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## Understanding the Influence of Colorism on The Dating Preferences of Black Undergraduate Students at Predominantly White Institutions

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# **UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF COLORISM ON THE DATING PREFERENCES OF BLACK UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the degree  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

in

Child and Family Studies

by  
Odessa Julia Foster  
B.S., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2020  
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## **Abstract**

As Black emerging adults learn to understand the significance of skin tone preference, it is important to know how this can impact their dating preference. This study examined the effects of colorism on emerging Black undergraduate college students and how it influences their dating preferences while attending a Predominantly White Institution. The participants were 12 self-identified Black 18-24-year-old women who attended a PWI. A correlational analysis was conducted between family, media/social media, and dating preferences. The findings of this study revealed that family can influence emerging Black adults dating preferences as they are likely to have the same preference as their family. There is a significantly positive relationship between family preference and dating preferences. The correlations between media/social media and dating preferences displayed positive and negative correlations. However, none were statistically strong to indicate a connection between them.

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Colorism, or "the allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one's skin," has been a primary source of discrimination and inequality, particularly among African Americans (Landor, 2013, p.817). Mental health, self-esteem, and perceptions of others are known to be affected due to the affects of colorism, discrimination, and inequality based on a person's skin tone (Martinez, 2019). Since the beginning of European colonization and slavery eras, many ethnic groups, consisting of Brown and Black people, judged themselves and conveyed White standards based on cultural and societal views (Martinez, 2019; Cosbert, 2019). Based on these standards that White Americans created, African Americans have internalized the idea that having European features will make you more attractive and gain better opportunities and privileges (Cosbert, 2019).

The effects of colorism have been visible among African Americans since the early days of U.S. slavery (Abrams et al., 2020), yet, it has also affected other ethnicities. East Indians, Asians, and Latinos are among the racial and ethnic groups that have experienced colorism. In East India, vestiges of colorism may influence an individual's work and school environment and choices regarding mate selections (Adiku & Darkwah, 2020). Like African Americans, these ethnicities have been defined by colonialism to surrender to European Standards. Within the East Indian culture, colorism has been established by the "caste system" (Dhillon-Jamerson, 2019). In India, individuals are born into a hierarchical arrangement that impacts their life experiences and societal involvement (Dhillon-Jamerson, 2019). For women in India, caste membership is directly related to their skin tone. Indian women with darker skin can experience slim dating and marital options because their skin tone is perceived as less valuable (Dhillon-Jamerson, 2019).

As a result of these perceptions, having a lighter skin tone is a fixation for Indian women. This is extremely important because having both confidence and lighter skin would grant a higher level of the caste system and closeness to the colonization standards (Wardhani et al. 2018). Indian women's value is powerfully articulated through their appearances and social status (Hunter, 2007). For instance, an Indian woman with darker skin and a higher education could be viewed or selected as potential dating or marriage material and even change her place in the caste system (Dhillon-Jamerson, 2019). In this case, social status (i.e., educational attainment) may compensate for her darker skin tone. Yet, lighter skin Indian women do not have to go through the same obstacles as dark skin Indian women because their skin tone has an advantage for them to be automatically selected (Dhillon-Jamerson, 2019). The benefits related to having lighter skin in this environment mean that beauty products such as skin-bleaching gels or creams are used by dark-skinned women to potentially increase their chances of being selected by a mate. This may increase their status within the caste system.

"Colonialism largely contributed to the perpetuation of Whiteness and masculinity superior not only through direct domination but also through the deepening of three key forms of social stratification, caste, class, and skin color" (Dhillon-Jamerson, 2019, p.12). The definition of beauty within countries like India and Asia is defined by having lighter skin through skin bleaching. This "bleaching syndrome" resulted from acting on internalization to achieve the ideal White aesthetic (Hunter, 2007). Along with African Americans and Latinos, researchers found that Asian Americans have internalized the messages that lighter skin is better and the desire for European features (Hunter, 2007). Colorism in Asia has also become a force of nature due to European colonial standards (Hunter, 2007). Skin Bleaching products are demonstrated on skin tone swatches showing all individuals' possible color changes depending on their skin color



(Basu, 2020). Between India and Asia, skin whitening/ lighting products have been used by 80-85% of women alone (Wardhani et al., 2018). African Americans eventually picked up this practice.

To comply with European beauty standards, bleach syndrome also affects African American women, who may also apply bleaching cream to their bodies (Cosbert, 2019). This demonstrates that African Americans view lighter skin as an indication of beauty and attractiveness, which impacts mate selection preferences (Cosbert, 2019). Colorism in the Latino culture has also modified their standards of beauty and their sources of living (Cueto & Godreau, 2021). Colorism towards Latinos also dates back to European Colonization, which created a caste system. For the Latin community, being lighter meant a higher status (Cueto & Godreau, 2021). Although the caste system is no longer in place in Latin America today, the legacy of these inequalities still persists (Martinez, 2019).

Although these ethnic groups have experienced colorism in various ways, it does not remove the significant effect of colorism amongst Black Americans. For people of color, their values have been assigned to their skin color by White Americans, and those ideologies can determine their lived experiences (Chaney & Perkins, 2018). Research has shown that colorism can influence several aspects of people of color's lives, such as mate selection, perceived self-worth, and attractiveness (Chaney and Perkins, 2018). Colorism is an intricacy of racism globally impacting black and brown people (Corso, 2014). Division among people of color, race, and ethnicity have been created through colorism which is understood as a historical and social construct (Corso, 2014). For example, African Americans have divided themselves into groups based on skin tones, which causes a particular skin tone(s) to be preferred (Corso, 2014).

Colorism is a learned behavior throughout history introduced by family, media, and internalized self-perceptions to reinforce notions of a particular skin tone (Chaney & Perkins, 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

As society continues to prioritize contemporary images of fair skin women as opposed to dark-skinned women in countless media outlets, these messages continue to be internalized within the African American community (Cosbert, 2019). Several research studies report that the latent affects of colorism are mostly reproduced within one's family (Corso, 2014). Changing the narrative within Black families to address the issue of colorism and preferences will help subside the standard of White beauty (Corso, 2014). The current lack of representation of darker-skinned individuals in mainstream media may create a cause of concern about how family, media, and internalized colorism influence areas of human development such as dating preferences.

Colorism determines Black Americans' preferences and judgments (Corso, 2014). Based on the acceptance and incorporation of White beauty standards and the impact of colonialism and slavery, the selection for lighter skin influences Black individuals throughout their lifespan. Most current literature on colorism focuses on adults who have experienced colorism and its effects, but there is not as much research on Black college students. Black students, especially Black female college students, are controlled by identity formation, which constructs gender and race (Henry, 2015). Therefore, this influences the dating experiences of Black young men and women in particular stages of development, such as racial and gender formations (Henry, 2015).

