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Attitudinal Judgments of Dialect Traits and Colorism in African Americans

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This study demonstrates how language and complexion influence professional and social perceptions of African Americans. This study contains an online verbal-guise survey where participants either saw a photo of a lighter skin-toned African-American male and female or an electronically darkened version. Audio was attached to each photo, which contains traits of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the case of the male and Standard American English (SAE) for the female. The results suggest African-American females are more likely to experience colorism in professional traits while African-American males are more likely to experience colorism in social traits. Additionally, the respondent's race influences perceptions of AAVE.

1 Introduction

1.1 African-American Vernacular English

Raciolinguistics is a term used to show how language influences racial prejudice and race in turn influences linguistic prejudice (Alim et al. 2016). Language has been frequently shown to be a marker of identity (Fought 2006, Coulmas 2013, Britt and Weldon 2015). People use language to index important facets of their lives such as their ethnicity, gender, age, and social class. These identities do not occur in isolation; rather, they intersect with each other. The speaker can choose to emphasize or reduce their membership in different social groups in various contexts by code-switching, using specific phonetic, syntactic, or lexical traits, and through intonational patterns (Fought 2006). Outside of racial divisions, previous research has looked at the distinction between power versus solidarity in the perception of linguistic variants. Preston (2004) suggests there is a tradeoff between the perceived correctness/status of your speech and the pleasantness/friendliness of your speech.

African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a speech variety usually associated with urban and lower class African Americans that is characterized by both phonological and morphosyntactic traits (Britt and Weldon 2015). The morphosyntactic traits of AAVE potentially index a stigmatized, lower socioeconomic class indication. Syntactic traits of AAVE include using “be” to indicate that an event habitually occurs, copula deletion, “had + verb” to form simple past tense, and a lack of overtly-marked subject-verb accordance in third person present sentences, while phonological traits include consonant cluster reduction, postvocalic r-lessness, and changing interdental fricatives into labiodental fricatives. AAVE is perceived to have covert prestige but not overt prestige (Fought 2006). This means the language variant is viewed favorably in some contexts, such as locally among community members as a display of solidarity, but it does not receive mainstream appeal. In this paper, I argue that the complex linguistic situation of African Americans is informed by other factors as well, such as colorism, and impacts their professional and social lives.

1.2 Colorism

In addition to the use of AAVE traits, the perception of African Americans is also influenced by the shade of their skin. Colorism is when a lighter skin-toned individual of the same race is met with privileges lost upon their darker skin-toned counterparts, including upward mobility through marriage, higher income, earning more money, living in better neighborhoods, and attending school longer (Hunter 2007).

Colorism of African Americans has a history dating back to slave times where lighter skin-toned African Americans were able to work in the house, while the darker skin-toned African Americans were subjected to working in the fields of plantations. The European-American slave owners sometimes had (often nonconsensual) affairs with their slaves, resulting in children who were mixed race. The one drop rule asserted that if you had one drop of African-American blood, you were considered African American. Because of this rule, the “mulatto” children, who often had lighter complexions, were categorized as black (Fought 2006).

Historically, African Americans were also overtly judged by other African Americans based on their skin tone. In order to be allowed entrance into some businesses and organizations owned by African Americans, their skin tone had to be lighter than a paper bag (Fought 2006). These paper bag tests show how colorism was present among members of the African-American community.

Colorism within the African-American community is still alive in the present day. Some darker skin-toned people even engage in the toxic practice of skin bleaching, which can lead to many skin disorders and infections. Some use this dangerous tool because they think having lighter-toned skin makes them become more attractive to

potential romantic partners and more likely to receive socioeconomic privileges. Based on a national survey, one article reported that darker skin-toned African Americans were more likely to be impoverished compared to lighter skin-toned African Americans, and the groups tend to show different racial attitudes towards European-American people and differences in how they attribute their success as either resulting from internal or external factors (Bowman et al. 2003). Another study showed that lighter skin-toned African Americans were perceived as more competent than darker complexioned African Americans (Breland 1997). These findings highlight the larger societal impacts of colorism and why it is important that more study is devoted to the phenomenon.

