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Sex Differences in Skin Tone Predicting Depressive Symptoms among College Students of Color

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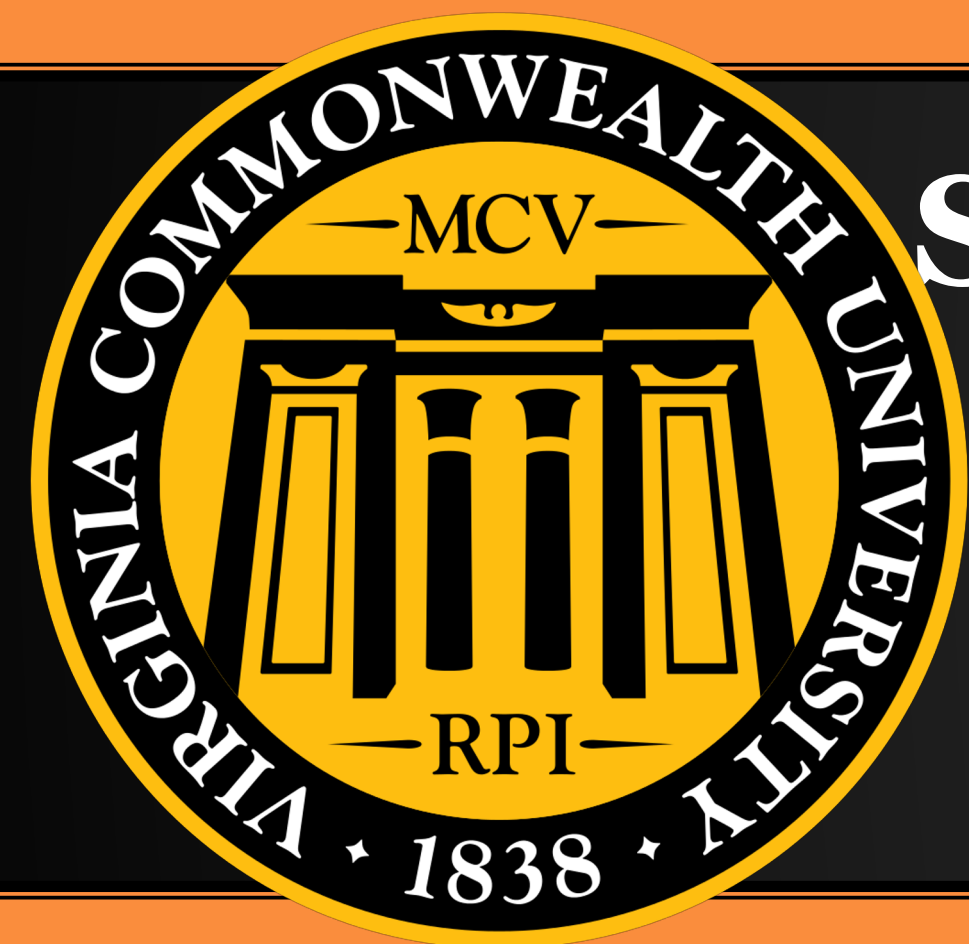
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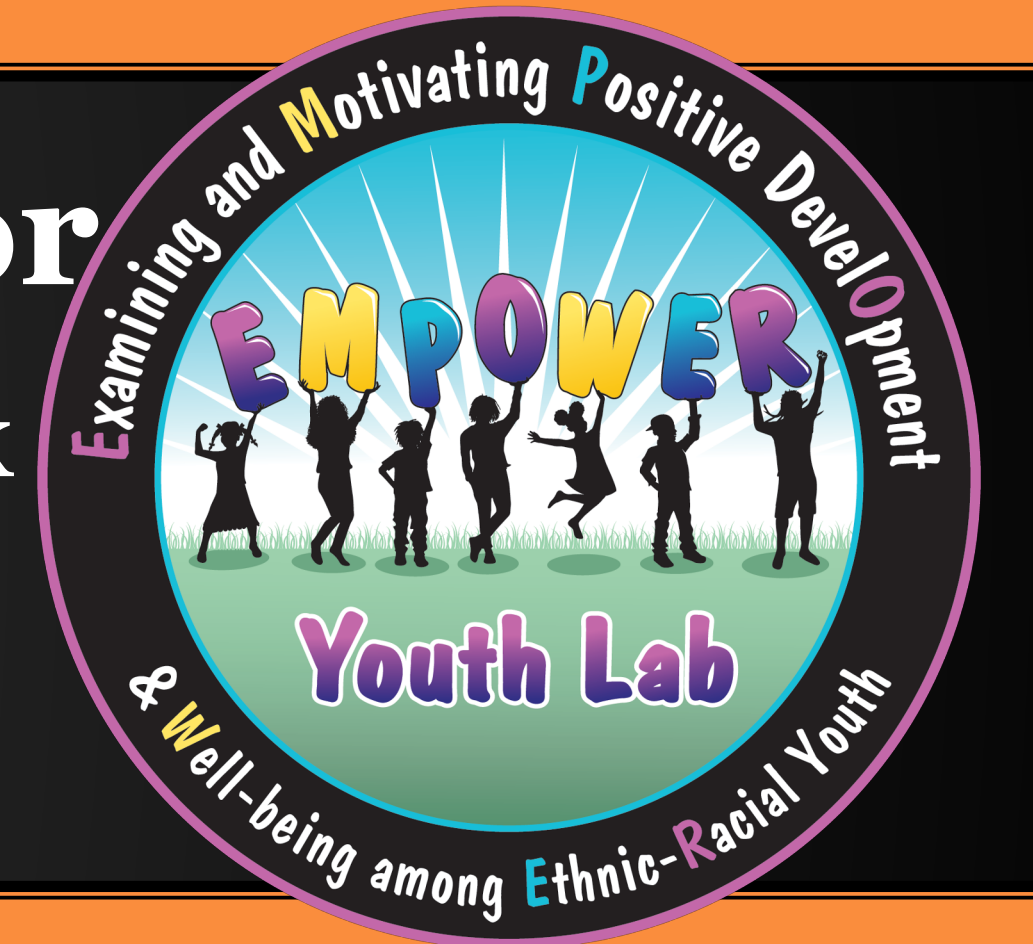
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Skin tone Predicting Depressive Symptoms Moderated by Sex among Students of Color