According to Williams (2022), current adult development theories do not consider how race-related phenomena influence individuals' experiences. This is also the case for Arnett (2000); as he does speak on emerging adults' development, his literature does not address colorism's impacts on their dating preferences. This is why it is essential to understand how

colorism influences the dating decisions of Black college students in a Predominantly White Institution. This study aims to explore the effects of colorism and its influences on Black American undergraduate students attending a predominantly white institution (PWI). The current research aims to increase awareness of colorism and how family, media, and internalized colorism influence Black undergraduate students' dating preferences. Information gathered from this study will benefit Black individuals in understanding their own experiences related to how Colorist messages affect their adult development.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical perspective used to frame this study within the field of colorism is the Critical Race Theory (CRT) with the tenet of Whiteness as Property.

Created by scholars in 1989, CRT was coined to signify an important intersection of theory, race, and racism (Burton et al., 2010). Prior to the formal establishment of CRT scholars, who identified as Asians, Latinos, and African Americans, were the stepping stones of the critical race-legal movement concerning the intersections of racism (Williams, 2021; Delgado and Stefancic, 2017; Burton et al., 2010). As a theory, CRT interrogated the meaning of Whiteness, privilege, and power passed on throughout generations (Burton et al., 2010; Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009). The foundation of White American Ideology and Identity created the racial hierarchy, such as the caste system, to which Asians, Indians, and Latinos were subjected within their countries. For African Americans, being "Black" is labeled as inferior, and "White" is classified as superior (Harris, 1993); this, in turn, created the precedent for light skin to be characterized as superior to dark skin and shaped the phenomenon known as Colorism (Hall, 2018).

As stated by Rocco et al. (2014), CRT establishes the understanding that African Americans and people of color go through regarding racial matters. CRT also points out how colorism and racialization continue to be internalized within families of color. Researchers continue to characterize and demonstrate Whiteness's substantial power and privilege (Hall, 2018). As critical race theories speak of race, race must be continually remade to reflect today's personal and public identities and experiences of individuals of color (Burton et al., 2010). CRT dominates and highlights the impact of skin discrimination, and researchers found the discourse on colorism essential to study because it marginalized family research for many years (Burton et al., 2010). This theory is vital to this study as it frames the understanding of race, gender, and internalized colorist messages surrounding colorism.

## **Chapter 2. Review of Literature**

### **Historical Origin**

Colorism refers to treatment or discrimination toward Afrocentric skin tone, hair texture, and facial features (Oh et al., 2021). Its effects have existed since the beginning of U.S. slavery (Abrams et al., 2020). Harris (1993) described the origins of slavery and how a Black person's race defined their status and defined them as property. Racial identity among Blacks stratified their social and legal status (Harris, 1993). White Americans found it necessary to establish a difference between Whites and Blacks. Harris (1993) states that "Black racial identity" was marked as enslavement, and "white racial identity" was marked as "free." This ideology created the social construction of race (Harris, 1993) and soon the standard of beauty. During the antebellum period, the White slave owners would display colorism by placing the darker Black Americans in the fields and the lighter-skin Black Americans in the main house (Abrams et al., 2020). The lighter-skin Black Americans, often the offspring of a White owner, would benefit and obtain more significant opportunities and privileges due to their color and Eurocentric features (Hill, 2002).

On the other hand, dark-skin enslaved people would sell for less than lighter skin enslaved people during auctions (Hill, 2002; Pinkston, 2015). This treatment of superiority and preference created the foundation for the basis of colorism. As discriminatory behaviors surrounding colorism evolved, Black Americans were valued by their skin tone when tools such as the "Paper Bag Test" was used. The "Paper Bag Test" perpetuated colorism by demonstrating that a Black American could not enter a place of business unless their skin tone was lighter than a brown paper bag (Martin, 2020; Cosbert, 2019). Cosbert (2019) states,

"Eurocentric standards and perspectives have been exerted into minority groups, including the African American community.

African Americans began to portray and adhere to what they had been conditioned to believe was the "proper" and "societal" way to think, behave and look" (p.14).

Colorism's influence is seen in many aspects of society, including emerging adults' lives.

### **Colorism in Black Adolescents Becoming Emerging Adults**

As a pervasive feature, colorism has been an underexamined topic within Black adolescent development (Rosario et al., 2021). Clark and Clark (1947) created a sequence of follow-up studies to test Black children's rejection of their skin tone in favor of White skin tone (Legal Defense Fund, n.d.). "The Doll" test was an experiment done with dolls to demonstrate racial preferences. This test was conducted with children attending segregated schools in the south and mixed schools in the north. The children would choose the doll's color they feared but wanted to be, resulting in them disliking themselves and diminishing their self-esteem (Legal Defense Fund, n.d.). This study was a petition to the board of education about segregated schools. This study was a petition to the board of education to end segregation in schools.

Social acceptance is a concern among Black American youth, especially Black women in the adolescence stage emerging into early adulthood (Rosario et al., 2021). Some may assume that colorism primarily affects dark-skinned men and women, but light-skinned men and women are also affected. Studies have shown that light-skin girls are discriminated against by dark-skin girls or girls of a lighter skin tone from themselves (Fultz, 2013). Dark-skin girls may need to compete with light-skin girls to receive some of the attention or privilege light-skinned girls would receive (Martin, 2020). However, light-skin Black women have stated feeling excluded

from the Black community due to being "too light" and needing to prove their place as authentic members of the Black community (Hollier, 2018).

Martin (2020), regarding this, also stated, "Skin complexion is one of the main reasons Black women or Black girls become obsessive in competing among one another to be socially accepted based on eye color, hair texture, and physical features" (p.51). Therefore, those who may have a large nose, coarse hair, and a darker complexion are not accepted due to social standards and feel the need to change their features (Ingram & Wallace, 2019). As a result, the practice of skin-lightening or skin bleaching for dark skin girls has been adopted (Craddock, 2018).

