role as Black men because they were still considered masculine. They were also punished in the same way that men were. Black women began to fail at adhering to the white ideals of femininity, bringing forth the stereotypes of dark-

skinned African American women (Hill, 2002). The women in the media that are considered beautiful are typically women who fall in line with white beauty standards (Hill, 2002). Women who fall in line with these features are Jada Pinkett Smith, Tia Mowry, or Tracee Ellis Ross. Many African American men will find themselves attracted to lighter skin women because of the Eurocentric ideals they have adopted (Hill, 2002). Hill aims to prove that attractiveness is more important for dark-skinned women than for dark-skinned men. Hill (2002) found that there was a significant difference in the importance of attractiveness in Black women. When it came to preference, lighter skin was likely to be chosen. Men are more likely to hold biases against dark-skinned women and choose lighter-skinned women. However, for dark-skinned men, the skin tone and attractiveness were less likely to be coinciding factors. The next section of this study will explain the methodology that was used for this study.

Methods

Although some research has focused on colorism, there is not enough research done on the subjective and emotional responses Black women have with colorism, specifically dark-skinned Black women. The research done on colorism has not focused on Black's experiences but rather their thoughts and feeling about colorism. It is hypothesized that the dark-skinned Black women in this study will be emotionally impacted by colorism. I expect most of the dark-skinned women I am interviewing to have similar experiences with colorism. I also identify as a dark-skinned Black woman, making it easier for the women I am interviewing. They will also feel more willing to talk about their experiences with someone that has had similar experiences. The goal of this research is to expose how harmful colorism can be in an African American woman's life and in American society. This study provides data on the emotional effects of colorism. Colorism is the prejudice or discrimination against people that have a darker skin tone within their racial

group. People with lighter skin tones typically have certain privileges within their racial group, while darker-skinned people have certain disadvantages within their racial group.

For this study, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant through an online video chat platform called Zoom. In-depth semi structured allows participants to have discussions and explain their feelings or thoughts on colorism. Interviews were scheduled through email, which is where consent forms were also exchanged with an electronic verification. Interviews were audio recorded with a cellphone. All interviews were conducted by me and interviewees had the choice of being interviewed wherever they felt comfortable. Upon introduction all interviewees were reminded of the study intent. The interviewees were also reminded that they may refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. The questions that were asked probed for stories so that interviewees were able to express their ideas and feelings about colorism freely in their own context. All audio recordings were transcribed into word document for the purpose of this study.

Snowball sampling was used to obtain all participants. I interviewed a friend who then referred other women. Five African American women who self-identified as dark-skinned were chosen for this study. The age range for these participants were 21-23. All of these women were students in college. Participants were given pseudonyms. These pseudonyms are Jessica, Amiah, Alila, Patricia, and Jamie.

Findings

In this section, I will discuss the results of the data in this segment. I will also interpret any quote that references colorism with either negative or positive characteristics. Based on the theme of each code, all interviews were coded and placed into individual themes. In this

research, the dark-skinned women all talked of common topics such as beauty standards, male attention/relationships, self-worth/identity and self-love.

Beauty Standards: If you have “Dark skin you’re just considered a negro, you know a slave.. you’re still in slavery mode.”

There seems to be a common theme when dark-skinned women discuss what it means to be dark in a community where lightness is the standard of beauty. Darker skin in this society is recognized as undesirable, therefore it is considered unattractive. Alila explains in this section what it means to be a dark skin.

Oh, very easy (laughs) To be light skinned to them is that you’re so close to white like you are perfect, you’re put on a pedestal that’s why you have people who are creaming their skin so they can be light which causes them skin cancer by the way. Dark skin you’re just considered a negro, you know a slave.. you’re still in slavery mode. When you cream your skin or you’re born light you can see like a mother can give birth to children and the light children, they get a different treatment vs the darker ones. If the mother still has that slavery mindset in their culture, you’ll see that.... Even when you walk into places, they look at you funny like she’s a thief, like there’s many things that they label us as and even when I was in school someone would call me, “African booty scratcher” and stuff like that and it’s our own people. It’s something that’s been stuck in our heads. The lighter the skin the better. Like even people who are Chinese do this. They wanna make sure that their skin is as white a snow (Alila).

