

Dark Skin vis-à-vis Women of Color: The Implications of Judeo-Christian Spirituality for Self-Hate

Ronald E Hall*

Michigan State University, USA

***Corresponding Author:** Ronald E Hall, Michigan State University, USA.

Received: October 07, 2019; **Published:** November 28, 2019

Abstract

In Western civilization light skin has emerged by Judeo-Christian spirituality as the ideal which facilitates self-hate among women of color. Subsequently said women introduce challenges to Clinical Psychology heretofore unprecedented. Among the distorted tales of dark-skinned peoples the story of Ham is perhaps the most potent in the facilitation of self-hate among women of color. In an attempt to perform a descriptive quantitative analysis of the aforementioned the author collected evidence regarding the idealization of light skin in perceptions of feminine beauty. According to these data, there is a participants' disdain for dark skin as a prerequisite to self-hate being women of color. Considering Clinical Psychologists who see women of color, it is recommended that they ponder the social context in which their skin color is defined. To meet the resulting challenges, Clinical Psychologists must be amenable to skin color where the various pathologies of women of color are concerned.

Keywords: *Dark Skin; Women of Color; Judeo-Christian Spirituality; Self-Hate*

Introduction

Any attempts on the part of Clinical Psychologists to define the concept of "spirituality" will be fraught with formidable challenges. However, an appropriate beginning is contained in the root words for "spirit." In Latin the term, spiritus conveys breath, courage, vigor, or life. According to Philip Sheldrake [1], spiritus was an effort to translate a Greek noun pneuma into English and which appeared in the Pauline letters of the Holy Bible. Similar to its Hebrew counterpart, ruach, pneuma means "wind," "breath," "life," and "spirit" [2,3]. The fact that "spirit" is so intimately associated with life is reflected in a definition of the Tenth Edition of Webster's Collegiate Dictionary [4]: "an animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms" (p. 1134). While the term "spirit" implies physical vitality in "breath," it is in fact essential to much more than respiration. According to Rudolph Otto [5], "spirit" also pertains to "the holy." In such a context, "spirituality" refers to the human search for purpose and meaning in life. Much to the dismay of those oriented by Judeo-Christian spirituality, women of color as per dark skin experience self-hate not irrelevant to the most holy and sacred institutions of Western civilization.

According to social scientific investigation skin color has no substantiated parallel to morality or spiritual frame of reference. Subsequently there exists no morally superior skin color as variation in skin color is void of any moral or spiritual significance. Considering the biological function of human skin, light skin has no fundamental dimension which dark skin does not have. Light skin has no innately distinct spiritual quality that would set it apart from dark skin. Conversely of all the physical attributes characteristic of the human population, light skin has emerged by Judeo-Christian spirituality as the implied moral ideal which facilitates self-hate among women of color. Subsequently women of color as per dark skin introduce challenges to modern-day Clinical Psychology heretofore unprecedented.

Aside from the implications of light skin, its spiritual value among women of color has thrived in the modern era being a residue of Judeo-Christian spiritual influence [6]. Volumes of literature have had little impact in facilitating the demise of color. Contributing to the lack of awareness Clinical Psychologists have avoided investigating the Judeo-Christian spiritual implications of light skin for fear of public discontent. In fact, as per light skin the Judeo-Christian ethos has evolved a spiritual impediment to well-being for darker-skinned women of color [7,8]. About the accuracy of this assumption there should be no doubt. Notwithstanding to then imply light skin as holy in a Judeo-Christian context encourages disdain for darker-skinned women of color. It enables the rhetoric of good and evil conveyed by proximity to light skin among those so characterized. It provides a conduit for the continued social, cultural, and traditional oppression of women of color worldwide. However, deserving of sympathy, the experiences of victims cannot be ignored. While investigating the Judeo-Christian implications may not be popular or “politically correct,” to do so regardless is what distinguishes science from quackery [9].

