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ASSESSING LATINX COLORISM AND SKIN TONE DATING PREFERENCES

Assessing Latinx Colorism and Skin Tone Dating Preferences

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Author's Note:

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Abstract

Colorism is favoring by individuals of lighter skin over darker skin. This differs from racism because racism is discrimination directed towards racial or ethnic minorities, while colorism typically refers to within-group prejudice. The purpose out of this study is to find out whether and how Latinx individuals' self-perceived skin color, family, and friends influence their dating skin color preference. 145 respondents ages 18 and over completed the In-group Colorism Scale by Harvey, Banks, and Tennial (2017) and answered additional questions on skin tone perceptions on dating, and parent and friend influences. There was no significant connection between self-perceived skin color and dating. There was no friend influences found while in comparison there was a significant influence from parents on the skin tone preferences. Documenting any correlation between Latinx and dating can not only contribute to the understanding of colorism but could open up more dialogue across all racial and ethnic groups about bias and prejudice based on skin tone. Further, I hope that this study will inform critical race studies to combat racial and ethnic inequalities.

Keywords: Colorism, Dating, Latinx

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The U.S Census Bureau counted approximately 58.9 million Latinx¹ people in the United States as of July 1, 2017. The Latinx population (comprised of those of Hispanic/Latin American/Spanish-speaking origins) is the largest growing group at 18.1 percent of the nation's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). One concept that is under-explored among Latinx populations is that of colorism. For this research study, colorism refers to the bias or discrimination that darker-skinned individual's experience, and the favoring of lighter skin (Golash-Boza, 2015). While research on colorism is abundant in African American and Black populations, Latinx research on the topic is less prevalent. Skin color and tone have been seen to affect one's mental health, self-esteem, income, education level, and perceptions of others (Hunter, 2002). However, skin tone has not been looked at in terms of effecting potential dating and marriage partners. Researches have shown that endogamy-marriage within one's own racial or ethnic group- is common in the Latinx population (Vasquez, 2015). Endogamy refers to intermarriage or people marrying within own racial or ethnic group (Vasquez, 2015). There is also little research on the influence of friends and parents on an individual's dating preferences involving skin color. I looked at the social group dynamics to understand a friend's influences on dating preferences. By using past research I anticipate that parent influence will be significant for this research. The main purpose of this research is to investigate the concept of colorism and the influences of social groups on Latinx adult's self-perceived skin color and their color skin preferences.

Colorism

Colorism is a global occurrence with a long history that is displayed in different ways around the world (Golash-Boza, 2015). Colorism is often connected to racism but occurs

¹ Latinx is a gender-neutral term to identify any individuals with Latin American or Hispanic backgrounds.

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exclusively within non-white communities of color; it refers to the hierarchy of skin color and tone, where lighter skin is viewed as superior (Alvarez, 2019; Hiplatina, 2018; Hunter, 2002). Dating back to European colonization, many groups judge themselves based on whiteness or lack thereof; these skin color hierarchies are significant to privileges because they continue to affect people of color (Hunter, 2002). Colonialism studies address research on skin color classification in the Latin American and African American populations. This is significant because there are differences in income, education, and segregation within living environments, as well as in other areas based on skin tone (Hunter, 2002). In Latin America, skin-color hierarchies have existed, for centuries (Golash-Boza, 2015). This can all be dated back to when Latin America was part of the Spanish colonies, they developed a system called Castas a system that would determine your social and legal status based on ancestry (Golash-Boza, 2015). While these divide the people into categories based on ancestry and not skin color, looking at physical traits Spanish ancestry meant lighter skin and more status (Golash-Boza, 2015). The Castas remains over time developed into a skin color hierarchy. Where preference for skin colors have been internalized ideals that be passed down through generations. In Latin America, these categories are no longer in place, but the inequalities are still persistent (Golash-Boza, 2015). Darker skin tones are allegedly seen more negatively than lighter skin tones. Studies on skin color have often brought up that brownness and blackness have been associated with terms like slothfulness or ugliness, while whiteness was associated with courtesy, astuteness, and attractiveness (Quiros & Dawson, 2013, Hunter, 2002). These kinds of judgments are closely associated with the stereotypes in culture (Landor & Halpern, 2016). Looking at how stereotypes and biases are formed there is a focus on the physical appearances of different racial/ethnic groups. Scholars have found that skin color is associated with the perception of self-worth and attractiveness (Thompson & Keith,

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2001; Cash & Duncan 1984). Therefore people with lighter skin tones are more likely to marry sooner and people commonly prefer partners with lighter skin tones (Landor & Halpern, 2016).