1.3 Discrimination

Evidence of discrimination against African Americans has been found in their professional and social lives. Studies have demonstrated how AAVE and colorism impact various facets of African-American lives separately. The present study is the only to research the interaction between both colorism and AAVE at the same time.

1.3.1 Professional Life: Employment, Education, and the Law

The skin tone and speech style of African-American people influences how they are perceived by potential employers and by people in other positions of professional authority. The characteristics important for professional life that are included in the current paper are “correct” English, trustworthiness, professionalism, being educated sounding, and comprehensibility.

An analysis of the speech of Rachel Jeantel, the leading witness in Trayvon Martin’s case provides evidence of linguistic discrimination against AAVE (Rickford and King 2016). Due to Rachel Jeantel’s usage of AAVE with Caribbean influence, her testimonial was largely disregarded by the jurors as incomprehensible and unreliable (Rickford and King 2016). These findings indicate that the use of AAVE can negatively influence the speakers’ credibility and trustworthiness.

Evidence of discrimination was also found in a study evaluating teachers’ expectations of students. Shepard (2011) found that teachers had a lower expectation of verbal responses said to be reported by second and third grade Hispanic and African-American children, even though it was the same exact response as their European-American counterparts. Especially in African-American and Hispanic teachers, there was a low expectation of African-American and Hispanic boys as compared to European-American students.

There has also been evidence of discrimination against AAVE in written work. Controlling for content and cohesion of the writing piece, Johnson and VanBrackle (2012) highlight how “errors” in writing caused by the inclusion of African-American English traits are graded more harshly than English as a Second Language (ESL) and Standard American English (SAE) errors and were failed at a higher percentage than the ESL and SAE errors. This shows how the syntactic traits which are normalized, accepted, and characteristic of AAVE, are viewed as ungrammatical and lower the perceived level of education of the writer.

When comparing high school students of the same race, one study found that lighter skin-toned students received higher grades than their darker skin-toned counterparts even when accounting for influential factors such as family background (Thompson and McDonald 2016). Thompson and McDonald’s (2016) study also found that teachers tended to punish darker skin-toned students more severely and have more negative relationships with them. It is an open question if there is increased discrimination against AAVE speakers who also have a darker tone of skin.

1.3.2 Social Life: Housing, Friendships, and Social Capital

The skin tone and speech type of African Americans also influences how they are socially perceived. Traits characteristic of social attractiveness included in this study are attractiveness, pleasantness, and friendliness.

Prior work includes a matched guise study (Purnell et al. 1999) where the same speaker inquired about available apartments over the telephone using three sets of dialect traits: AAVE, Chicano English, and SAE. When Baugh in the Purnell et al. study (1999) indexed the Chicano English or AAVE in his linguistic repertoire, he was more likely to be told by the landlord that there was no housing availability. This indicates evidence of linguistic profiling and discrimination and how these can influence where African Americans are able to live and in turn with whom they are able to interact.

Britt and Weldon’s (2015) article highlights how members of the middle class tend to strive towards the overtly prestigious variety, i.e., SAE, even hypercorrecting themselves to do so out of a sense of insecurity in their

speech. This puts middle class African Americans at an interesting intersection between indexing their racial identity and maintaining their class distinction.

Colorism potentially has more of an impact on African-American females, because females tend to be judged more by their appearance than males (Mathews 2013). Mathew's (2013) study consisted of a questionnaire with qualitative and quantitative prompts that was completed by 95 undergraduate female students attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), with 23% of the respondents self-reporting as light complexioned, 55% identifying as medium complexioned, and 20% considering themselves dark complexioned. It is worth noting that there was not an image associated with the skin tone options, so the respondents might have had different impressions of each shade. Mathews (2013) also suggests that African-American males seek out lighter skin-toned African-American females or European-American women in order to increase their social capital. Because of this preference, African-American males may be the perpetrators continuing contemporary colorism. In a survey of all African-American female respondents, 77% responded with "dark" in the question "people think _____ skin is unattractive" (Mathews 2013). An analysis conducted by Hill (2002) found that African-American females with lighter skin tones were perceived as more attractive by African-American respondents; the same effect was not found in the attractiveness of African-American males. It is worth noting that the Hill (2002) analysis was based on survey data collected from participants rating the attractiveness of real people after conducting face-to-face interviews with them, that skin tone was not an isolated variable (since the ratings were ascribed to people after an in-person interview), and that other physical and personality traits that can influence perceived attractiveness were not recorded.