In differentiating science from quackery the intent of this paper is to inform Clinical Psychology as pertains to self-hate among women of color via Judeo-Christian spirituality. While skin color is not irrelevant to humanity at-large for darker-skinned women of color there exists a different set of circumstances. For women of color in a Judeo-Christian environment is a uniquely complicated existence. This complication is most evident among dark-skinned women of color due to implied biblical references. Said complication is painful and complex because Judeo-Christian spirituality is sacred and germane to Western civilization [10]. By addressing the spiritual implications of dark skin this paper will inform Clinical Psychology via taboo challenges to the ethos of modern Western civilization. The following will facilitate comprehension of the current status quo: (1) the Biblical implications of dark skin; (2) dark skin as pertains to women of color; (3) empirical evidence; (4) implications for Clinical Psychology; and (5) conclusion.

The biblical implications of dark skin

The Biblical implications of dark skin suggested everything black as inferior and evil. Subsequently anything but black i.e. white and/or light was assumed good and pure. Evidence of this fact is supported by the King James’ version of the Holy Bible. Such a notion was necessary to facilitate resolution of the conflicts between Western slavery and Christianity. Western operatives recruited religious personnel to interpret the Bible in such a way that enslavement could be justified with the force of science. They accomplished this by distorting both truth and fact.

In the history of Western civilization Judeo-Christian spirituality assumed the status of science. That is whatever phenomena it deemed as truth and fact could not be challenged. According to Rogers [11] and the Christian Bible [12], Cain had found his wife in the land of Nod. As per the Christian version of Creation, which is taken by scientists to be Jewish folklore, the human population was comprised of three people consisting of, Adam, Eve and Cain. The people in the land of Nod were pre-Adamites. By all accounts they were dark-skinned people who Christians insisted would have had no role in creation by God. What’s more, Cain was considered immoral which predestined him to marry a dark-skinned woman. Any “respectable” man would have engaged her sexually but only under concubinage. To marry a woman from the land of Nod would be dismissed as immoral as they were by all accounts of dark complexion [11].

Among the distorted tales of dark-skinned peoples the story of Ham is perhaps the most potent in the facilitation of self-hate among women of color. By cultural myth extended from biblical tales dark-skinned peoples had been effectively demonized. The association of dark-skinned peoples with Ham provided a convenient mechanism for accusations of their rejecting paternal authority by Western commentators. The blackening and rejection of Ham’s descendants then represents-according to Judeo-Christian mythology--the retaliatory castration by the higher Father in God. As per Freud’s psychoanalysis what is black and/or banished would not be seen, as when King Oedipus was said to have blinded and banished himself for learning of what he had done. After punishing one among their number, Noah’s remaining sons then earned the approval and protection of God, their paternal Father. This scenario represented cultural absorption of the super-ego by the West. It furthermore contributed to self-hate in the denigration of dark skin. The bad and evil son set apart from humanity by the curse of dark skin had been forever banished from the acceptable fold of humanity until European descendants of the lighter-skinned and thus good sons of Noah discovered him again, assumingly in darkest Africa [13].

Eventually Western scholars sought to scientifically rationalize the story of Ham. One of their first attempts to account for dark skin was that it was due to the intense sun in the African region. This hypothesis did not last very long considering that there were Native-Americans located on a similar latitude in the New World who by comparison were quite light-skinned. In the minds of the most learned among men, the myth of Ham was utilized to account for what could not be substantiated scientifically. Subsequently it became suitable in Western civilization, enabled by psychodynamics, to inculcate a view that the bodies of dark-skinned peoples were a manifestation of the most primal of curses upon mankind. These assumptions formed the bases for many a racist fantasy. Associated with dark-skinned people notions of their evil grew in intensity. Thus, among civilized nations in Europe and elsewhere West, dark-skinned women--Africans in particular--represented the embodiment of filth and disgust.