Adolescents are in a stage of life where they are forming their identities and acceptance in the form of their peers (Rosario et al., 2021). Like any other child development stage, the adolescent period is critical for physiological and socio-emotional development (Craddock et al., 2018). Adolescence signifies transitioning from childhood to early adulthood, ages 12 to 25 (Craddock et al., 2018). Amid this transition, a key feature of emerging adulthood is taking advantage of identity explorations in areas such as love (Arnett, 2000). However, prejudice or discrimination associated with colorism during this transition can negatively impact adolescents' well-being (Craddock et al., 2018). Research studies have found that young Black adults' attitudes toward skin tone, physical attractiveness, and romantic relationships revealed that lighter skin is more attractive (Adams et al., 2016; Stephen & Few, 2007). As Black adolescents become aware of skin tone differences, the importance surrounding skin tone is due to developmental and contextual changes (Adams et al., 2016). However, greater knowledge and increased awareness of race and colorism can foster an adolescent's pride in their Black skin or increase their preference for lighter skin regarding White privilege (Adams et al., 2016).

## **Self-Esteem and Attractiveness**

Society's racial and gender-structured identities are focal aspects of developing oneself (Rosario et al., 2021). As adolescent men and women grow up, they become more aware of whether they will be perceived as attractive and beautiful (Rosario et al., 2021). Self-esteem for adolescents is a way of understanding and learning one's self-worth (Rosario et al., 2021). Some studies have resulted in mixed findings when examining a relationship between the perceived skin tones and self-esteem of Black college students who attend a PWI (Adams et al., 2016).

Moreover, for dark skin girls and dark-skin boys, the link between seemingly unattractive and beautiful can trigger low self-esteem (Rosario et al., 2021). Low self-esteem in dark skin girls can be related to poorer mental health, lower academic achievement, and social acceptance (Rosario et al., 2021). Researchers have suggested for Black girls that colorism primarily impacts their sense of perceived attractiveness, authenticity, and Black identity (Rosario et al., 2021). Along with colorism impacting their sense of identity, they also experience oppression concerning their skin color (Williams et al., 2022). Consequently, for dark-skin Black girls, the message of having dark skin, natural hair, and Afrocentric features is labeled unattractive and masculine (Rosario et al., 2021). They can cause them to question their Blackness and internalize these thoughts and feelings, especially as a Black student attending a PWI (Williams et al., 2022). In the world of colorists, social media, and White culture, these perceived thoughts about colorism affect self-esteem and attractiveness. For dark-skin Black girls, the message of having dark skin, natural hair, and Afrocentric features is labeled unattractive and masculine (Rosario et al., 2021).

In the world of colorism among dark skin Black girls, the "ideal" standard of beauty consists of what White society has considered "beauty." Colorism is pervasive in today's celebrity culture, where light skin is endorsed and dark skin is invisible (Craddock et al., 2018).



This is similar to how Harris (1993) stated that Whites defined White as "free" and Black as "enslavement." White society has created the notion that "light" is beautiful and "dark" is ugly (Wilder and Cain, 2011). Self-esteem and self-concept have been related to body image dissatisfaction in Black adolescent girls (Wallace et al., 2011). Dark skin Black girls who do not conform to the standard of beauty pose a greater risk of body image dissatisfaction (Wallace et al., 2011). Physical characteristics, including lighter skin, longer hair, small narrow noses, etc., send messages to Black girls on how they should look and what physical characteristics are more favorable (Wallace et al., 2011). Along with low self-esteem, mainstream media can also become a concern for Black adolescents.

### **Colorism and Media**

When the beginning of colorism and media began, African Americans surfaced as extremely Black with no variations of brown (Cosbert, 2019). Mass media created the manifestations of color-blind ideology that showcased characters apart from how African Americans are in reality (Steele, 2016). African Americans were shown in a cartoonish way that exaggerated their Afrocentric features (Cosbert, 2019). With the media being a powerful tool, these characters created to represent Black women and men throughout the years became believable (Steele, 2016). Stereotypes such as "Mammy" or "Sapphire" were and still are the presentation of dark skin Black women who are either displayed as the "Motherly self-sacrificing" or the "Angry Black woman" (Toms- Anthony, 2018). As for the stereotype "Jezebel," this character was portrayed by light skin Black women who were shapely, attractive, and sexual (Toms- Anthony, 2018).

Both dark skin men and women have been depicted and portrayed negatively in the media. Conversely, hyperstereotypical images in the media depict Black men as criminals, dead-beat fathers, and uneducated "Sambos" (Stamps, 2021). However, the double standard on dark

skin men has been applied today. They are either characterized as "thugs" or aggressive but considered masculine and ideal marriage partners (Cosbert, 2019). Steele, 2016 states, "The media is a powerful tool in disseminating societal ideals about images (p.53). Moreover, media in today's time has exemplified colorism in various other ways, primarily through social media.

### **Social Media**

Within the Black community, studies have shown that 73% of Black Americans have been recognized as heavy mainstream media and social media platform users (Avery et al., 2021). Regarding social media use, studies have shown that 96% of African American adolescents and young adults between 18-29 (Corso, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017), Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook are the most used social media platforms. On these social media platforms, skin tone wars were created with hashtags regarding which skin tone had the better likeness and representation (Abrams et al., 2020).

These skin-tone-related hashtags can denote a negative skin tone (Abrams et al., 2020). For example, hashtags say #teamdarkskin and #teamlightskin (Abrams et al., 2020). They are comparing light and dark Black skin tones, which may cause concerns related to low self-esteem and attractiveness issues. Abrams et al. (2020) state, "African American teens (34%) report going online "almost constantly" (p.172). Manifestations of Colorism on all social media platforms are a concern and can hurt dark skin adolescent girls' self-images and self-esteem. (Abrams et al., 2020). Racial socialization is the beginning factor of Colorist messages, although social media contributes to the messages of colorism.

### **Racial socialization**

Despite the longevity of Colorism among African Americans in the United States, it is still unknown how significantly Colorism messages about beauty and skin color have turned into Racial Socialization (Tribble et al., 2019). "Racial Socialization involves the relationship

between parents, children, and society that educates children about their race" (Crutchfield et al., 2021, p. 26). Research has established that Racial socialization is a crucial parenting practice that fosters positive development in Black youth and young adults (Tribble et al., 2019). A national sample found that 64% of African American parents convey Racial socialization messages to their children, but 78% of Black-American college students report receiving socialization messages about race (Landor et al., 2013). Racial Socialization messages have occurred through family advice and praise (Tribble et al., 2019). Family is, in many ways, responsible for shaping an individual's identity and perspectives through Socialization (Wilder and Cain, 2011).