Dating and Endogamy

Racism, colorism, and dating preferences have always been interrelated. As observed by Aoki (2002, pp. 589), “Darwin believed that racial differences in skin color were caused by sexual selection.” However, through history skin color has also been selected against society. Historically the United States has had laws to avoid racial mixing to protect whiteness (Vasquez 2015). Low intermarriage- marriage within a different racial or ethnic group- rates are a problem because it normalizes single-race families and makes mixed families seem atypical (Vasquez, 2015). Skin colors have been correlated to dating preferences (Stephens, Fernández, & Richman, 2012). Latinx families have been found to have great influences over their children’s dating preferences, given that skin color is a value in interpersonal relationships (Stephens, Fernández & Richman, 2012). Studies have shown that Latinx parents influence their children’s close relationships, especially when it comes to dating and marriage (Stephens, Fernandez, & Richman, 2019). Vasquez (2015) addresses how endogamy or intragroup marriage is common in the United States, such as; legal and social practices that have kept our society racially divided and have sustained a racist society (Vasquez 2015). Vasquez (2015) determined that Latinos tend to reserve themselves from blacks and support intermarriage. Intragroup relations are common in 87 percent of the United States, meaning that individuals tend to marry “within their own racial category” (Vasquez 2015, pp 456). Existing research on skin tone and mate selection shows lighter skin individuals marry sooner, while in darker skin individual’s marriage is less common (Landor, & Halpern, 2016). It is unclear if lighter skin colors or darker skin colors in the Latinx population also results in faster or lower marriages. On the other hand, Garcia (2015) states that

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Latinos make up 26 percent of interracial-different racial and ethnic groups- marriages as of 2010. O'Brien (2008) classifies Latinos in the US into the “racial middle”, where Latinos are “not black” but not accepted as “white” either. Marriage rates of Latinos are closely compared to those of white women (Garcia, 2015). The Latinx population has higher interracial marriage rates than Black populations (Garcia, 2015). Since Latinos are in the middle they tend to have more contact with whites, which have led to higher intermarriage rates with whites than blacks (O'Brien, 2008). In Latin America individuals deliberately chose romantic partners who have light skin, hoping that their children will be lighter and have a better social status (Golash-Boza, 2015). In Latin America people called this strategy “mejorando la raza or improving the race” (Sue, 2009), this means that Latin American or Latinx may marry someone darker than them but might still favor Light skin colors. This is significant because as part of the racial middle in the US this would predict if Latinos assimilate thought marriages into “whites,” or become part of the “black” category (Vasquez, 2015).

Parent and Friends Influences

Skin color is the most noticeable physical feature, which is how the construction of race and ethnicity was developed. Not only does skin color create labels but it also led to characteristics classification within race and ethnicity groups. (Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999; Henderson, 2009). In the United States, two out of five people reported that they would not be content if a family married someone of a different race (Lehmiller et al., 2014). If someone important like a friend or parent dislikes the person you like, it would create tension. Social group perceptions are responsible for intergroup occurrences like stereotyping and prejudice (Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999). Even if individuals are no aware influence form social groups might affect how they view others. Especially to young adults who develop their

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partners' interests from peer networks (Seffrin et al., 2009). These peer groups create a support system and connections that could potentially lead to future relationships (Friedlander et al., 2007). Overall, social groups have shown that they greatly influence one's beliefs and support of stereotypes (Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999). This is why I believe that looking at social group influences it may lead us to find out where these social ideals are coming from.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to explore colorism among Latinx adults in terms of their self-perceptions, dating preferences, and influences from family and friends. This is important because it can provide more research on Latinx community intragroup relationships and systemic racism more broadly. By researching skin color, I hope to understand the population's struggles. While colorism is influenced by westernized ideals, looking at the value that the affected group holds can also explain the prevalence of colorism in the population. Research has shown that there might be a connection between an individual's skin color self-perception and the skin color of partner preferences within the African American population (Cosbert, 2019). While some research does touch on skin color dating preferences I want to further investigate how this basis is manifesting and is influenced. My findings contribute to the understanding of why Latinx marriages are closer to the rates of lighter skin individuals (Vasquez, 2015). It provides research on colorism and in-group biases. It is unique because it focuses on the participant's skin perception and its connection to seeking a partner.

Methods

To address my research questions, I conducted a quantitative study among self-identifying Latinx individuals age 18 and over. I created a survey to find the correlation between

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the participants' perceived skin color and views about skin color as well as dating preferences by skin tone. The survey was conducted via Qualtrics and was distributed electronically in March 2020. After the informed consent form the survey asked demographic questions. The survey started with demographic questions like age, gender identity, education, and other background questions as shown in. The survey then asked questions about skin tone perceptions and feelings, dating preferences by skin tone, and how the participants' parents and friends influence impact participant's dating preferences. These questions can be found in Appendix A.