Returning to Freud's concept of psychoanalysis, motivated by the super-ego, the ego designated the id, something not seen, as being associated with darkness i.e. skin. Luther and Calvin had already laid the foundations for this abstraction. Thus, the id represents darkness within the personality. Its underlying components, repressed from consciousness, revealed themselves symbolically in Judeo-Christian fantasies about dark skin. In Freud's psychodynamics of blackness Western civilization had revealed by way of projection how it had acted upon the revelation of dark-skinned people. Judeo-Christian spirituality had assumed the task of being a direct representative of the culture which destroyed African civilization necessitating among Africans the need for missionary assistance. Its dual role makes of Judeo-Christian spirituality an appropriate sacrifice, in the blackness myth, to the more barbaric entity which it serves. Thus, having wedged itself securely into the Western psyche, dark skin via Judeo-Christian spirituality dominated as the focus of human hierarchy. Psychodynamically, Western culture had found a way to resolve-through projection-much of its color conflicts at the expense of dark-skinned people. This ability allowed for the unconscious oedipal symbolism without inhibition to be acted out in real life. The antebellum maternal figure was then divided into the pure "white" mother and the impure, lustful "black" "mammy". The "black" man represented divided roles of bad father to be castrated and bad son-Ham--to be castrated as punishment for castrating his father-Noah. He is also the end of projected oedipal desires for the antebellum "white" mother. The "black" woman became a sexually available object for repressed "white" oedipal desires for the mother while at the same time symbolizing lust [14]. This complex rationale was the foundation by which racists for centuries would denounce all dark-skinned people and justify their exploitation by Judeo-Christian spiritual rationale. For example, in the contemporary world among factions of the South African Dutch Reform Church the story of Ham justified apartheid. Suffice it to say that while Judeo-Christian spirituality could have delivered Western civilization from the rank of barbarianism its complexity was also a system used to encourage self-hate not irrelevant to dark-skinned women of color [15].

Dark skin as pertains to women of color

As people of color Native-American women were not the savages they had been made out to be by dark skin. Their communities maintained a National Council that was controlled by educated, light-skinned "white blood-mixed" tribesmen, many of whom adhered to the value system of antebellum slave traders. They set up schools, which were modeled after same, where Judeo-Christian values could be passed on to youth. In many instances, it was the "full-blood" dark-skinned Native-American women who were a minority within such privileged groups. The primary interest of such schools was the "refinement" of daughters so that they might serve as dutiful wives. Another interest was in the assimilation of the darker-skinned, "full-blood" girls, but apparently, this idea did not come about until 1871, after a Native-American council was pressured by disgruntled tribesmen to establish a department to provide education free of charge to poorer, darker-skinned "full-bloods" [16].

While it was true that many Native-American women were from affluent lighter-skinned families, the very wealthy were in the minority. The majority could pay tuition, but they were not necessarily from among the nation's upper class. In fact, daughters of such families frequently attended schools outside the Native-American community. And each year, dozens of dark-skinned "full-bloods" went to the school free of charge. Later (1851 - 1856) a class system at some of the schools was based on wealth, but from 1872 until 1910, status was based more on aversions to dark skin as implied by self-hate and race [16].

Certain among Native-American students and teachers took pride in their light skin. They frequently taunted those girls who had darker skin. A few of the darker-skinned Native-American “full-bloods” also scorned those girls who had limited knowledge of Western ways. It was generally assumed among the mixed-blood students that the “full-blood” girls were “a little bit backward,” and that the dark-skinned “full-bloods” were well aware of their inferior status.

Among women of color today there exist beliefs and practices common and unique for separate skin color factions. One characteristic, however, that seems to be indicative of a large number of dark-skinned women of color is their tendency to self-hate. In countries such as Canada, Great Britain, and Australia, the phenomenon is widespread. Additionally, in some Asian cultures such as that of Japan, the concept of attractiveness had been associated with light skin as would be evident of the Geisha Girl. It is reflected by Japanese in their almost 50% rate of “eurogamy” during the seventies [17]. Thus, for Japanese who began to migrate West in large numbers where light skin was already the ideal, Caucasian marrying out to avoid dark skin was helped along by what had seemed culturally preferred [18].

Travel brochures to the island of Puerto Rico aptly profess the rich variation in skin color and other phenotypes among its people. Tourists are impressed by the seeming lack of color prejudice which residents proudly proclaim. Unmentionable, however, is the perception of intense self-hate suffered by dark-skinned Latino women of color. Its existence is invisible to the casual observer but substantiated as fact by documented litigation. Said litigation is typological in that it accounts for charges of skin color discrimination across and within Latino group and gender lines [19].

One of the first cases of skin color discrimination brought by dark-skinned Latino women of color was that of Felix-plaintiff--versus the lighter-skinned Marquez--defendant. It was litigated in 1981. Both plaintiff and defendant were employees of the same government office. The plaintiff alleged that the defendant via self-hate did not promote her on the basis of skin color discrimination. At trial, the plaintiff introduced the personnel cards of 28 of her former fellow employees. She testified that among them, only two were as dark, or darker in color than she. All of the other employees in the office, according to the plaintiff, were light-skinned. That the court ruled in favor of the defendants should not imply the absence of Latino self-hate attributed to dark skin [20].