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ABSTRACT

The current study focuses on how skin tone plays a role in depressive symptoms depending on sex. Surveys were completed by college students. We hypothesized that sex would moderate this relation, such that this association would be weaker among males compared to females. A linear regression with sex as a grouping variable was ran, and according to results it did not support our hypothesis. It was found that males with lighter skin tones perceived more depressive symptoms compared to darker skinned males and females of all skin tones. In conclusion, this study pushes for awareness in regard to the correlation between skin tone and depressive symptoms.

BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

- ❖ Darker-skinned males have higher self-ratings and experience less depressive symptoms due to being seen as more dominant and males with lighter skin have lower self-ratings and higher depressive symptoms in regard to their skin-tone and sexual attractiveness (Wade, 1996).
- ❖ Darker-skinned women experienced more discrimination and unfair treatment, which is associated with higher depressive symptoms. Lighter-skinned women show less depressive symptoms when compared to the higher depressive symptoms in darker-skinned women due to them being exposed to more discrimination (Keith et al., 2010).
- ❖ College students whom had more a “authentic” skin color related to their ethnic/racial identity had higher acceptance (Gonzales-Backen & Umana-Taylor., 2011) towards their culture and fellow students. As well as experiencing less depressive symptoms while having more cultural pride (Gonzales-Backens & Umana-Taylor., 2011).
- ❖ The goal of the present study was to test whether sex moderated the relation between skin tone and depressive symptoms. We hypothesized that sex would moderate this relation, such that this association would be weaker among males compared to females.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

- ❖ The current study focuses on 115 young adults 18-25 years of age taken from a larger sample of VCU students who participated in a longitudinal study (spring and fall 2017) on young adults’ experiences associated with receiving ancestry and health results from 23andMe.
- ❖ Most participants were female (68.7%), Seniors (92.5%), and identified as an ethnic/racial minority student (i.e., Hispanic/Latinx, Black/ African American, Native American/ American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander).

PROCEDURES

- ❖ A two-time data measure was conducted with college students.
- ❖ Students completed a survey online and were given their personalized genetic information from 23andMe.
- ❖ Students were assessed at the beginning and end of each semester on genetic literacy, attitudes towards personalized genetic information, and cultural identity

MEASURES

- ❖ Skin Tone was assessed with an adapted version of the 10-point item Massey-Martin Skin Color scale (Massey et al., 2003).
- ❖ Depressive Symptoms was assessed using the 20-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies- Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff,1997). The participants responded regarding the frequency and severity of various depressive symptoms (i.e., hopelessness) during the past week.
- ❖ Sex was coded as 1 = Male, 2 = Female.

RESULTS

- ❖ The hypothesized model was tested utilizing a linear regression model with participant sex as the grouping variable in Mplus v. 7.2. Participant age was included as a covariate in analysis.
- ❖ Findings indicated that skintone does not predict depressive symptoms among females ($B = .08, p = .54$), however, for males, skin tone negatively predicted depressive symptoms ($B = -.53, p = .02$).



DISCUSSION

- ❖ Contrary to our hypothesis, results indicated that sex moderated the relation between skin tone and depressive symptoms, but that this relation only existed among males, but not among females. Specifically, males who had lighter skin tone experienced higher depressive symptoms compared to males with darker skin tone.
- ❖ Based on our results, it is suggested that when considering skin tone among females, peer skin tone comparison may not play a significant role in depressive symptoms, due to media, programming and cosmetics changing their message and becoming more positive in regard to how females perceive themselves in present day. However, future studies should assess these factors.
- ❖ According to previous literature, lighter skinned males were found to have more depressive symptoms due to feeling less valued in their community when compared to darker-skinned males being viewed as a valuable asset (Monk., 2015), which is also indicated in our results. Therefore, media is a possible factor with depressive symptoms in regards to lighter-skinned males being seen as sensitive due to their lighter complexion.
- ❖ Limitations: (1) cross-sectional and (2) sample is predominately Hispanic/Latinx and Black/African American. Future research should include longitudinal studies with Asian Americans, Native Americans and Hawaiian descent.
- ❖ Despite these limitations, the current study suggests that sex plays a role when it comes to skin tone predicting depressive symptoms.