In this study, I also used the In-Group Colorism Scale that was developed by Richard D. Harvey, Rachel E. Tennial, and Kira Hudson Banks in their study of African Americans (2017). It assesses five different areas; self-concept, attraction, affiliation, upward mobility, and impression formation. Self-concept refers to the grade to which a person finds their skin color significant to how they assess themselves. The attraction is the grade to which one finds their skin color attractive. Affiliation is the desire to associate and socialize with others centered on skin color. Upward mobility is how one's skin color experience and opportunities shape their life. Impression formation of the skin color associated with characteristics associated with a person or people (Canada, 2017; Harvey, Tennial, & Hudson Banks, K. 2017). I found this scale to be more useful since it has some questions that encompass attraction and perceived skin color. Participants completed the In-Group Colorism Scale that is 20 questions where participants used the Likert scale. This scale is found in appendix A, example questions include "My skin tone is an important part of my self-concept" and "Dark-skinned people are more difficult to work with". I particularly chose this scale because it covered other areas that can also shape the perception of an individual's skin color.

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The surveys asked participants to choose their perceived skin color from the Princeton University PERLA Color Palette. This scale is in appendix A. The skin color chart has a total of 11-skin color tones. The reason I used this scale is that it is more inclusive of different skin colors and multiple ethnicities than other scales I found used in other studies. The Latinx population is a community where skin color varies and may include multiple ethnicities. The palette was numbered 1 through 11 and participants were able to choose the skin color that closely resembled them. The palette was broken into three categories of Light (1-3), Medium (4-7), and Dark (8-11).

For this study, I used Qualtrics for frequency analysis of my results. I used SPSS to do the statistical analyses for the In-Group Colorism Scale. I also looked at if the individual friend group and parent's influence impacted dating preferences. Other variables of interest that could potentially be relevant are gender identity, age, and education level.

Sample

The survey sample is comprised of Latinx adults. Participants were not required to be college students or to be attending UNC. Given that I am a UNC student, I used my connections in different departments and groups around campus to recruit participants. I recruited additional participants via social media and connections.

For this study 145 participants completed the survey. From the sample, 81% were young adults in the ages between 18 to 25 years old and the remaining 19% were ages 27-46 years old. The majority of participants identified as females (82%) and a total of 16% of our sample identified as males. The remaining 2% identified as genderqueer/gender nonconforming or as other. 87% of our participants were born in the United States while 13% were not. All of our

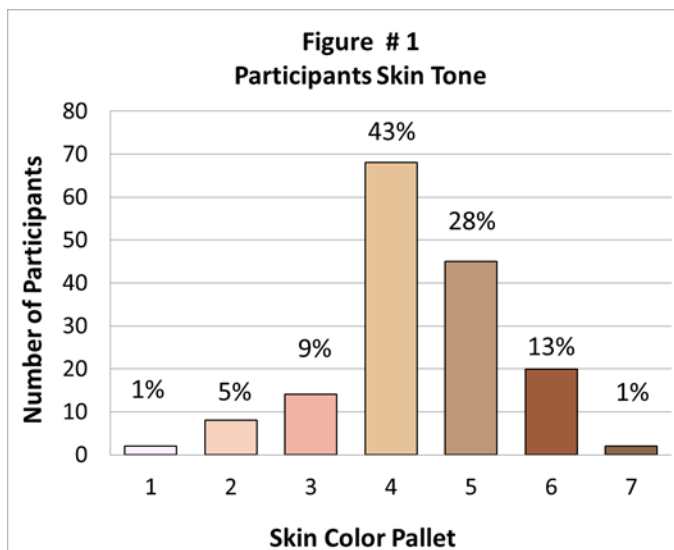
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sample had some kind of educational background. 6% of our sample had completed high school. Most of our participants said they had taken some college (45%), while 12% of them had an associate and 26% had a bachelor's degree. The rest of our participants at 11% had a masters and 1% had a doctoral degree. When I asked the participants what ethnicities with the Latinx identity they identified with, 80% reported Mexican. In summary, the sample is largely female, U.S.-born, educated at or above some college, and Mexican.