1.4 Hypotheses

This is the first sociolinguistic study exploring the intersection of AAVE traits and colorism on the perception of African Americans. In light of the existence of colorism and discrimination against AAVE, my research specifically investigates which perceptual traits result in variable discrimination towards African Americans, and how skin tone and AAVE are perceived by other African Americans and European-American people. In the African-American community, I hypothesize that a lighter complexioned African-American female will be perceived more favorably socially and as more physically attractive professionally, as having a more pleasant-sounding voice, and as sounding more professional. I also hypothesize that respondents will perceive a lighter complexioned African-American male more favorably professionally and socially as more friendly, trustworthy, and attractive visually and audibly. Based on Preston's (2004) proposed tradeoff between correctness and friendliness/pleasantness, I hypothesize that AAVE will be perceived as more friendly/pleasant than correct by both European-American and African-American respondents and that SAE will sound more correct than friendly or pleasant by European-American and African-American respondents. This study aims to provide more information on whether there is a particular demographic perpetuating contemporary colorism and prejudice against AAVE.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

In total, 285 people completed the survey. Participants were recruited using social media platforms and by distributing cards with the link to the survey in person. The participants that were recruited in person were primarily students and staff of Dartmouth College, and they were offered light snacks. Since the hypotheses focus on the perception of African Americans and European Americans, respondents that did not identify as African American or European American were excluded from the analysis. This means 201 of the responses were included in the data analysis.

As part of the demographic questions, participants were asked to report their socioeconomic status out of four options: working class, lower middle class, upper middle class, or upper class. Participants that responded with working class and lower middle class were grouped together as "lower" in terms of socioeconomic status, and participants that responded with upper middle class and upper class were combined as "higher" during analysis.

There were two versions of the study that the participants could complete: Version 1 containing the lighter skin-toned African-American female and male, and Version 2 containing the darker skin-toned African-American female and male. Table 1 shows the gender and socioeconomic divide of African-American and European-American respondents in Version 1. Table 2 shows the gender and socioeconomic divide of African-American and European-American respondents in Version 2.

Table 1: Respondents to the light skin-toned survey

		African American	European American	Total
Gender Divide	Female	14	44	58
	Male	5	36	41
	Non-Binary	0	1	1
Socioeconomic Divide	Higher	7	56	63
	Lower	11	25	36
	Unreported	1	0	1
Total		19	81	100

Table 2: Respondents to the dark skin-toned survey

		African American	European American	Total
Gender Divide	Female	28	36	64
	Male	6	29	35
	Non-Binary	1	1	2
Socioeconomic Divide	Higher	13	39	52
	Lower	19	27	46
	Unreported	3	0	3
Total		35	66	101

2.2 Design

The independent variable that was manipulated was the skin tone (light complexion or dark complexion) of the African-American person in the image. We also used two different speech type: AAVE and SAE, but since the variable was not isolated, the speech types cannot be directly compared against each other (see Section 4). We measured perception using a Likert scale on multiple traits with a range from 1 to 6 — an even number that prevented respondents from providing a neutral rating.

2.3 Materials





This verbal-guise experiment (Cooper and Fishman 1974) included videos consisting of still pictures with attached audio clips of a person speaking (see Figure 1). There were two versions of the survey, each with six photos, consisting of one African-American female, one African-American male, and four distractor images (see Table 9 in Appendix B). There was an additional tester that was removed from the analysis (see Table 10 in Appendix C). These photos were selected from publicly available stock photos. After making a selection of photos of light skin-toned African Americans who appear to be around the same age, the photos were electronically darkened using Photoshop. Skin tone was the manipulated variable, while the attached audio clip was the same in both tester stimuli. The audio clips for the tester images were original recordings by voice actors who provided consent to

have their voices included in the survey. The student-researcher first wrote the sentences that incorporated the linguistic traits of interest and then contacted African Americans from her personal network to record themselves reading the text. For the African-American female image, the audio was SAE and for the African-American male image, the audio was AAVE. Each participant was asked to complete only one version of the study, with Version 1 containing the lighter complexioned male and female and Version 2 containing the darker complexioned male and female.