This participant explains the negativity surrounding dark skin. She relates dark skin to slavery because of the history surrounding dark skin. This specific history behind colorism has been imbedded into the Black community. You are treated worse and unfavored on the basis of your skin. As mentioned previously in the literature review, dark skin slaves were often separated from the lighter skinned slaves. They were given more strenuous labor because of their skin color. The Black community has held on to those ideals and continue to practice those same ideals on each other, hence being in slavery mode. These ideals begin to define what beauty should look like. This participant explains how these same beauty ideals may cause African

Americans to lighten their skin tone by bleaching their skin. She explains the difference in treatment of children when they have parents who are color conscious. This can result in children being treated different based on the lightness or darkness of their skin. She points out that it is something that very common in the Black community. It's not other cultures inflicting colorism on African Americans, but it is the African American community inflicting colorism upon each other. It is also not only African Americans that want to be light but also other cultures such as Asians. There's this idea the lighter you are the more acceptance you'll receive. Beauty equals light skin.

Another participant speaks on beauty standards and colorism.

Well shoot um, it's weird cause it's like nowadays like dark skin women in social media we get praised a lot like when we are like in photo shoots full of oil and stuff, we get praised and stuff like that. But in real life (laughs) we don't. In real life were not really noticed like that but on social media it's like were praised cause you ... I honestly don't know why... it's like different from social media to real life. Cause in real life it could be that same person that you saw on the shoot with fully oiled, but you still wouldn't get noticed as you get on social media (Patricia).

Patricia feels that the recognition that Black women get is not always genuine. For a dark-skinned woman to be recognized she has to be sexualized. She explains that many of the dark-skinned women who are represented are often oiled up in these photoshoots. There are certain standards that that dark skin women have to adhere to in order to be what's considered conventionally attractive. Dark-skinned Black women who aren't sexualized aren't deemed attractive. The praise isn't the same for a dark-skinned woman who isn't being sexualized. It is almost as if the Black female body has to be sexualized in order to recognize its beauty.

Now you see dark skins being praised and stuff like that, but I feel like light skins are like you know you see them on the internet and stuff like that.

When it comes to dark skins you wouldn't see the really nice comments unless it is photoshopped. When it comes to light skins the picture might not be edited but that makes them beautiful that makes them okay (Jamie).

This participant also has similar feeling on the representation of dark-skinned women. There is more representation for lighter skinned women. The bar for what light-skinned women should look like on social media is set lower than dark-skinned women. Regardless of how a light skin woman may look in photo, the photo of the light skin woman can still be deemed attractive because light skin is favored. However, this participant explains that for dark-skinned women many of their photos must be edited in order to get the same attention that lighter women receive. There's a number of expectations that a dark-skinned Black woman is expected to adhere to and if that Black woman does not fit those expectations; she is not beautiful. Lighter skinned women don't need to fit any of these same expectations because their light skin defines what it means to be beautiful in the Black community.

Obviously, you know this. If your light skin no matter how ugly you are you're considered to be beautiful. Dark skin, you're ugly, you're too dark you know? That's not considered beautiful (Amiah).

In this interview response the participant is explaining that the beauty standards for light skin differ from the beauty standards for dark skin. For a dark-skinned woman, you can have attractive features but be considered unattractive based on the darkness of your skin. Light skin is synonymous is with beauty in society. If you were to put two women side by side and they had the same facial features, but they differed in skin tone, the lighter woman would be considered the one who's beautiful. Your facial features don't play a part in your beauty but you skin tone defines your beauty.

Well um uhh.. something happened in my school and they had to pick like a girl to do a certain thing, I think it had to do with beauty. And you know everybody was like pick Jamie. But then some people were like pick Jackie it was this other girl that her name was Jackie and she's light skin. And some people were like pick Jamie but then all the boys were nah Jackie would be a better fit for this part (Jamie).

This participant explains being in a beauty contest between her and another classmate. Instead of her classmates choosing her, a dark -skinned Black woman, her classmates chose the girl who was lighter than her. It seems that this participant is trying to explain that the men in her class chose Jackie as more beautiful because she had lighter skin. Even though others insisted on picking Jamie as beautiful. Because that Jackie was lighter, she fit the beauty standard that society adheres to.

Male Attention/ Relationships: “I guess you don’t make it passed 12pm right? Oh, why your skin mad dark like you crusty?”