Within Black families, knowing the legacy of slavery and preparing to deal with issues related to racism and inequality is crucial (Wilder and Cain, 2011). Although there is evidence that Black families work to teach their children the standards of responsibility and high achievement, there is an issue with how Colorism messages operate within Black families (Wilder and Cain, 2011). Studies have examined how skin tone moderates a child and parent's relationship regarding quality and Racial Socialization (Landor et al., 2013). As parents approach the issue of colorism with their children, researchers have found that gender plays a significant role when delivering Colorism messages. For example, Black girls reported receiving messages about cultural pride rather than racial bias. Young Black girls are taught that regardless of other physical characteristics they display, they may not measure up to lighter skin Black girls simply because of their skin tone (Perkins, 2008). Black boys would report receiving messages more about coping with racial bias than cultural pride (Wilder and Cain, 2011).

As the intersection of skin color and race create differential life experiences, familial contexts have been shown to develop sibling rivalry, prompt paternity questions regarding skin color variation, and have been the root of internalized Colorism (Maxwell et al.,

2015). The notion that gender may create the effects of skin tone bias among Black Americans is theoretically supported by a demonstration of how Colorism influences Black women and men differently (Maxwell et al., 2015). As family plays an integral role in Racial socialization, the generational aspect gives an in-depth look at how internalized colorism is created.

### **Generational Teaching of Colorism**

According to current research, colorism has been rooted in Black families for generations (Abrams et al., 2020). Colorist ideologies throughout Black families have been the root of Racial socialization (Abrams et al., 2020). Maternal figures such as grandmothers, aunts, and mothers are the primary persons for skin tone biases and associating negativity with darkness and goodness with lightness (Abrams et al., 2020). Skin tone has become a social feature that often influences identity development and creates racial and self-esteem attitudes (Corso, 2014). Young men and women may begin to question themselves based on the messages they receive. Generational teachings of colorism, such as light skin being superior and dark skin being inferior, perpetuate Colorist practices and the gender biases of Black family members (Abrams et al., 2020).

Gendered colorism is a sociocultural phenomenon of perceptions of skin tones that impact the lives of Black boys and girls differently (Abrams et al., 2020). Skin tone and gender bias are more pronounced in Black women and girls than in Black men and boys (Abrams et al., 2020). Adolescent Black girls, especially dark skin Black girls, may be subjected to idealized beauty standards and a preference for light skin (Abrams et al., 2020). Adolescent Black boys are less likely to be imposed with beauty standards and emotional distress about falling short of a favorable complexion (Abrams et al., 2020). Years ago, Breland-Noble (2010) addressed this issue of generational colorism, stating, "Colorist notions are still operating within the larger Black community, a factor which can contribute to internalization" (p.221). As generational

teachings of colorism are still influential today, this study highlights the need to understand how these teachings currently influence Black students' dating preferences.

## **Dating**

As the privilege of Whiteness is known in partner selection (Corso, 2014), researchers have found that lighter-skinned women are viewed as more attractive than their darker counterparts (Perkins, 2008). Stephens and Thomas (2011) state that these messages are internalized when children witness others being treated differently based on having light or dark skin tones. Over time as both young Black men and women internalize these messages, skin tone preference and bias are being created (Corso, 2014). Along with these preferences, previous research has proven that Blacks with lighter skin have gained better employment, higher income statuses, and education opportunities (Hall, 2005; Stephens & Thomas, 2011; Wade, 1996), highlighting the need for the current study. Although socioeconomic advancement has been used to justify entering into relationships with light-skin partners, when socioeconomic status is involved, dark skin Black men have the same desire for socioeconomic status in girlfriends and wives as light skin Black men (Stephens and Thomas, 2011). However, there is a double standard among Black men because they are less likely to be judged by their skin tone compared to light-skinned Black men (Stephens and Thomas, 2011). Black men possessing dark skin would be perceived as "Highly" attractive based on their socioeconomic status (Cosbert, 2019). However, studies show that women with dark skin can still be devalued regardless of socioeconomic status. A study by Maddox and Gray (2002) found that college students' attitudes toward dark skin women are likely to view them as unattractive and unintelligent compared to lighter skin women. The dark skin women in this study were viewed as loud, talkative, and aggressive but viewed the White women as intelligent, materialistic, and sensitive. Therefore, this creates negative perceptions about attractiveness and desirability amongst dark-skinned

Black women, which then causes unhealthy dating interactions. As this may still be the case today, only literature has shown how society has viewed Black women compared to their White counterparts regarding dating.

Studies have shown that many Black men consciously and subconsciously are biased toward skin complexions (Matthew & Johnson, 2015). As a result of these perceptions, Black women who are college students may experience dating issues concerning being overlooked or picked over for a lighter-skinned woman. This particular group is at risk for depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, and shame (Henry, 2015). It is known that many African American men choose to be in a relationship or marry a woman of a lighter shade to increase their social standing (Matthew and Johnson, 2015). Black men who date a lighter-skinned woman are judged accordingly based on their partner's physical appearance, which creates a pleasing and accepting response from his peers (Matthew and Johnson, 2015). However, when a Black man's attributes of his self-worth are tied to the physicality of his partner who may be of a lighter skin tone, it continues to contribute to colorism and the preference for light-complexioned women (Matthew and Johnson, 2015). However, the double standard in dating among Black college men and women is that Black men are less likely to be judged by their physical appearance than women. Black women's appearance and skin tone are not only being judged, but these notions also shape skin tone perceptions and dating preferences.

The ideals related to the CRT tenet of Whiteness as Property create an environment for Black American individuals where light is considered most desirable. The effects of Whiteness as Property could be perceived within social media and family networks for Black American adolescents, which may also lead to internalized colorism within this group. Opposing Colorist

ideologies, gender biases, and social media have taught Black adolescents how they would be seen and how they would be socially judged based on their skin complexion (Bohonos, 2019).

Today's world is a racial world created by White Americans that promotes lighter skin as optimal (Bohonos, 2019). This can negatively create adverse environments involving media, family, and internalized colorism. As recent studies have partially elaborated on how colorism affects Black adolescents' lives, this research aims to fill in the gaps of how significantly it affects Black undergraduate college students' dating preferences amongst their peers and families while attending a predominantly white institution. This research is essential as it looks at Black adolescents' perceptions of self and skin tone preferences and gives insight into Black families, generational upbringing, and future relationships of Black emerging adults.

## **Chapter 3. Method**

This study examines the effects of Colorism and its influences on Black American emerging adult undergraduate students attending a PWI. Study findings also provide a better understanding of the relationships between perceived skin color, internalization of family messages related to skin color, media colorism messages, and dating preferences.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to identify the significance of colorism and how colorism influences a Black American undergraduate student's dating preferences. The two research questions for this study were 1) Does the family upbringing of African American college students affect dating preferences? and 2) Does media/social media influence dating preferences among African American college students?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

To address these research questions, data were collected in a 30-question survey measuring participants' responses regarding family, social media, and potential partners. The survey included two open-ended questions that allowed the participants to go into more detail regarding their experiences with colorism. The responses to the open-ended questions were used to support the quantitative results.