Directly after each stimulus, the participant was asked to answer a sequence of attitudinal questions on a Likert scale from 1 to 6 to measure the participant's perception of various attributes of the person in the clip (see Appendix A). Each attribute was based on two separate criteria: the looks of the image and the sound of the voice. We also collected demographic information (see Appendix A) on each participant, including their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and age.

A limitation to the design of this study is that the male image was only paired with the AAVE and the female image was only paired with SAE. To build on this study, there should be eight stimuli to account for all the considered variable combinations of gender, race, and the two speech types. Furthermore, as a demographic trait, a future study could record the skin tone of the participant to see whether the skin tone of the respondent plays a factor in their perception. Additionally, the respondent should also be asked to self-report their skin tone in order to see whether that influences the perception of the stimuli. There was also a low response rate, especially for African Americans in Version 1. It is possible that participants did not want to give their gut reactions for fear of being perceived as racist. There were variations in the physical size of clips based on whether the survey was completed on a phone or computer, and individual differences in audio volume and brightness were also not controlled.

Table 3: Images and sentence(s) in the survey

Version 1	Version 2	Sentence(s)	Dialect	Traits
		“For real though, they had went to West Atlanta for my birthday.”	AAVE	Interdental to labiodental fricative Postvocalic r-lessness “Had + verb” for simple past tense Prevocalic final consonant cluster reduction
		“She hid a great laugh saying, ‘Oh my,’ and threw the note in the shape of a toy plane, which plowed into her father. ‘Would you laugh about this elsewhere?’ And then they fought.”	SAE	Absence of vowel shifts Sentence incorporates all American English vowels

2.4 Procedure

Each participant was randomly assigned Version 1 or Version 2 of the online survey. The survey began with an informed consent form, which the participant was prompted to electronically sign. Then the first image would appear and the participant would press play to hear the audio. They were asked to only play the clip once. After that, the participant was asked to click a radio button corresponding to a number from 1 to 6 for each of the

attitudinal questions on that clip. Then the next clip would appear and the same questions were asked. After all six clips were finished, the participant was asked to fill out their demographic information. At the end of the survey, there was a paragraph debriefing the participant on the purpose of the survey and with contact information for the researchers.

3 Results

To analyze the data, multiple 2x2x2 ANOVA tests were conducted. Multiple statistical models were conducted due to limitations in VassarStats to up to three factors and wanting to include the responses of participants rejected in one of the models but not the others. In the first set of ANOVA tests, the factors of the ANOVA were the version of the survey (lighter skin tone version or darker skin tone version), race of the participant (European American or African American; participants who self-reported another race were excluded), and gender of the participant (female or male; participants who self-reported non-binary were excluded). Table 4 shows the results from the ANOVA tests with the factors of version, race, and gender on professional traits. Table 5 shows the results from the same ANOVA factors for social traits.

Another set of 2x2x2 ANOVA tests used the version of the survey (lighter skin tone version or darker skin tone version), race of the participant (European American or African American; participants who self-reported another race were excluded), and socioeconomic status of the participant as described in Section 2.1 (higher or lower; participants that did not report their socioeconomic status were excluded). In this set of ANOVA tests, participants who self-reported their gender as non-binary were included in the analysis. Non-binary respondents were only excluded from the ANOVA model with gender as a factor due to not having enough non-binary respondents to form a distinct category in the analysis. The non-binary respondents were included in the ANOVA models that did not include gender as a factor because the analysis was not restricted to having two factors (male and female). Table 6 shows the results from the ANOVA tests with the factors of version, race, and socioeconomic status for professional traits. Table 7 shows the same ANOVA factors for social traits.

A final set of ANOVA tests addressed whether there was a difference between perceived correctness and friendliness/pleasantness. This set of tests was added to test the hypothesis related to Preston's (2004) proposed tradeoff between correctness and friendliness/pleasantness in speech, with the standard variety being hypothesized to be perceived as more correct and the non-standard variety as more friendly/pleasant. An ANOVA with the factors of skin tone, race, and correctness versus friendliness/pleasantness was conducted. Table 8 shows the results of correctness versus friendliness/pleasantness.