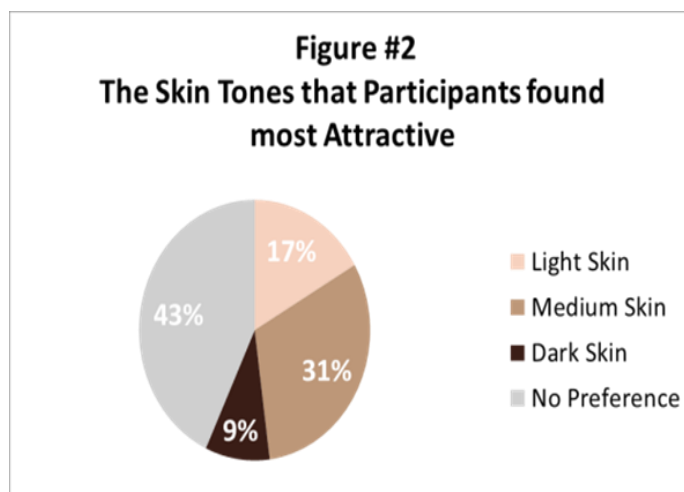
Results

To evaluate the results of this study, it is important to remember the research question. The first question is about the perception and preferences of a potential partner's skin color. To assess this question I looked at the participant's self-perceived skin and the questions that were about attractiveness. From our three categories in the PERLA color palette, participants only identified in the light skin and the medium skin tones. Out of the 165, only 160 participant's responses were recorded for the question what is your self-perceived skin tone? There was a total of 15% identified as Light skin tone. 85% identified as Medium skin with the majority choosing skin tone #4 of the pallet chart (See Figure 1). What was surprising was that 0% identified in the Dark skin tone.

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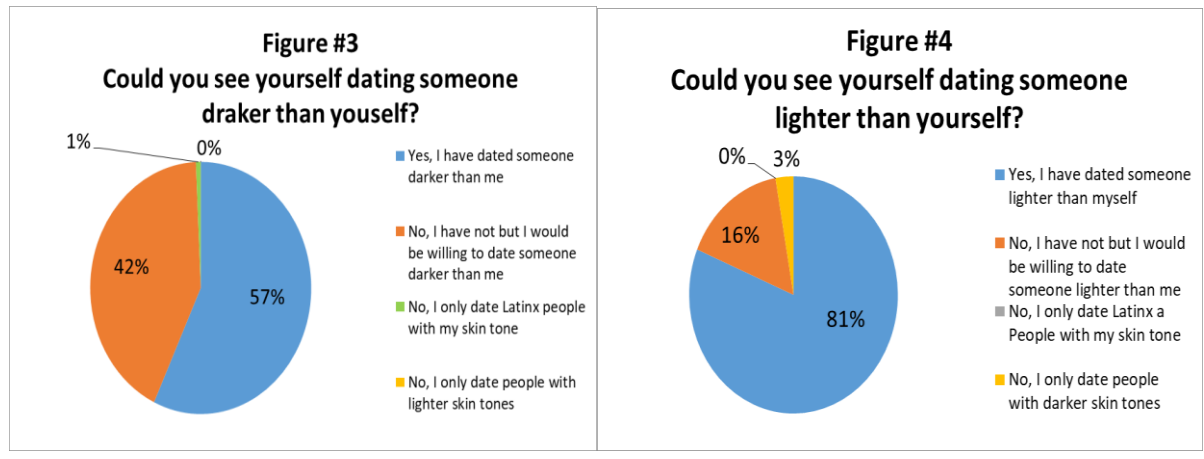
The next question I looked at was the skin color tone you find most attractive. For this question 145 out of 165 responded. The majority at 43% said they have no preference. 31% found medium skin tone more attractive while 17% said they found a lighter skin tone more attractive. Only 9% of survey respondents said they were more attracted to darker skin tone (See Figure 2).



For the question, “could you see yourself dating someone darker than yourself”, 145 out 160 responded to the question (See Figure 3). 57% said they had dated someone darker than themselves and 42% said they had not but would be willing to date someone darker than themselves in comparison, 81% responded that they had dated someone lighter than themselves