### **Sample**

Study participants all self-identified as Black American undergraduate college students who attend a PWI in the southern region of the United States. Twelve participants completed the survey. The ages of participants ranged from 18-24. All participants identified as Black women and represented various skin tones, light to dark, based on the PERLA color palette (see Figure 1). All the participants lived locally, either on or near the campus. Those over 24 who did not self-identify as Black but attended the institution could not participate in the study. The



demographic information collected on the participants included gender, housing status, age, and skin tone. The participants were not required to specify their income level, employment status, or sexual orientation. Of the 14 survey responses, only 12 were used for analysis due to two incomplete surveys.

## **Measures**

As previously stated, data were collected using a 30-question survey to measure perceived colorism. To assess the significance of skin color variations on participants' dating preferences, the researcher employed the In-Group Colorism Scale (ICS) (Harvey et al., 2017). The In-Group Scale was first utilized from Simms's (2007) guidelines on scale construction, which ultimately came from Loevinger's (1957) seminal model of scale construction (Harvey et al., 2017). This scale was modified and used for this study. The ICS scale measured five facets of Colorism: Self-Concept, Attraction, Affiliation, Racial Socialization, and Parental Socialization. A 5-point Likert scale was used for each question, with 1 strongly disagreeing to 5 strongly agreeing. As for self-concept skin tone questions, The PERLA color palette was also used to allow participants a more comprehensive range of options for expressing their skin tone. With this color palette, one represented the lightest skin tone on this scale, while 11 was the darkest. Some examples of survey questions are as follows.

(See Appendix B)

1. Do you believe your family has a skin tone preference when it comes to your dating preferences?
2. Do you think skin tone preference is generational in your family?
3. If you use social media, do you believe colorism is prevalent on your social media?
4. Do you feel you fit the standard of beauty based on the media's representation?
5. Do you compare your skin tone to the men/women in the media?

## **Procedure**

The study's co-investigators (thesis co-chairs) emailed various campus departments to solicit the sample of participants (see Appendix C). The email entailed what the study was about, who was conducting it, how many questions the survey had, how long it should take to complete the survey, how participants would be protected, and a link to the Qualtrics survey. The email was sent to a convenience sample of several departments at the University. The department receiving the email chose whether to invite its undergraduate students to participate in the study. Those who did not fit the study criteria were asked within the email not to participate and possibly extend the email to someone who could. The email explained how to access the survey. The participants were also instructed to complete the survey by a specific deadline. A source of contact information was provided if there were any issues or questions. Those choosing to participate responded to questions about their experiences with colorism regarding perceived skin tone, media usage, and dating preferences. The participants had varying levels of knowledge about the definition or history of colorism. This study received IRB approval in October 2022 (see Appendix A).

## **Analytic Plan**

Surveys were collected in Qualtrics, downloaded to Excel, cleaned, and coded. Data were analyzed using Stata/BE 17.0. The coded study variables were labeled to reflect the questions they represented. For example, a question referencing perceived prejudice within one's family about skin tone was coded as *Family prejudice*. Additional codes and their corresponding questions can be found in Appendix D

## Chapter 4. Results

All participants in this study were female. The mean age for the participants was 20 years old. Regarding living status, 64 percent of the participants lived off campus, and 35 percent lived on campus. One hundred percent of the participants self-identified as Black and represented varying skin tones. Using the PERLA color palette (see Figure 1), 50 percent of the participants chose skin tone #7, 14 percent were classified as skin tone #6, another was classified as skin tone #4, and seven percent of the sample categorized themselves with skin tones #5, #3, and #2. No participants identified with darker skin tones than #7 on the PERLA scale (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants Demographics

Age	Campus Living Status	Skin tone
18	On	2
18	On	3
19	On	4
20	On	4
20	On	5
20	Off	7
20	Off	7
<b>20</b>	<b>Off</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Off</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Off</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Off</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>Off</b>	<b>7</b>



Figure 1. PERLA Color Palette

The survey asked two open-ended questions regarding experiences with colorism and dating influences while attending a PWI. There was a sense of internalized colorism from the survey participants who responded to the open-ended questions. One participant stated, "before coming to college, I was into White boys, but now I see that boys of all skin colors across campus are into White or light skin girls, so it has influenced me to want to date people who have a darker complexion." Another participant stated, "yes, I have been compared to my lighter tone friends as house enslaved people and field slaves. I don't have a lot of White friends. My Black friends and I have similar experiences." While another participant says, "I don't think I've experienced colorism because I am a light-skinned woman."

### Research Questions

The research questions that were guiding this study were 1) Does the family upbringing of African American college students affect dating preferences? and 2) Does media/social media influence dating preferences among African American college students? The first research question investigated the participants' family-perceived thoughts surrounding skin tones and was used to analyze possible influences on the participants' dating preferences. Survey questions

related to The second research question examines the media representation of various skin tones surrounding attractiveness and how it may influence participants' dating preferences.

To answer the research questions, correlational analyses were used. Data variables were created and analyzed for family influence, social media influence, and dating preferences. The family influence was obtained on a 5-point Likert scale, with one being strongly disagreed to 5 strongly agreeing with each participant's answers. The media/social media influence was obtained on a 5-point Likert scale for each participant's responses to the survey. The data was downloaded into Excel, cleaned, and then coded. The data was then saved into Stata/SE 17.0 for statistical analysis,

A correlational analysis addressed the first research question of family upbringing and how it influences dating preferences. Prior to examining the relationship between family influences and dating preferences, data for both variables were inspected for normality. Measures of central tendency, skewness coefficients, histograms, and normal Q-Q plots ensured that family influences and dating preferences were normally distributed. The null hypothesis is that there is no statistically significant relationship between family influence and dating preference. The alternative hypothesis is that there is a relationship between family influences and dating preferences. This means the higher the family influence, the more dating preferences are affected. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (Spearman's *rho*) test was used because the sample size, 12, did not meet the assumptions of the Pearson's test correlation coefficient test.

A correlational analysis addressed the second research question regarding media/social influences and dating preferences. Prior to examining the relationship between media/social influences and dating preferences, data for both variables were inspected for normality. Measures of central tendency, skewness coefficients, histograms, and normal Q-Q plots ensured that both

media/social media measures were normally distributed. The null hypothesis is that no statistically significant relationship exists between media/ social influence and dating preference. The alternative hypothesis is that there is no relationship between media/social influence and dating preferences. Again, a Spearman's *rho* test was used for the data representing the second research question because the same sample was used with a sample size that did not meet the assumptions of Pearson's test.