So basically, it's definitely definitely a difference like I feel like I this day in age being light skin, Like I really don't care what nobody says it definitely comes with privileges it definitely comes with advantages. It definitely comes with pluses like. In my opinion I realized it like it's so funny like. Now I'm about to go on the topic of relationship wise...Every single time an African American man would come to you my line with like a wife or girlfriend, 8 times out of 10 it would always be a lighter woman. Every single time like... European features, curly hair, you know those type of features, so as darker woman I always noticed that. And I started noticing that it was mostly with African American men especially the darker ones. The white males or the Hispanic men would always come with darker women but the African American men especially with a darker color would always come with lighter women (Jessica).

This participant first talks about certain privileges that light-skinned people have over dark-skinned people. This privilege is specifically within the Black community. This privilege can include being what society deems attractive and your chances of being chosen

in the dating world. This participant explains the issues that many dark-skinned women go through concerning relationships chances with Black men, specifically Black men with the same complexion. The likelihood of a dark-skinned Black man choosing a Black woman the same complexion is slim. She explains that most men she sees with dark -skinned Black women are not with other Black men. Black men will typically choose Black women with more Eurocentric features or other women who have Eurocentric features. It is rare that a dark-skinned Black man will choose a Black woman with Afrocentric features. If you are a Black woman who has more Afrocentric features your chances with another Black man are low because of the beauty standard the Black community holds the Black woman to. These standards can include hair type. Looser curls are also typically seen as more desirable in the Black community. This something that this participant had become aware of.

Um definitely from the male side, because a lot of them like I like my girl really light skin like that's when you realize they like I don't want no dark skin female I want a light skin. Like at the time you can't really speak up cause its conversations that people are having on the side, but it makes you realize how much they themselves who are dark skin they don't love themselves like, it's like they regret being black in the first place. They're speaking ill of themselves and not even realizing it (Alila).

This participant focuses on that fact that many Black men don't want women who are of their skin tone. She explains that they are projecting self-hate upon themselves and they aren't recognizing it because they are so deeply rooted in biases against dark- skinned women. This participant explains that it is almost as if they themselves don't want to be Black because they reject their own people. It seems that if they could choose to be another race, they would gladly be of another because of the self-hate they constantly inflicting on themselves. Many of these men speak of only wanting women are light skin and completely disregard dark-skinned women. This participant feels that most of the time there's not

much she can say about the topic because they are conversations that she as a black woman is not included in.

It's sad but I realized it when I was in kindergarten. Like I realized like I was the darkest girl in kindergarten. And I realized all the lighter skinned girls they would get like little crushes or whatever. They would be like oh and like the guys would be like all over them. They would be like omg she's dark. They would close the lights and be like omg where she at? The jokes were endless. Oh my god like "I guess you don't make it passed 12pm right?" "Oh, why your skin mad dark like you crusty?" (Amiah).

This participant explains her experiences with being dark skin as a young girl. She noticed that even at such a young age light-skinned girl her age was given more attention than her. It was the light skin girls who got more attention from the boys in her class. This preference is passed down to young children and they also inflict self-hate upon each other even though they are so young. This participant explains the jokes that were played on her because of her skin. When the lights turned off students would act as if they did not know where Amiah was because to them her darkness of her skin meant that she disappears in the dark. It's as if the darkness of her skin was offensive to her classmates and so they made fun her for the darkness of her skin.

It would definitely affect them depending on how old they are. I feel like its gonna affect them harder the younger they are because I feel like when your younger that's when you are building who you are. That's when you are figuring out why you're on this earth and who you gonna be. So, I feel like the younger they get those comments the harder it becomes for them to love themselves. I'm not gonna say that older people don't get affected when they get those comments because we definitely, definitely get affected. When someone says, "You're dark that means you're mad mean, that's why black girls are mean" The moment someone agrees you gonna start thinking... does everybody else think that? Does everybody else think black women are mean? Does everybody else think dark women are mean? It affects you all throughout your life but the earlier it starts the worst it becomes (Jessica).

This participant feels that colorist comments affect dark-skinned women depending on

how young they are. As a child you are developing and learning who you are and how you fit into the social norms of society. This participant feels that the younger they become exposed to colorism the more it will affect them. She also feels that validating the negative connotations about dark skin make young Black women believe that this is how society sees them. They begin to think they are defined by certain stereotypes, even if those stereotypes are not true. If those comments are brought on earlier in a Black women's life it only gets worse as she gets older. She keeps those negative opinions about dark skin as she grows up.

I mean, emotionally it's just them feeling less than and not good enough, they not pretty, they feel like they not pretty, they feel like they color is not pretty is not good enough, cause that how I used to feel like so I'm guessing (Amiah).