Table 4: Set of ANOVA tests with factors: Image skin tone, respondent race, and respondent gender for professional traits

Image	Characteristic(s)	What is Significant	<i>p</i> -value	Mean Values
Female	“Correct” English	Main effect of Gender	Gender: ($p < 0.05$)	Female: (5.66) > Male: (5.38)
Female	Comprehensibility	Main effect of Skin Tone	Skin Tone: ($p < 0.05$)	Light: (5.64) > Dark: (5.35)
Female	Trustworthy Sounding	Main effects of Skin Tone Interaction between Skin Tone/Race/Gender	Skin Tone: ($p < 0.05$) Interaction: ($p < 0.01$)	Light: (4.97) > Dark: (4.70) Light, AA, and F: (5.57) Light, EA, and F: (5.00) Dark, AA, and M: (5.00) Dark, EA, and F: (4.97) Light, EA, and M: (4.78) Dark, EA, and M: (4.52) Dark, AA, and F: (4.46) Light, AA, and M: (4.40)
Female	Professional Sounding	Main effect of Skin Tone Main effect of Gender	Skin Tone: ($p < 0.05$) Gender: ($p < 0.05$)	Light: (5.15) > Dark: (4.85) Female: (5.13) > Male: (4.79)

Female	Professional Looking	Main effect of Skin Tone	Skin Tone: ($p<0.05$)	Light: (4.24) > Dark: (3.88)
Female	Educated Sounding	Main effect of Skin Tone Interaction between Skin Tone/Race	Skin Tone: ($p<0.05$) Interaction: ($p<0.05$)	Light: (5.37) > Dark: (5.09) Light and AA: (5.74) Light and EA: (5.29) Dark and EA: (5.16) Dark and AA: (4.97)
Female	Educated Looking	Interaction between Skin Tone/Race	Interaction: ($p<0.05$)	Light and AA: (5.00) Light and EA: (4.61) Dark and EA: (4.60) Dark and AA: (4.32)
Male	Comprehensibility	Main effect of Race	Race: ($p<.001$)	AA: (5.02) > EA(4.11)
Male	Professional Looking	Main effect of Race	Race: ($p<0.05$)	EA: (3.2222) > AA: (2.8269)
Male	Educated Sounding	Main effect of Gender Main effect of Race	Gender: ($p<0.05$) Race: ($p<0.05$)	Female: (3.23) > Male: (2.86) AA: (3.37) > EA: (2.99)