### Research Question #1

The first research question investigated how a family's upbringing influences an African American college student's dating preference. A two-tailed test was used to determine if there was a correlation between family influences and dating preferences to explore whether the sense of family influence was either negatively or positively present. The independent variable for this two-tailed research hypothesis was Family preference(believing your family has a skin tone preference when it comes to your dating preferences). The dependent variable was Dating1(the skin tone you find most attractive). A statistically significant, strong positive correlation ( $\rho = 0.65, p < .05$ ) was found between Family preference and Dating1. In other words, as the participant's family's skin tone preference increases, the participant will likely have the same skin tone preference (see Table 2).

Table 2. Results of Spearman's *rho* Correlation

		Family preference	Dating1
Family preference	Correlation	1	**0.6506
	Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	12	12
	N		0.0220
Dating1	Correlation	**0.6506	1
	Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	12	12
	N	0.0220	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level 2-tailed

The second two-tailed test surrounded the independent variable, Family preference (believing your family has a skin tone preference when it comes to your dating preferences), and dependent variable Dating4 (dating someone of a skin tone that you are not attracted to). There is a statistically significant strong negative correlation ( $\rho^2 = -.66$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between family preference and Dating4. As the participant's family's skin tone preference decreases, the preference for dating a skin tone you are not attracted to increases. (see Table 3).

Table 3. Results of Spearman's  $\rho$  Correlation

		Family Preference	Dating4
Family preference	Correlation	1	**_
	Coefficient	12	0.6647
	Sig. (2-tailed)		12
	N		0.184
Dating4	Correlation	**_	1
	Coefficient	0.6647	12
	Sig. (2-tailed)	12	
	N	0.184	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level 2-tailed

The third two-tailed test looked into the independent variable, Family messages (believing your family exposed you to the message that light skin tones were better), and the dependent variable Dating2 (skin tone do you find most attractive in a potential dating partner). Spearman's  $\rho$  results show a negative and insignificant relationship ( $\rho^2 = -.11$ ,  $p > .05$ ) between Family messages and Dating2 (see Table 4).

Table 4. Results of Spearman's  $\rho$  Correlation

		Family messages	Dating2
Family messages	Correlation	1	-0.1086
	Coefficient Sig.	12	12
	(2-tailed)		0.7368
	N		

Table 4 (continued)

Dating2	Correlation	-0.1086	1
	Coefficient Sig.	12	12
	(2-tailed) N	0.7368	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level 2-tailed

The fourth two-tailed test looked into the independent variable Family prejudice (believe that people in your family hold prejudice against darker skin tones) and Dating2 (skin tone do you find most attractive in a potential dating partner). Spearman's  $\rho$  results show a positive but insignificant relationship ( $\rho = -.14$ ,  $p = >.05$ ) between Family prejudice and Dating2 (see Table 5).

Table 5. Results of Spearman's  $\rho$  Correlation

		Family prejudice	Dating2
Family prejudice	Correlation	1	0.0149
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed) N		0.9237
Dating2	Correlation	0.0149	1
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.9634	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level 2-tailed

## Research Question #2

The second research question investigated how media/social media influences participants' dating preferences. A two-tailed test was used to determine if there was a correlation between media/social media influences and dating preferences to explore whether the sense of media/social media influence was either negatively or positively present. The independent variable for this two-tailed research hypothesis was the Media representation (fit the standard of



beauty based on the media's representation). The dependent variable was Dating2 (skin tone you find most attractive in a potential dating partner). Spearman's  $\rho$  results show a positive but insignificant relationship ( $\rho^2 = -.11$ ,  $p = >.05$ ) between Media representation and Dating2 (see Table 6). There is not a strong significance between media representation and dating preference.

Table 6. Results of Spearman's  $\rho$  Correlation

		Media representation	Dating2
Media representation	Correlation	1	0.1064
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.7420
	N		
Dating2	Correlation	0.1064	1
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.7420	
	N		

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level 2-tailed

The second two-tailed test examined the independent variable Media standards (media standards of showcasing lighter skin tones make you wish you had lighter skin) and Dating4 (dating someone of a skin tone that you are NOT attracted to). Spearman's  $\rho$  results show a negative and insignificant relationship ( $\rho^2 = -0.23$ ,  $p = >.05$ ) (see Table 7). There is not a strong significance between media standards and dating preference.

Table 7. Results of Spearman's  $\rho$  Correlation

		Media standards	Dating4
Media standards	Correlation	1	0.2335
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.4652
	N		

Table 7 (continued)

Dating4	Correlation	0.2335	1
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.4652	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level 2-tailed

The third two-tailed test examined the independent variable Social media (using social media and comparing your appearance to the female you see) and Dating1 (skin tone you find most attractive). Spearman's results show a positive but insignificant relationship ( $\rho = -0.05$ ,  $p > .05$ ) (see Table 8). There is not a strong significance between social media comparison and dating preference.

Table 8. Results of Spearman's  $\rho$  Correlation

		Social media comparison	Dating1
Social media comparison	Correlation	1	0.0483
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed) N		0.8815
Dating1	Correlation	0.0483	1
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.8815	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level 2-tailed

The fourth two-tailed test examined the independent variable TV comparison (comparing your skin tone to the women in the media) and Dating4 (dating someone of a skin tone you are not attracted to). Spearman's  $\rho$  results show a negative and insignificant relationship ( $\rho = -0.12$ ,  $p > .05$ ) (see Table 9). There is not a strong significance between TV comparison and dating preferences.

Table 9. Results of Spearman's *rho* Correlation

		TV comparison	Dating4
TV comparison	Correlation	1	-0.1153
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed) N		0.7212
Dating4	Correlation	-0.1153	1
	Coefficient	12	12
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.7212	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level 2-tailed

## Summary

This research found significant and insignificant results concerning family and media/social media influences and dating preferences. Regarding family influences, there are strong significant findings that the participant internalizes family preference to have the same skin tone preference. Although the participant may inherit the skin tone preference, the likelihood of the participant dating someone of a skin tone they are not attracted to increases as their family's preference decreases. However, concerning media/social media and dating preferences, the results indicated that the participants might compare their skin tone and looks to the women in the media in correlation to particular dating preferences, but it is not significant.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

This study examined the influences of family and media/social media on Black college students' dating preferences. The results of the correlational analyses were used to determine if having a particular skin tone preference contributed to dating preferences. This study's outcome was for participants to express opinions on colorism and what affects their dating preferences.