This participant explains that dark-skinned women who are exposed to colorist comments can experience problems with self-worth. It can be easy for them to feel that they aren't important. They may hold the idea in their head that because they are dark, society doesn't see them as beautiful. This participant explains these same feelings that she is explaining are the same feelings that she had of herself.

Emotionally they feel like they don't belong and then also they that they're inside the wrong body or inside the wrong skin like why I was born into this family. Why wasn't I born white or why wasn't I born light skin. It affects many parts of them emotionally.... It makes them look down upon themselves and not really like know who they truly are because... they take up a character or an identity that is not truly who they are. Their emotions are telling them that if you be yourself, if you advertise that yes, I'm black and I'm beautiful and I'm black and I love it, I'm black and I love my melanin, it's a problem so emotionally it affects them in many ways (Alila).

This participant feels that colorism can affect Black women in the sense that they may feel like an outcast. They may have an identity crisis which causes them to feel that they don't

belong. Feeling this way makes them wonder why they weren't of a lighter skin tone or a different race. When being light skin is the norm and there is rarely any representation of dark skin being beautiful, it can affect a dark-skinned woman's sense of self. She may feel that she has to change who she is in order to feel accepted by her counterparts. This can be physical changes that a Black woman feels that she has to undergo to be accepted or she may practice self-hate upon herself because she does not like her skin. This participant feels that dark-skinned Black women should tell themselves that they are beautiful and that their skin tone does not define their beauty. Overall, this participant feels that colorism is a big problem that affects dark-skinned Black women emotionally.

Well, it can definitely make you feel like you're not worth it or you don't matter, and you're not included when it comes to like anything cause like skin tone just goes so far like. It can even just be jobs and stuff like that... Somehow it always, it's always part of it like, even when you go to like um... schools they have like certain programs where they look at like your skin tone or like your background to be part. So, it definitely does affect you emotionally (Jamie).

This participant explains that colorism can make dark-skinned Black women feel that they are not enough, or they are not important. There are many factors in life that look at skin tone. Skin can determine whether jobs hire you. Many jobs may hire job applicants with lighter skin tones because of the positive traits ascribed to lighter skin tones. Jamie feels that there are school programs that may accept someone based on how light their skin is. She feels that all these factors have the ability to affect dark-skinned Black women in many ways.

Self-love

It was actually a YouTube video about a dark skin girl that was like a makeup artist or something like that and she was describing her life, and um she was describing her transition from being in Africa and how that her skin tone over there was considered beautiful and how her skin tone was like “Oh my god, you’re so beautiful, you’re so dark, your so melaninated and stuff like that. Like her transition from that to here whereas in here they rather the light skin, they rather the more... European features or whatever. And she was describing how she had to keep that confidence that she had in Africa even though here the beauty standards weren’t the same. So that’s when I tried to apply that in my life, and it made me feel good cause I’m like... to be honest I actually am beautiful like my skin tone is very rich, is very nice... I just felt good about it because I never payed attention to these things until I saw stuff like that (Jessica).

This participant explains that she came across a YouTube video that helped her realize that her skin tone was beautiful. This Youtuber explains the differences in how her skin tone was viewed in Africa compared to how it was viewed in America. This Youtuber found that in Africa her dark skin was viewed as beautiful but in American light skin was the ideal beauty standard. She explains that she had to keep that confidence regardless of the cultural differences concerning beauty standards. This participant explains that she applied this confidence to her life and began to accept her own skin tone as a dark skin woman. She also had never focused on skin tone until she became exposed to colorism.

Yea I feel like what they’re doing now is making me love my skin tone more like back then I wasn’t um.. There was times where I was like why am I this dark... I mean... why I was born this way because I guess there was a bad representation of us. Don’t get me wrong I have to love my skin before social media made it... but that also added on to it. I’m happy that I’m dark skin (Amiah).

This participant explains that the representation that dark-skinned women are getting now is making it easier for her love her skin tone. She explains that she has questioned why her skin was dark. The lack of representation that dark-skinned Black women made her feel inadequate compared to what society deems beautiful. She learned to love her skin

before social media started to appreciate dark skin but still feels that the added representation helped her gain more confidence. Overall, this participant is confident in her skin tone.