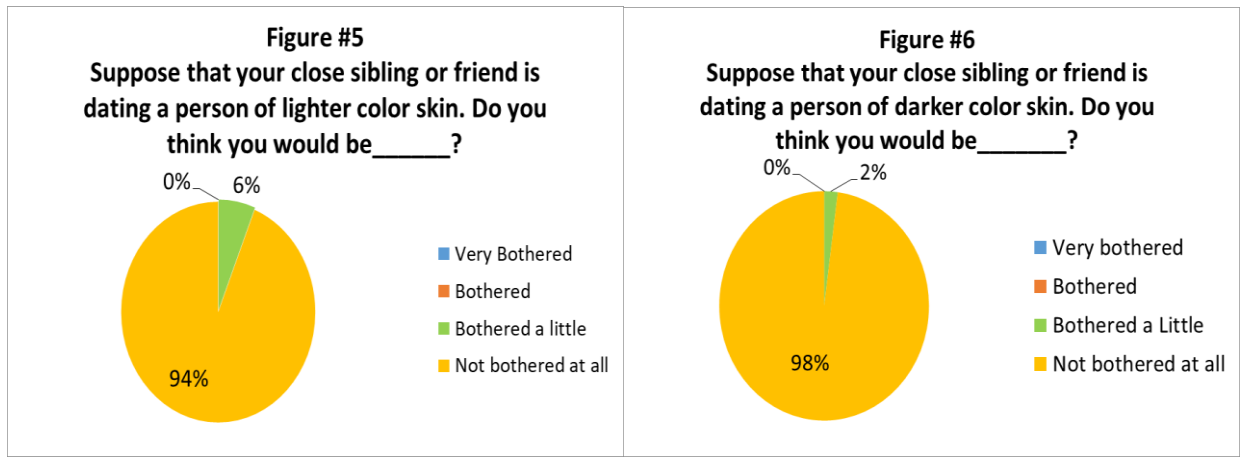
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(See Figure 4). While 16% said they had not but would be willing to date someone lighter than themselves.

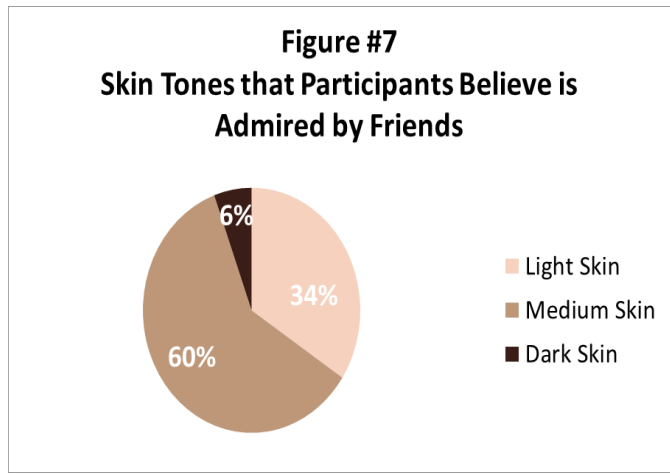


The next series of questions is to find out if the participant would be bothered if someone they care about was dating someone of a lighter or darker skin tone. 145 out of the 160 answered the question “suppose that your close sibling or friend is dating a person of lighter skin tone. Do you think you would be _____?” Almost all at 94% said they would not be bothered at all (See figure 5). Surprisingly 6% said that they would be bothered a little. When I asked about a darker skin color, I found that 98% said they would not be bothered by a close sibling or friend dating a person of darker skin tone (See Figure 6).

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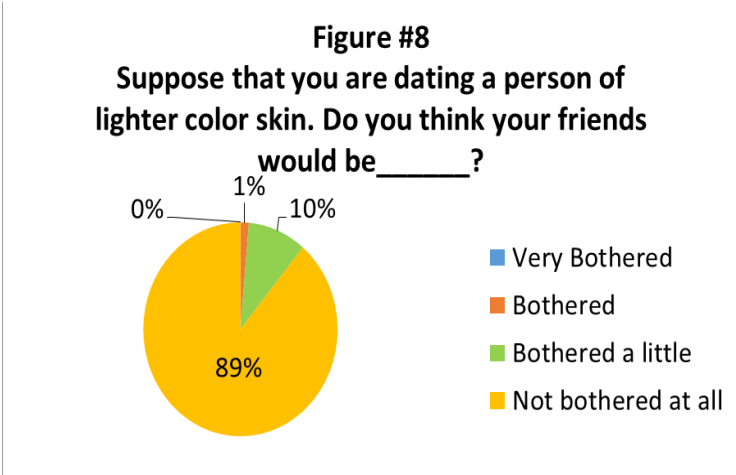


Our second research question focuses on how peers influenced mate selection by asking participants what skin tone they believed was admired by their friends (See figure 7). 143 out of the 160 participants answered this question. 60% believed that their friends admired medium skin tones. 34% said that they believed that their friends admired lighter skin tones. Only 6% believed that their friends admired darker skin tones.