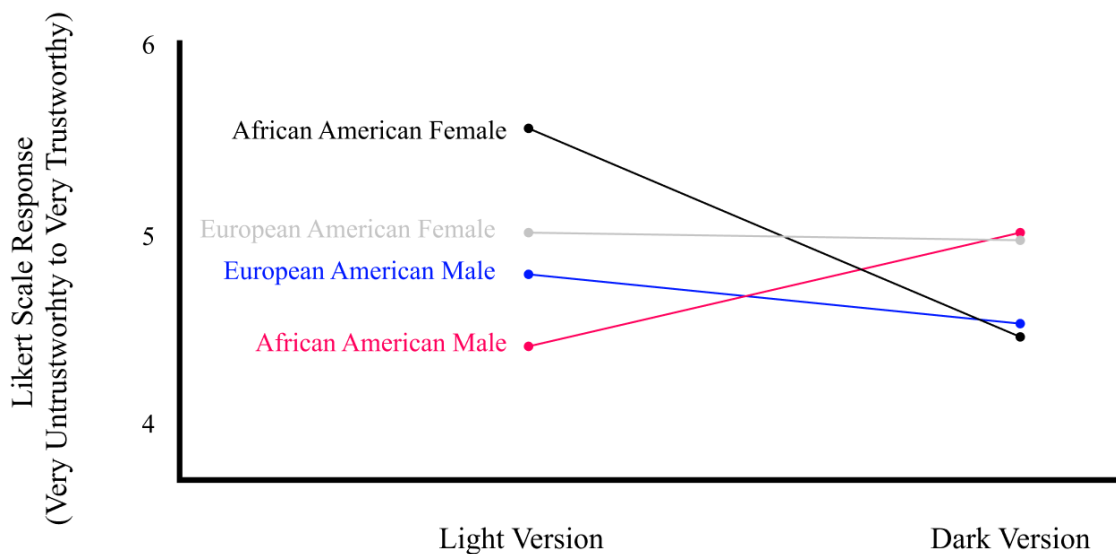


Figure 1: Ratings for “trustworthy sounding”. African-American female respondents and European-American male respondents rated the lighter skin-toned African-American female as significantly more trustworthy sounding than the darker skin-toned version. In contrast, African-American male respondents voted the lighter skin-toned African-American female clip as less trustworthy than the darker skin-toned version.

3.1 Respondent Gender: African-American Female (Professional Traits)

In the professional traits (“correct” English, trustworthiness, professionalism, educated sounding, and comprehensibility) of the African-American female, there was a three-way interaction between the skin tone of the African-American female clip, race of the participant, and gender of the participant in the perception of how trustworthy the African-American female clip sounded (see Table 4). African-American female respondents

perceived the lighter complexioned African-American female as more trustworthy sounding than all other respondents and more trustworthy sounding than the darker complexioned clip. African-American male respondents were the only ones to perceive the darker complexioned clip as sounding more trustworthy than the lighter complexioned clip. And there was a minimal difference between the perception of Version 1 versus Version 2 by European-American female respondents.

An interaction was found between the skin tone of the African-American female clip and the race of the respondent in how educated she looks and sounds (see Table 4). In both, the African-American respondents rated the lighter complexioned African-American female the highest and African-American respondents rated the darker complexioned African-American female the lowest compared to the rating of European-American respondents. The skin tone of the clip played a factor in the perception of how comprehensible she sounds, how trustworthy she sounds, how professional she sounds, how professional she looks, and how educated she sounds (see Table 4). In all of these traits, the lighter complexioned African-American female was perceived more favorably than the darker complexioned female. The gender of the participant also had a significant impact in the rating of the African-American female in the perception of how “correct” her English sounds and how professional she sounds, with female respondents rating more favorably in both traits than male respondents in both the dark and light skin tone (see Table 4).

3.2 Respondent Gender: African-American Male (Professional Traits)

In the professional traits (“correct” English, trustworthiness, professionalism, educated sounding, and comprehensibility) of the African-American male, the race of the respondent played a factor in the perception of how comprehensible he sounds and how educated he sounds, with the African-American respondents rating him more favorably than the European-American respondents in both traits (see Table 4). The race of the respondent also played a role in how professional he looked with European-American respondents reporting more favorably than African-American respondents (see Table 4). Female respondents rated the African-American male as sounding more educated than male respondents (see Table 4).

Table 5: Set of ANOVA tests with factors: Image skin tone, respondent race, and respondent gender for social traits

Image	Characteristic(s)	What is Significant	<i>p</i> -value	Mean Values
Female	Attractive Sounding	Main effect of Gender	Gender: ($p < 0.05$)	Female: (4.93) > Male: (4.61)
Female	Attractive Looking	Main effect of Gender	Gender: ($p < 0.05$)	Female: (4.77) > Male: (4.40)
Female	Friendly Looking	Main effect of Skin Tone	Skin Tone: ($p < 0.05$)	Light: (4.67) > Dark: (4.36)
Female	Pleasant Sounding	Interaction between Skin Tone/Race	Interaction: ($p < 0.05$)	Light and AA: (5.58) Dark and EA: (5.00) Dark and AA: (4.97) Light and EA: (4.95)
Male	Attractive Sounding	Main effect of Skin Tone Main effect of Gender	Skin Tone: ($p < 0.05$) Gender: ($p < 0.05$)	Light: (4.23) > Dark: (3.85) Female: (4.21) > Male: (3.78)
Male	Attractive Looking	Main effect of Skin Tone	Skin Tone: ($p < 0.05$)	Light: (4.48) > Dark: (4.09)
Male	Friendly Sounding	Main effect of Race	Race: ($p < 0.05$)	EA: (4.24) > AA (3.85)
Male	Friendly Looking	Main effect of Skin Tone	Skin Tone: ($p < 0.01$)	Light: (4.72) > Dark: (4.23)