### **Implications**

Implications are limited from this research with a small sample. Still, the results show a correlation between family and media/social media influences and emerging Black adult dating preferences. The data collected in this study first support the implications of CRT. As previously stated, one of the functions of CRT in this current study is that it highlights skin discrimination's impact and how racialization continues to be internalized within families of color (Burton et al., 2010).

When it comes to internalized colorism, it first starts with family. Black families prefer lighter skin due to a historical preference for lighter skin (Landor et al., 2013). Skin discrimination would be displayed within Black families by lighter skin adolescents receiving higher quality parenting compared to darker skin adolescents (Landor et al., 2013). Colorist messages which become internalized, set the tone for skin tone preference (Landor et al., 2013). As the results displayed, skin tone preference effectively comes from family.

### **Family**

The findings in this study regarding family influences and dating preferences indicated a connection. As previously stated, skin tone has become a social feature that often influences identity development and creates racial and self-esteem attitudes (Corso, 2014). In association with this statement, the results of this study indicated that a family's skin tone preference could

be carried throughout generations as the current generation could have the same skin tone preference. It is statistically significant that skin tone preference will be adopted in future generations. Research has shown that maternal figures such as grandmothers, aunts, and mothers are the primary persons for skin tone bias and associating negativity with darkness and goodness with lightness (Abram et al., 2020). As these biases are taught, future generations will likely prefer a specific skin tone that aligns with their family's preferences. Crutchfield et al. (2021) state in their study that the preference for lighter skin is linked to family preference. As this research did not indicate which specific skin tone is a preference for the participant's families, skin tone preference is still evident regarding dating preferences.

### **Media/social media**

This study also examined the influences of media/social media and dating preferences. The results displayed positive and negative insignificant relationships between the two. The questions of how the participants may view their skin tone compared to TV and social media's representation of beauty in correlation with dating someone of a skin tone they are not attracted to displayed a positive but insignificant relationship. This indicates that both TV and social media do not have a connection to a person's dating preference. On the other hand, a question surrounding the participants comparing their skin tone to the women in the media in correlation to dating someone of a skin tone they are not attracted to displayed a negative but insignificant relationship. This indicates no connection between the participants' comparison of skin tone to the women they see and their dating preferences. However, there may not be a strong significance between media/social media and dating preferences. As previously stated, manifestations of colorism on all social media platforms are a concern and can hurt girls' self-images and self-esteem (Abram et al., 2020).

## **Dating**

Dating has generally been complex for women, as studies have shown that many Black men are consciously and subconsciously biased toward skin complexions (Matthew & Johnson, 2015). This study examined dating preferences as the dependent variable that could be influenced by either family or media/social media. The dating preferences that were looked at in this study were dating someone of a skin tone that is not attractive, a skin tone that is most attractive, and a skin tone that is attractive in a potential partner. Both independent variables, family and media/social media, showed various positive and negative significant and insignificant correlations with dating preferences. The results show family preference can influence someone's dating preference. Research has suggested that skin tone consequences are gendered but impact young women differently because of their outward appearance (Uzogara & Jackson, 2016).

As this study could not certainly display how dating preferences are truly impacted due to the sample size, the results from this sample size demonstrate that family has some form of influence on dating preferences. As emerging Black college adults continue to form their identities and acceptance in the form of their peers (Rosario et al., 2021), the likelihood of colorism inadvertently influencing romantic relationships (Chaney & Perkins, 2018) is significant. It is substantial for Black emerging adults to understand what can impact their dating preferences as they develop their perceptions of skin tone and preferences.

## **Limitations**

Despite the significance of this study, there were two limitations. First, the open-ended questions were not answered fully. A sense of internalized colorism seemed present based on some responses but could not be confirmed. Follow-up interviews are needed to fully understand how colorism plays a part in young adults' dating preferences. The second limitation was the

generalization of the study. Although Black men were invited to participate in this study, none volunteered. Therefore, this study could not generalize the overall Black college student population regarding dating preferences.

### **Future Directions**

In terms of future research, exploring what influences emerging Black adults' dating preferences is useful. A larger sample size is needed for the data to be generalizable to a larger group. Instead of looking at undergraduates, a more open range to Black college students' classification could be used, as some may be within the age range and graduate students. An option for students to identify their sexual orientation could be included to explore dating preferences within the LGBTQ+ community; very few studies surround this. The study could also be conducted state-wide, as this may give a more generalized look into Black college students dating and skin tone preferences, especially for Black men, to get their perceptions. Lastly, more intensive qualitative data surrounding internalized colorism and experiences with colorism could be conducted to understand better how individuals internalize colorism.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to explore how colorism effects influence emerging Black undergraduate college students' dating preferences. This research used a survey to collect data from Black undergraduate students who attend a PWI to determine what influences their dating preferences. This study brought awareness about dating as a Black student while attending a PWI. This study identified that family has an influence when it comes to dating preferences, but it doesn't seem as if media/social media have an impact. It is important to understand what role colorism plays regarding preferences or skin tone preference.

The findings from this study identified that family influence has a positive and negative significance regarding dating preferences. Results suggested that as a family prefers a particular

skin tone, the following generation will inherit that same preference. However, the results also indicated that though the family has a skin tone preference, the subsequent generation will likely date someone of a skin tone they are not attracted to or someone their family doesn't prefer. However, the results displayed positive and negative correlations between media/social media and dating preferences, but those correlations were not significant.

While much research surrounds the effects of colorism and provides studies demonstrating how so, the lack of Black college students being studied to assess the impact of colorism is what is needed in today's time. This study gives a sense of that, but more work is needed to generalize the effects of colorism on emerging Black adults properly and what influences their dating preferences.