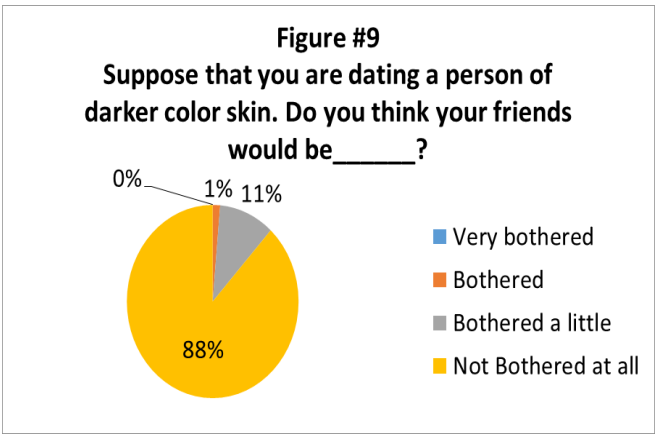


I then asked them how bothered did they believe their friends would be if they were dating a person of lighter skin (see figure 8). 145 out of the 160 responded. 89% of participants responded that they thought their friends would not be bothered, while 10% responded that their friends would be bothered a little.

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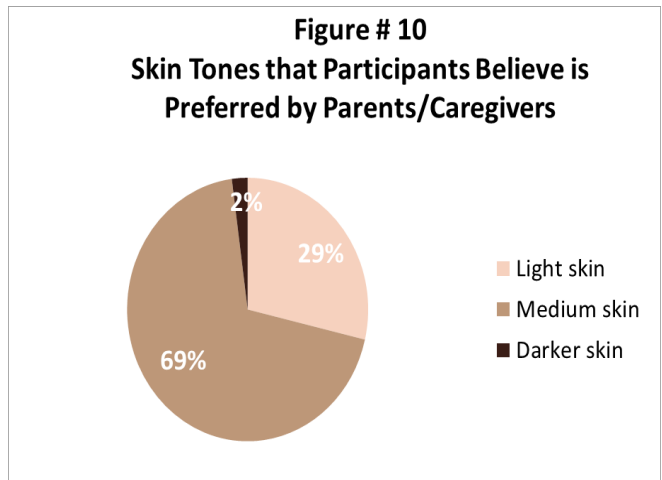
Then again I asked the question if they were dating a person of darker skin tone if their friends would be bothered if they dated someone of darker skin tone (see figure 9). 145 out of 160 responded. The results were similar to the lighter skin tone question. 88% said that they thought their friends would not be bothered at all. While 11% said they thought that their friends would be bothered a little if they dated someone of darker skin tones.



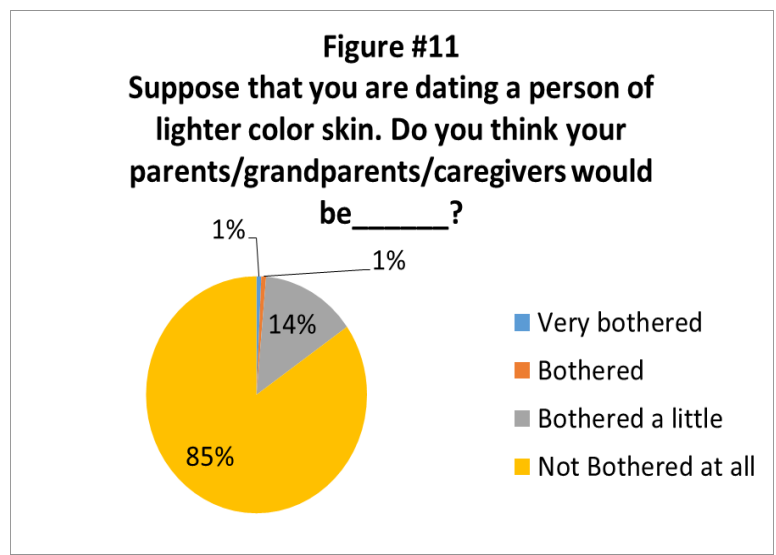
Our last question looked at the parent’s influence on dating preferences. Participants were asked what skin tones they believed their parents or caregivers preferred (see figure 10). 143 out of 160 answered the question. 69% said that they thought that medium skin was their parents’ or

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caregivers' preference, while 29% said lighter skin would be preferred by the parents or caregiver. While only 2% said their parents would prefer a darker skin tone.