Given the potency of Judeo-Christian spirituality Western ideals pertaining to skin color have been pervasive throughout the globe for women of color. A common practice among native African women who aspire to maximize their marital potential is the act of skin bleaching. Skin bleaching involves the utilization of various chemicals to reduce the melanin content in dark skin making it lighter. Research into this activity revealed the potential damaging effects of various bleaching concoctions fortified with dangerous additives, such as arsenic, mercury and hydroquinone. Members of the African medical community contend that women who suffer from damaged kidneys are a result of the toxic substances present in bleaching crèmes [21]. What's more are major health risks to unborn fetuses of women who use bleaching crèmes. This is due to the affinity of mercury to the human brain. All too often, offspring exposed to mercury during gestation risk severe and/or significant brain damage. Until recently, such information was ignored in the sale of beauty products by Western interests in countries such as Kenya. In the outcome, markets were flooded with toxic skin bleaching products which were then sold to African women specifically via self-hate to lighten their dark skin [21].

Empirical evidence

In an attempt to perform a quantitative analysis of the aforementioned the author collected evidence regarding the idealization of light skin in perceptions of feminine beauty. Using a sample of college students enrolled at a women's institution of higher education, the following null hypothesis was formulated to provide a context for investigating the problem: “There is no relationship between skin color and selected values for skin color ideals”. The sample consisted of 117 participants contacted by the author during the traditional school year. Respondents had a mean age of 20 years. A self-report instrument was administered for assessing skin color. Called the Cutaneo-Chroma-Correlate, this instrument was developed and previously pilot tested by the author to determine the relationship between skin color and various aspects of bias relative to sections “A” “B” and “C”. Section “B” (of the CCC) was used in this paper to appraise the

respondent’s personal values pertaining to skin color [22]. In differentiating responses, a designation of lightest was noted as 5, light as 4, medium as 3, dark as 2, and darkest as 1. The results are contained in table 1 and 2.

Valid	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Lightest	14	12.0	12.2	12.2
Light	75	64.1	65.2	77.4
Medium	22	18.8	19.1	96.5
Dark	3	2.6	2.6	99.1
Darkest	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	115	98.3	100.0	
Missing System	2	1.7		
Total	117	100.0		

Table 1: Pretty skin.

Valid	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Lightest	11	9.4	9.5	9.5
Light	79	67.5	68.1	77.6
Medium	24	20.5	20.7	98.3
Dark	1	.9	.9	99.1
Darkest	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	116	99.1	100.0	
Missing System	1	.9		
Total	117	100.0		

Table 2: The skin color of pretty women.

As per table 1 most students (76.1%) responded “lightest” or “light” when questioned about pretty skin. Only 3.5% responded “dark” or “darkest”. 18.8% of student participants responded “medium” to pretty skin. Interestingly less than 1% thought of “darkest” skin as pretty.

As per table 2 most students (76.9%) responded “lightest” or “light” when questioned about the skin color of pretty women. Only 1.8% responded “dark” or “darkest”. 20.5% responded “medium” as pertains to the skin color of pretty women. Referring to the aforementioned descriptive data it would appear with some reservation that light skin is in fact a perquisite of feminine beauty among the sample selected perhaps not irrelevant to people of color worldwide. Subsequently dark skin by default is demeaned.

Implications for clinical psychology

According to these data, there is a participants’ disdain for dark skin as a prerequisite to self-hate being women of color. This would appear to contradict the Black consciousness rhetoric of the sixties that espoused pride and dignity in being dark--particularly for a sample of respondents in the aftermath of such an era. Their personal values are a reflection of Judeo-Christian implications relative to dark skin. In a spiritual environment where light skin has been portrayed as the unspoken ideal, the scores may suggest a psychological

advantage or self-esteem for light-skinned women compared to their lesser esteemed dark-skinned counterparts. The lesser self-esteem of the dark-skinned respondents may also characterize their reaction to conflicting cultural norms [23]. They may thus seek Clinical Psychology services where skin color is an underlying problem unbeknown to the practitioner.