Male	Pleasant Looking	Main effect of Skin Tone	Skin Tone: ($p < 0.01$)	Light: (4.66) > Dark: (4.29)
		Main effect of Race	Race: ($p < 0.05$)	EA: (4.58) > AA: (4.21)
		Interaction between Skin Tone/Race	Interaction: ($p < 0.05$)	Light and AA: (4.79) Light and EA: (4.71) Dark and EA: (4.37) Dark and AA: (3.91)

3.3 Respondent Gender: African-American Female (Social Traits)

In the social traits (attractiveness, pleasantness, and friendliness), there were judgment differences of the African-American female stimuli based on the reported identity of the respondent. The African-American female was rated as more attractive sounding and looking by the female respondents than the male respondents. The African-American female was rated as friendlier in the guise with lighter skin than darker skin (see Table 5).

There is an interaction between skin tone of the stimulus and the race of the respondent when considering how pleasant the African-American female sounds (see Table 5). African-American respondents rated the lighter complexioned variant of the African-American female stimulus more favorably than the darker complexioned variant.

3.4 Respondent Gender: African-American Male (Social Traits)

In the social traits (attractiveness, pleasantness, and friendliness), there were judgment differences of the African-American male stimuli based on the reported identity of the respondent. The lighter skin-toned African-American male was rated as more pleasant looking than the darker skin-toned variant by all the respondents; however, on average, the African-American respondents had the steepest difference of all the respondents, rating the lighter variant more pleasant looking and the darker variant less pleasant looking (see Table 5). The skin tone of the African-American male in the clip had a significant effect on his reported attractiveness, friendliness, and pleasantness (see Table 5), with the lighter skin-toned variant being rated more favorably than the darker skin-toned variant. The race of the respondent also had a significant effect on the perception of how friendly he sounded and how pleasant he looked (see Table 5). In both of these traits, on average the European-American respondents rated both guises more favorably than the African-American respondents. Female respondents rated the African-American male as more attractive sounding than the male respondents (see Table 5).

3.5 Respondent Socioeconomic Status: African-American Male (Professional Traits)

Table 6: Set of ANOVA tests with factors: Image skin tone, respondent race, and respondent socioeconomic status for professional traits

Image	Characteristic(s)	What is Significant	p-value	Mean Values
Male	Trustworthy Sounding	Main effect of Skin Tone	Skin Tone: ($p < 0.05$)	Light: (4.12) > Dark: (3.80)
Male	Trustworthy Looking	Interaction between Skin Tone/SES	Interaction: ($p < 0.05$)	Light and Low SES: (4.61) Dark and High SES: (4.12) Light and High SES: (4.10) Dark and Low SES: (4.00)

The lighter skin-toned African-American male was rated more trustworthy sounding than the darker skin-toned version (see Table 6). There was also a significant interaction between the skin tone in the clip and the socioeconomic status of the respondent. Respondents with a lower socioeconomic status reported the light skin-toned variant as more trustworthy looking than the darker complexioned version.

Table 7: Set of ANOVA tests with factors: Image skin tone, respondent race, and respondent socioeconomic status for social traits

Image	Characteristic(s)	What is Significant	<i>p</i> -value	Mean Values
Male	Attractive Sounding	Interaction between SES/Race	Interaction: ($p < 0.05$)	EA and High SES: (4.23) AA and Low SES: (4.23) AA and High SES: (4.00) EA and Low SES: (3.69)