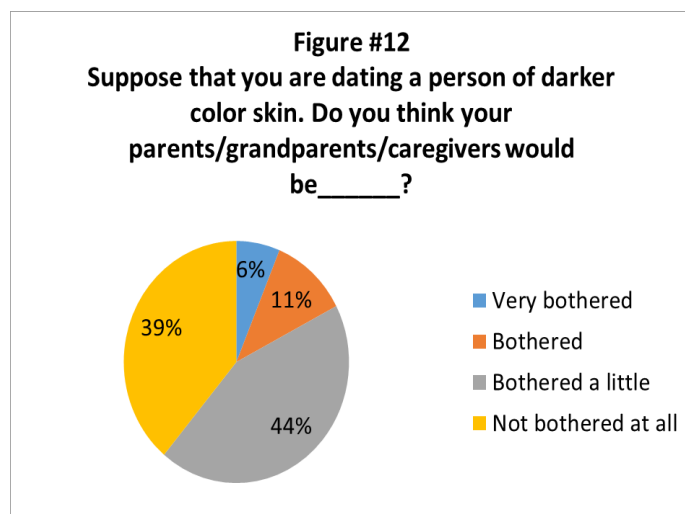
For the question asking if they were dating a person of lighter skin tones would their caregiver be bothered, 85% responded that they thought their caregiver would not be bothered at all (see figure 11). 14% of participants said they believed their caregivers would be bothered a little, 2% said that their caregivers would be bothered and very bothered.



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The question that was the most interesting for this group supposed that you are dating a darker skin tone individual. “Do you think your parents/caregivers would be darker skin tones a ____?”

39% said that their caregivers would not be bothered at all (see figure 12). However, 44% said they believed their caregiver would be bothered a little. 11% responded that their caregiver would be bothered. While 6% believed their caregiver would be very bothered.



Additional results

With the In-group colorism scale, I found no correlation between an individual’s self-perceived skin color and the attractiveness questions. When I used the PERLA color palette I split it into three different categories (light skin, medium skin, and dark skin) I took the light skin and medium skin categories and did a correlation against the in-group colorism scale. I found that there was no correlation between an individual's self-perceived skin color and the questions from the in-group colorism scale. The only questions that I saw a slight difference in were the self-concept. It was interesting to find out those individuals identified in the medium skin tone category had a higher self-concept than those identified in the lighter skin color category.

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Discussion

I did not find a correlation between self-perceived skin tones and dating preferences. As I had hope, I found that most people are open to dating people from different skin tones. The research could indicate that some norms might be changing. People are being more open-minded to dating people with different skin tones and the possibility of different ethnic backgrounds. I did find that parents and or caregivers might also be passing values to individuals about whom they are dating.

For future studies, I might want to closely focus on parent influences. I did think that there would be some influences for friends. I was surprised to find none. I would also like to see if the results would change if I had a sample of younger participants. If I had the opportunity to redo the study, I would like to do some follow up interviews with some of the participants.

One big limitation was that it was an online survey. Because of this, I was not able to ask more in-depth questions of why individuals choose these answers. Our sample was larger than I thought I would have, but it was not enough to find any significant correlation between groups. For a correlation, I would need an even bigger sample size. I would like to focus on learning more about parent's influences on Latinx individuals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I set out to learn more about what dating preference within the Latinx community looked like. I found that while there may be no influence by friends, parents very much influence dating preferences. Many of my Latinx samples thought themselves as more of the medium and light skin tone ranges and avoid the darker skin ranges. The mediums skin tone

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ranges have a better self-concept. More research and a bigger sample size in the future would be beneficial. Dating is complex and with Latinx being the middle racial ideals may be changing.

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Appendix A**In-Group Colorism Scale (Harvey, Banks & Tennial, 2017)**

Instructions: This questionnaire includes statements regarding your personal views about skin color. Use the scale to respond to each statement based upon how true it is for you. In the column next to each item, click in the category that best describes your response to each statement.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Agree or Disagree

- _____ 1. My skin tone is an important part of my self-concept
- _____ 2. My skin tone is an important component of who I am
- _____ 3. My skin tone affects my self-esteem
- _____ 4. My skin tone is a big part of my identity
- _____ 5. You can tell a lot about a person by their skin tone
- _____ 6. Latinx with lighter skin tone tend to be more pleasant people to deal with
- _____ 7. Dark skinned people are more difficult to work with
- _____ 8. There are real differences between light skin and dark skinned people
- _____ 9. I'm usually uncomfortable being around people who are a certain skin tone
- _____ 10. Most of my friends tend to be the same skin tone
- _____ 11. I usually choose who I'm going to be friends with by their skin tone
- _____ 12. The majority of my current friends are the same skin tone as me
- _____ 13. I'm primarily attracted to people of a certain skin tone
- _____ 14. I prefer light skin over dark complexion skin when choosing romantic interests
- _____ 15. I prefer a romantic partner who has the same skin tone as me
- _____ 16. Lighter skin tone makes others more attractive
- _____ 17. Even if you work really hard, your skin tone matters most
- _____ 18. Skin tone plays a big part in determining how far you can make it
- _____ 19. Skin tone affects how much money you can make
- _____ 20. If you want to get ahead, you have to be the right skin tone

ASSESSING LATINX COLORISM AND SKIN TONE DATING PREFERENCES

This is a survey of Latinx young adults about skin tone.