## Appendix A. IRB Approval



Office of

Research & Economic Development

**TO:** Laura Ainsworth  
LSUAM | Col of HSE | Social Work |  
CC00167

**FROM:** Alex Cohen  
Chairman, Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** 21-Oct-2022

**RE:** IRBAM-22-1115

**TITLE:** Colorism Influence: Dating Preferences of  
Black Undergraduate College Men and  
Women Odessa Julia Foster on  
15-Oct-2022 9:49 AM

**SUBMISSION TYPE:** Initial Application

**Review Type:** Exempt

**Risk Factor:** Minimal

**Review Date:** 21-Oct-2022

**Status:** Approved

**Approval Date:** 21-Oct-2022

**Approval Expiration Date:** 20-Oct-2025

**Exempt Category:** 2a

**Requesting Waiver of Informed Consent:** Yes

**Re-review frequency:** Three Years

**Number of subjects approved:** 180

**LSU Proposal Number:**

**By:** Alex Cohen, Chairman

**Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.

3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.**

*\* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/research>*

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## **Appendix B. Survey**

### Survey Questions

1. Are you, Male or Female

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-Binary
- ☐ Prefer not

2. How old are you?

- ☐ 18
- ☐ 19
- ☐ 20
- ☐ 21
- ☐ 22
- ☐ 23
- ☐ 24

3. Do you live on or off your college campus?

- ☐ On
- ☐ Off
- ☐ Prefer Not to Say

4. Please check the box that BEST represents your skin tone.



- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10
- ☐ 11 (11)

### **Family and Colorism**

5. I believe that I have been treated differently from others in my family because of my skin tone.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- 6. Do you believe that people in your family hold prejudice against other Black Americans with darker skin tones?
  - ☐ Definitely Not
  - ☐ Probably Not
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ Probably Yes
  - ☐ Definitely Yes
- 7. Do you believe your family has a skin tone preference when it comes to your dating preferences?
  - ☐ Definitely Not
  - ☐ Probably Not
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ Probably Yes
  - ☐ Definitely Yes
- 8. How often do you believe your family exposed you to the message that light skin tones were better than darker skin tones?
  - ☐ Strongly Disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Neutral
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly Agree

9. Do you believe your extended family exposed you to the message that lighter skin tones were better than darker skin tones? An example of this might be, "if you play in the sun too long, you will become too dark." (Extended family: A family that extends beyond the nuclear family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives, who all live nearby or in one household).

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

10. Do you think you were/have been treated differently based on your skin tone by your family?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

11. Do you think skin tone preference is generational in your family?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

## Media/Social Media

12. I watch videos/tv frequently.

- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Somewhat Frequently
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Not at all

13. Do you use social media frequently?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

14. If you use social media frequently, which platform do you use the most?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Twitter

15. If you use social media, do you believe colorism is prevalent on your social media?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree

- ☐ Strongly Agree

16. Do you feel you fit the standard of beauty based on the media's representation?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

17. Do you use social media, videos/tv, and compare your appearance to the male/female you see?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

18. Do you compare your skin tone to the men/women in the media?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

19. Do the media standards of showcasing lighter skin tones make you wish you had lighter skin?

- ☐ Definitely Not



- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

20. How satisfied are you with your skin tone after viewing media/social media representations of various skin tones?

- ☐ Extremely Dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Satisfied
- ☐ Extremely Satisfied

### Dating Preferences

21. Which skin tone do you find MOST attractive?



- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6

- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10
- ☐ 11

22. Which skin tone do you find MOST attractive in a potential dating partner?



- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10
- ☐ 11

23. Which skin tone do you believe is admired MOST by your family?



- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10
- ☐ 11

24. Would you date someone of a skin tone that you are NOT attracted to?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

25 Do you believe your skin tone is attractive to potential partners?

- ☐ Definitely Not

- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

26 Do you believe if your skin were three shades lighter, you would be considered attractive to potential partners?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes (5)

27 Do you believe if your skin tone were three shades darker, I would be considered attractive to potential partners?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Definitely Yes

28 My skin tone is an issue for potential dating partners.

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Probably Yes

- Definitely Yes

29 Would you change your skin tone to fit a potential dating partner's preference?

- Definitely Not
- Probably Not
- Somewhat
- Probably Yes
- Definitely Yes

30 How satisfied are you with your skin tone?

- Extremely Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Extremely Satisfied

## Appendix C. Recruitment Email

Hello, my name is Odessa Foster, and I am a graduate student from the School of Social Work majoring in Child and Families Studies. I am working with Dr. Ebony Williams to complete my thesis entitled Understanding the Influence of Colorism on the Dating Preferences of Black Undergraduate Students at Predominantly White Institutions.

I would like to invite Black undergraduate students at LSU between the ages of 18 – 24 to participate in this research project by completing a survey found at the link below.

[https://lsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_e2SliLiL15Up6WW](https://lsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_e2SliLiL15Up6WW)



This survey should take you 5 – 8 minutes to complete. This project has been approved by the LSU Institutional Review Board (IRBAM-22-1115) and poses no risk of harm to participants. Your identity will be secured at all times.

Participation is voluntary, but I hope you will choose to be part of this project. For more information, you can contact Odessa Foster ([ofoste4@lsu.edu](mailto:ofoste4@lsu.edu)), Dr. Ebony Williams ([ebonywilliams@lsu.edu](mailto:ebonywilliams@lsu.edu)), or Dr. Laura Ainsworth ([lainsworth@lsu.edu](mailto:lainsworth@lsu.edu)).

Thank you,

Odessa

## **Appendix D. Result Codes**

### **Family Questions**

(Family prejudice)

1. Do you believe that people in your family hold prejudice against other Black Americans with darker skin tones?

(Family preference)

2. Do you believe your family has a skin tone preference when it comes to your dating preferences?

(Family Messages)

3. How often do you believe your family exposed you to the message that light skin tones were better than darker skin tones? (Family Messages)

### **Media/Social Media Questions**

(Media representation)

4. Do you feel you fit the standard of beauty based on the media's representation?  
(Social media comparison)
5. Do you use social media, videos/tv, and compare your appearance to the male/female you see?

(TV comparison)

6. Do you compare your skin tone to the men/women in the media?

(Media standards)

7. Do the media standards of showcasing lighter skin tones make you wish you had lighter skin?

### **Dating**

(Dating1)

8. Which skin tone do you find MOST attractive?

(Dating2)

9. Which skin tone do you find MOST attractive in a potential dating partner?

(Dating4)



10. Would you date someone of a skin tone that you are NOT attracted to?

The quantitative data was then entered into Stata for analysis to determine the answers to the research questions.

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## **Vita**

Odessa J. Foster was born in Flint, Michigan but raised in Amite, Louisiana. She is the daughter of Wylie Foster Sr. and the late Jeanetta Hearn-Foster. She has four children, Emari J., Brielyn B., Averl E., and Silas Smith. She started her journey to further her education in 2008 after graduating from Amite High School. She went to the University of Lafayette for her first year, where she met the love of her life, her husband, Melvin Smith. After getting married and starting her family, she returned to school in 2016 for her Bachelor's. She received her Bachelor's in Family and Consumer Sciences in 2020. She always had a desire to work with children and families, especially those who are underprivileged. In addition to being a full-time mom to her children, she works as a graduate assistant to Dr. Ebony K. Williams and a part-time career coach to high school seniors, helping them create their plans for life after graduation. She plans to further her education by working toward her doctoral degree in Child and Family Studies. She plans to receive her Master's degree in May 2023.