Women of color who have light skin are less stigmatized than are the darkest-skinned members within the group. They may move more freely than dark-skinned women among the mainstream within society and are thus less victimized psychologically [24]. However, their privileged status within the mainstream has not necessarily served them in their psychological health because they are defined as dark relative to the dominant group population. Their difficulties may then reflect similar problems experienced by the “dark” and “darkest-skinned” members in relation to that population.

That skin color has implications for women of color suggests it also has implications for practitioners. Judeo-Christian spirituality as cultural norm may affect the self-esteem and/or mental health of such women that likely impose an exacerbation upon whatever the presenting problem. Social problems such as teen pregnancy, generational welfare, and drug abuse may indeed be symptoms of a more deeply rooted inability of some among women of color to value themselves. When they internalize the negative images for dark skin they’re exposed to in a Judeo-Christian spiritual environment, the problem recapitulates itself. Recapitulation has direct implications for therapeutic potential that do not impose upon the mainstream population which makes skin color less visible as a clinical issue. What is more, most clinical issues are framed in a standard context which further locates issues such as skin color among women of color at a distance inaccessible by most Clinical Psychologists other than specialists or the uniquely informed.

Considering Clinical Psychologists who see women of color, it is recommended that they ponder the social context in which their skin color is defined. A light-skinned African-, Asian- or Latino-American may in fact be defined as dark-skinned in a biracial community [25]. Biracial communities comprise a composite group with enough feelings of solidarity to aid in forming coalitions which could foster resentment in some form on the part of an outsider and vice-versa. In other situations this sense of solidarity need not be called into play such as in a middle-class community where skin color is associated with familial and/or personal wealth.

By adhering to professional tradition, Clinical Psychologists in a Judeo-Christian spiritual environment are likely to view women of color from a generic perspective. This facilitates the marginalization of their issues, presenting problems and overall well-being. Under such circumstances the continuation of a homogeneous perspective is reinforced. The more scientifically grounded, historical dimensions of life pertaining to women of color are then overlooked accordingly. To reverse this trend and enable more affective Clinical Psychology in practice with women of color it will be helpful to:

- Determine the class, social and familial circumstances of the client
- Be sensitive to the possibility that women of color who are in crisis or who are experiencing powerful emotions may have issues with the skin color of the practitioner
- Seek relevant support systems if such action seems appropriate
- Review the literature pertaining to the judeo-christian spiritual traditions pertaining to dark skin.

Conclusion

The consequences of Judeo-Christian spirituality for Clinical Psychologists who serve women of color extend from Western traditions [26]. Various Christian sects during the colonial era took part in an effort to insure that society would not validate by official decree any one religion, philosophy or other state sponsored spirituality. That belief was put forth by Roger Williams and others who felt imposed upon by any religious doctrine to which they did not aspire. The problem for Clinical Psychologists is that as pertains to Judeo-Christianity policy does not consistently extend to the activities and/or special needs of actual practice. In becoming educated as to the skin color nuances of women of color, Clinical Psychologists gain insight necessary for bridging the gap between policy and practice.

In comparison to other nations today, in the U.S. there is relative less confrontation between church and state including Clinical Psychology. However, existing lines of demarcation have not eliminated problems completely. School systems on occasion have sought to solicit available tax dollars to fund religious curriculums [27]. Clinical Psychologists have not been isolated from the efforts of such activists who many see as violating American law in their attempts to fund religious education. In the aftermath, practitioners have been less inclined to utilize spiritual resources for fear that spirituality is not only biased but economically pathological as well. To reduce pathology Clinical Psychologists may serve as professional advocates in combating the negative rhetoric associated with the spiritual community making of Judeo-Christian spirituality a viable practice resource.