Questionnaire (Using the color skin chart categories)

While it's impossible to represent all skin tones or have a universal scale of tone, for purposes of this research we are using 11 skin tones. Please review the following 11 categories of different tones and chose the one that most closely resemble your skin tone.

1. What is your self-perceived skin tone? _____

While it's impossible to represent all skin tones or have a universal scale of tone, for purposes of this research we are using 3 groups of skin tones. Please review the following 3 categories of different tones generally divided by Light, Medium, or Dark.

2. In your household growing up, please indicate the other individuals besides you, and their skin tone. Please include anyone that lived in your household (or households if you lived across multiple homes) with you at any time growing up.

- Mother _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Mother #2 _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Father _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Father #2 _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Grandmother _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Grandfather _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Grandmother #2 _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Grandfather #2 _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Sibling #1 _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Sibling #2 _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Sibling #3 _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Sibling #4 _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Stepmother _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Stepfather _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Other Relative _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark
- Others _____ Light ___ Medium ___ Dark

3. What skin color of dating relationships partners do you believe is preferred most by your family?

- Lighter skin
- Medium skin
- Dark skin

4. Thinking of your closest friends, what would you say is the percentage of friends you have (including non-Latinx friends) who are in each skin tone category?

- Light skin _____
- Medium skin _____
- Dark skin _____

ASSESSING LATINX COLORISM AND SKIN TONE DATING PREFERENCES

5. What skin color of dating relationships partners do you believe is admired most by your friends?
- Light skin
 - Medium skin
 - Dark skin
6. Have you ever had a crush on a person of a different skin color or different skin tone, or do you already have a crush on one?
- Yes, I have had a crush on someone of a different skin tone
 - Yes, I have a crush on someone of a different skin tone
 - No, only date Latinx people with my skin tone
 - No, I have never had a crush on someone of a different skin tone
7. Could you see yourself dating someone darker than yourself?
- Yes, I have dated someone darker than me
 - Yes, I would be willing to date someone darker than me
 - No, I only date Latinx people with my skin tone
 - No, I only date people with lighter skin tones
8. Could you see yourself dating someone Lighter than yourself?
- Yes, I have dated someone lighter than myself
 - Yes, I would be willing to date someone lighter than me
 - No, only date Latinx people with my skin tone
 - No, I only date people with darker skin tone
10. How many dating relationships partners have you had in the following skin tone ranges?
- Light skin _____
 - Medium skin _____
 - Dark skin _____
11. Select the skin color tone do you find more attractive?
- Light skin
 - Medium skin
 - Dark skin
13. Suppose that your close sibling or friend is dating a person of lighter color skin. Do you think you would be very bothered, bothered, bothered a little or not bothered at all?
- Very bothered
 - Bothered
 - Bothered a little
 - Not bothered at all
14. Suppose that your close sibling or friend is dating a person of darker color skin. Do you think you would be very bothered, bothered, bothered a little or not bothered at all?

ASSESSING LATINX COLORISM AND SKIN TONE DATING PREFERENCES

- Very bothered
- Bothered
- Bothered a little
- Not bothered at all

15. Suppose that your close sibling or friend is dating a person of lighter color skin. Do you think you would be very bothered, bothered, bothered a little or not bothered at all?

- Very bothered
- Bothered
- Bothered a little
- Not bothered at all

16. Suppose that you are dating a person of lighter color skin. Do you think your friend would be very bothered, bothered, bothered a little or not bothered at all?

- Very bothered
- Bothered
- Bothered a little
- Not bothered at all

17. Suppose that you are dating a person of lighter color skin. Do you think your family would be very bothered, bothered, bothered a little or not bothered at all?

- Very bothered
- Bothered
- Bothered a little
- Not bothered at all

18. Suppose that your close sibling or friend is dating a person of darker color skin. Do you think you would be very

- Very bothered
- Bothered
- Bothered a little
- Not bothered at all

19. Suppose that you are dating a person of darker color skin. Do you think your friend would be very?

- Very bothered
- Bothered
- Bothered a little
- Not bothered at all

20. Suppose that you are dating a person of darker color skin. Do you think your family would be very?

- Very bothered
- Bothered

ASSESSING LATINX COLORISM AND SKIN TONE DATING PREFERENCES

- Bothered a little
- Not bothered at all

ASSESSING LATINX COLORISM AND SKIN TONE DATING PREFERENCES

PERLA Color Palette



The altered color palette used in the survey for this study