I will be honest, I've grown to actually not allow it to affect me because I know that I fearfully and wonderfully made, But I can tell that there are a lot of other black females at my age or even younger.....when you present two dolls to um a child that's Black she picks the white one because she wants to be more associated with the white one. And this is something that they've been taught. It's not something that's in their head. I think a lot of people suffer because they wanna be what society is telling them to be so bad. So that's why we see black females straightening their hair. Because ok I want my hair to be bone straight like white females, but your hair was made to be kinky, curly, have 4c, have the different types and stuff like that. But me personally I'm not letting it break me I like my melanin (Alila).

This participant explains that she had not let colorism bother her. Even though she hasn't let colorism control her life, she explains many Black women are still affected by colorism. She then explains a study that was done with Black children. These children were presented with a white baby doll and a Black baby doll. The researchers asked the children which was more beautiful, and all the Black children chose the white baby doll. She feels this study explains that it had been taught to these young children to hate their skin. These same white standards that society praises are the same standards that make Black women feel that they must have straight hair. This participant feels that Black women should accept the Afrocentric features they were born with. This participant has not let the negativity surrounding Afrocentric features change how she feels about herself.

Analysis

This study focused primarily on the emotional reactions of dark-skinned Black women to colorism. There was a common theme of beauty standards, male attention/ relationships, and self-love. Some women in study this spoke of colorism being practiced within the Black

community and the Black community being prejudice against themselves. Studies have focused on black families inflicting colorism on each other. Many women in other studies came to the realization that the negative bias they hold against people with dark skin were biases that were produced with their family. Women within my study I recognized that colorism is a big problem within Black families, but the women in this study didn't speak of having direct experiences with colorism within their families. However, they were well aware that children of lighter skin tones can be treated better than their darker siblings. In the findings above there was a big focus on male attraction specifically concerning Black men.

Although the dark-skinned Black women in this study felt that colorism did affect Black women emotionally, most Black women in this study did not feel impacted by colorism. They instead tried to prevent negative connotations about their skin tone affect them personally. Other Black women in this study felt that the representation of Black women specifically dark-skinned Black women, has caused their insecurities about their skin tone. In the literature above, they explain this issue concerning kids cartoons that display Black characters. The proud family had many stereotypical images being displayed of Black women. Any characters that were dark skinned were the most undesirable characters on the show.

Although these character portrayals may seem harmless and seen as jokes it can affect the way young Black women see themselves. It further perpetuates that idea that having a dark skin tone automatically means you are undesirable. As mentioned in the literature review Dijonay was always seen chasing after men because the show portrayed her as someone who could never be desirable. Young Black women who are exposed to these stereotypes may apply these stereotypes to their lives and begin to believe that this is the way the world sees them. Because they feel that this is the way world sees them, they may see themselves as undesirable. While the

jokes may seem harmless the damage it's doing to young Black women is not. If it is portrayed in the media and the Black community also agrees with the media, it stresses to a Black woman that dark skin isn't beautiful. For this reason, she begins to believe it and apply this belief to her life. There needs to be a focus on that way that media portrays Black characters, specifically in shows that are targeted towards young Black children. When Black children are exposed to colorism at a young age, they learn the way the media portrays Black women is how they should either see themselves or see other Black women. Children may also reenact these views upon each other. Many Black women in these studies including this study had experiences with classmates their age commenting negatively on their skin tone. For example, their classmate would assume that because of how dark their skin tone was it meant that they were "crusty" meaning dirty.

Furthermore, the women in this study explain the issues that they have with the representation of Black women. Many black women in this study felt that the representation and support that dark skinned Black women received were not genuine. Black women in this study felt that they had to be sexualized in order to be deemed beautiful. Many of these women gave examples of dark-skinned Black women in photoshoots who were always oiled up to look desirable. They had to be sexualized to be seen as beautiful. Henneberg explains this issue in this quote:

“ Although the details of what makes a good black shape, good black hair, or good black skin can be as daunting as the rigorous prescriptions and proscriptions of white body culture, even the perfect black body is, by definition, a body that fails to conform: although it may meet all the norms black culture dictates— although it may have, for instance, large buttocks combined with a small waste accordance with black patriarchal ideals expressed by Nelly and many rap artists like him—it is doomed to fall short once measured against the white True Body. A variation on W.E.B Du Bois's double consciousness emerges as black women are pressured to shape their bodies into both black and white objects of desire.” (Henneberg, 2018).