The application of Judeo-Christian spirituality to practice with women of color is not local to any specific ethnic but should be placed in a broader context which addresses all groups including Latinos, Asians, and Native-Americans, as well. Knowing more about the various ethnics will enable practice in facilitation of judgment and preferred outcomes. Some among Clinical Psychologists have objected to the inclusion of spirituality in practice on the grounds that it should be non-sectarian. However, such practitioners have not considered the implications of this discourse in the determination of what is appropriate for practice. They have not considered the implications of power for what gets validated and who determines validation. Contrary to the most well intended among Clinical Psychologists who may value and advocate for diversity, opposition to spirituality in practice may have inadvertently recapitulated a colonial decision making model. To meet the resulting challenges, Clinical Psychologists must be amenable to skin color where the various pathologies of women of color are concerned. In the aftermath Clinical Psychologists worldwide will become flexible enough to enhance the dynamics of practice between service providers and women of color as clientele. The outcome will then sustain the integrity and prestige of the profession at-large both at home and abroad.

Bibliography

1. Sheldrake P. "Spirituality and history: Questions of interpretation and method". New York: Crossroad (1992).
2. Delbane R and Montgomery H. "The breath of life: Discovering your breath prayer". San Francisco: Harper and Row (1981).
3. Roth N. "The breath of God: An approach to prayer". Cambridge, MA: Cowley (1990).
4. Merriam-Webster. "Webster's tenth collegiate dictionary". Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster (1993).
5. Otto R. "The idea of the holy". New York: Vintage Books (1958).
6. Whitsett D and Whitsett D. "Anti-black racism and its consequences: A self-psychology/object relations perspective". *Journal of Analytic Social Work* 3.4 (1996): 61-81.
7. Stember C. "Sexual Racism". New York: Elsevier Scientific (1976).
8. Hall RE. "The Bleaching Syndrome: African Americans' Response to Cultural Domination vis-a-vis Skin Color". *Journal of Black Studies* 26.2 (1995):172-183.
9. Aro J. "The authority of reason and passion for science. The rules of sociological method". *Sociologia* 32.2 (1995): 81-89.
10. Solomos J. "Race ethnicity and nations/Racism, modernity and identity: On the Western front. Sociology". *The Journal of British Sociological Association* 29.4 (1995): 750-752.
11. Rogers JA. "Sex and Race". St. Petersburg, FL: Helga M. Rogers (1967).
12. Holy Bible. "Holy Bible: 1611 edition: King James version". Nashville, TN: Nelson (1982).

13. Hall R. "Discrimination Among Oppressed Populations". Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press (2003).
14. Kovel J. "White Racism: A Psychohistory". New York: Columbia University Press (1984).
15. Richards G. "Race, Racism and Psychology". New York: Routledge (1997).
16. Halliburton R. "Red Over Black: Black slavery among the Cherokee Indians". Westport: Greenwood Press (1977).
17. Kikumura A and Kitano H. "Interracial Marriage: A Picture of the Japanese Americans". *Journal of Social* 29.2 (1973): 67-81.
18. Hall R. "Filipina Eurogamy: Skin color as vehicle of psychological colonization". Manilla, Philippines, Giraffe Books (2001).
19. Comas-Diaz L., et al. "Ethnic Conflict and the Psychology of Liberation in Guatemala, Peru, and Puerto Rico". *American Psychologist* 53.7 (1998): 778-792.
20. Felix v. Marquez, 78-2314, (U.S. Dist. Dist. of Columbia, 1981) (1981).
21. Opala K. "Cosmetics Ban: Did standards body err?" (2001).
22. Hall R. "A descriptive analysis of skin color bias in Puerto Rico: Ecological applications to practice". *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 27.4 (2000): 171-183.
23. Hall R. "The denigration of dark skin vis-à-vis Western civilization: Evolution of an African pathology". *Psychologia* 13.2 (2005): 138-149.
24. Hall R. "The projected manifestations of aspiration, personal values, and environmental assessment cognates of cutaneo chroma (skin color) for a selected population of African Americans". (Doctoral dissertation, Atlanta University, 1989). *Dissertation Abstracts International* 50 (1990): 3363A.
25. Bilides D. "Race, color, ethnicity and class: issues of biculturalism in school based adolescent counseling groups". *Social Work with Groups* 13.4 (1990): 43-58.
26. Farber E. "Puritan criminals: the economic, social, and intellectual background to crime in the seventeenth-century". *Perspectives in American History* 11 (1977-78): 81-144.
27. Midgley J. "The new Christian Right, social policy and the welfare state". *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 17.2 (1990): 89-106.

Volume 8 Issue 12 December 2019

©All rights reserved by Ronald E Hall.