Henneberg explains that Black women are given no choice but to become objects so they can be seen as desirable. Black women are in constant competition with the white ideals of what a woman should look like. These white ideals become reproduced into the Black community. Even if Black women are being praised in music videos it is only a certain demographic of black women that are being represented. These Black women that are being represented are typically sexualized to fit the standards of Black people and white people. Patricia Hill Collins says:

“Judging White women by their appearance and attractiveness to men objectifies them. But their White skin and straight hair simultaneously privilege them in a system that elevates whiteness over blackness. In contrast, African American women experience the pain of never being able to live up to prevailing standards of beauty—standards used by White men, White Women, Black men, and most painfully one another.” (Collins, 2015).

This quote further explains that Black women are at a disadvantage because not only are white beauty standards used by White people, but it is also used by their own people. It is even more difficult for Black women who identify as dark skin. They are constantly at a battle with themselves because dark skin is not the norm when concerning beauty especially within the black community. Alina Minoo’s *Black Feminist Thought* mentions how power and knowledge are related and the ways that counter-hegemonic knowledge places a focus on how power is structured and the way that it functions. This is important because it helps to explain the ways that power works to keep groups of people subordinated and how they repeat the cycle of oppressing themselves. Minoo says in this quote “An important aspect of black feminist thought as counter-hegemonic knowledge is its focus on ‘how power is organized and operates’, how relations of domination and subordination are maintained and normalized, and how they make the disempowered participate in the reproduction of their own subordination.” (Minoo, 2015). This quote helps to explain the issue of colorism within the Black community because colorism is something that is practiced within communities of color. African Americans participate in their

own subordination because they pass on ideas that value light skin over dark skin. The fact that it is based on white beauty standards maintains those hegemonic ideals as long as they are continually being practiced. It also keeps the African American community divided because there is always this issue of light skin versus dark skin. Minoo also says “Hegemonic ideologies that justify oppression can be internalized by people and be seen as systems of “common sense” ideas. These deep-rooted, internalized and taken-for-granted ideas are reproduced by structures and institutions, and by ordinary people in their daily practice and interactions.” (Minoo, 2015). Colorism was originally practiced by White people onto Black slaves and this mentality of light skin being “better” than dark skin became internalized by African Americans. As Minoo says it is something that makes sense to the oppressed which is why African Americans practice colorism on each other. Many women in the literature review mention their own experiences of witnessing their families practice colorism and ascribe a person’s worth on how light or dark they are. Because it has been practiced for so long it is something that just makes sense to believe in the black community.

Conclusion

Currently research that focuses colorism against Black women and the way that it affects them emotionally is lacking. My research addresses this lack. Studies that have been done on colorism typically focus on colorism within Black families. However, studies do not focus on how it affects dark-skinned women emotionally. My research focused on the emotional effect colorism can have on dark-skinned Black women. Many of the interview questions probed for emotional responses that Black women had in response to colorism. Many of the Black women in this study agreed that colorism does negatively impact dark-skinned Black women emotionally. Furthermore, participants explained that depending on how young dark-skinned Black woman

are exposed to colorism affects how it will affect them emotionally. Women in this also experienced emotional responses to negative comments about their skin tone. Other Black women in this study refrained from letting negative comments about their skin tone affect how they felt about themselves. However, these women were still well aware of the emotional affect colorism can have on dark-skinned Black women. In future studies about colorism there needs to be a heavy focus on how colorism can affect Black women. Colorism is a problem that is often ignored because not enough people outside of the Black community recognize it. Sadly, people within the Black community recognize it, but do not feel that it is important. Others will claim that colorism does not exist. Future studies should focus on how colorism is reproduced. People, especially within the Black community, are typically insensitive when concerning the topic of colorism because it has been passed on through generations. It is evident in the way that Black women get represented in the media and most people will turn a blind eye to this issue.

There needs to be a focus what can be done to enlighten more people about the issue of colorism to try to keep kids from inflicting colorism onto each other. Future research should not only focus on older Black women, but also young Black women, who are even more vulnerable to colorism. Most Black women are exposed to colorism when they are young. This is the time when they are most susceptible to comments that devalue their appearance. A focus on colorism in young girls may help to show why understanding and recognizing colorism is important. Focusing on how young Black girls see colorism and how it affects them emotionally is an important factor. It is within families and school settings that most young girls encounter colorism. Seeing how those experiences affect young black women would be beneficial to understanding colorism and how damaging it can be.

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