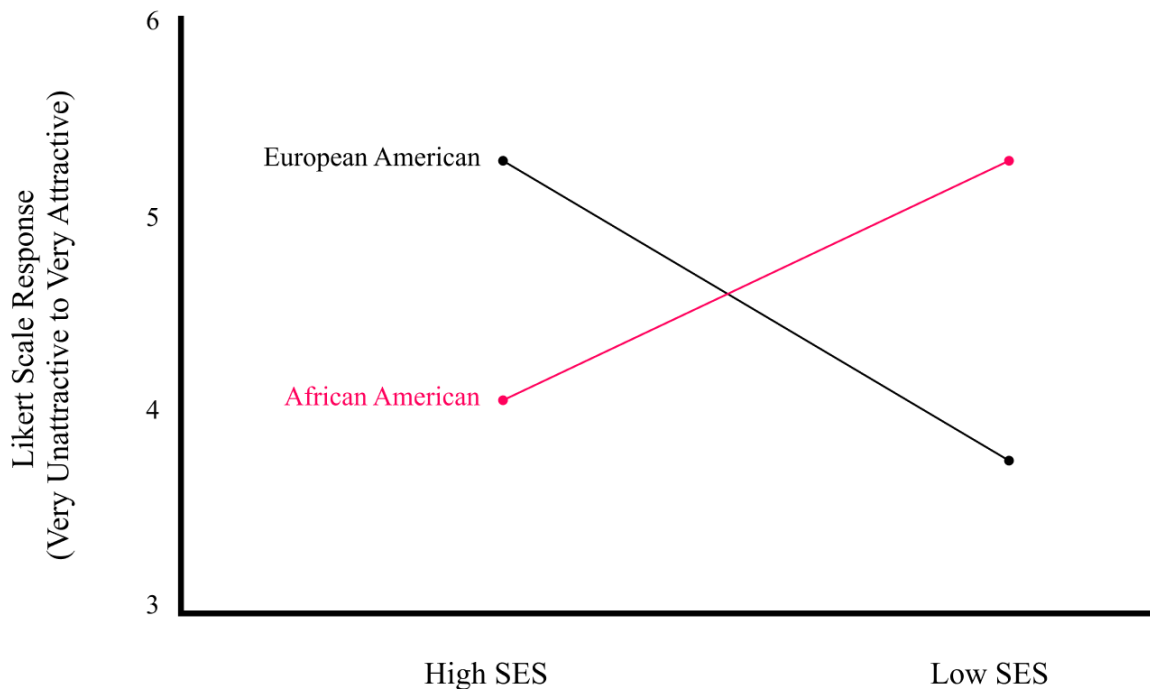


Figure 2: Ratings for “attractive sounding”. African-American respondents with a low socioeconomic status reported the AAVE as more attractive sounding than the African-American respondents with a high socioeconomic status. The opposite effect was found in the European-American respondents.

3.6 Respondent Socioeconomic Status: African-American Male (Social Traits)

The interaction between the socioeconomic status of the respondents and race of the respondents was significant in the perception of how attractive the African-American male sounded (see Table 7). There was a statistically significant difference in the rating of attractiveness in the European-American respondents depending on their socioeconomic status, with European-American respondents of a higher socioeconomic status reporting the African-American male as more attractive sounding than European-American respondents with a lower socioeconomic status. The opposite was found in the African-American respondents: African-American respondents with a lower socioeconomic status perceived AAVE as more attractive sounding than the African-American respondents with a higher socioeconomic status.

3.7 Correctness versus Pleasantness/Friendliness

The results of the African-American female using SAE show that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceived correctness and friendliness/pleasantness of her speech (see Table 8).

Table 8: Set of ANOVA tests with factors: Image skin tone and participant race, for “correct” versus “pleasant/friendly sounding”

English	Characteristic(s)	What is Significant	<i>p</i> -value	Mean Values
SAE Female	Correct versus Friendly sounding	Main effect of Version Main effect of Correctness versus Friendliness	Skin Tone: (<i>p</i> <0.05) Corr/Friendly: (<i>p</i> <.001)	Light: (5.33) > Dark: (5.1139) Correct: (5.56) > Friendly: (4.89)
SAE Female	Correct versus Pleasant sounding	Main effect of Correctness versus Pleasantness Interaction Version/Race	Corr/Pleasant: (<i>p</i> <.001) Interaction: (<i>p</i> <0.05)	Correct: (5.56) > Pleasant: (5.04) Light and AA: (5.71) Light and EA: (5.28) Dark and AA: (5.27) Dark and EA: (5.21)
AAVE Male	Correct versus Friendly sounding	Main effect of Correctness versus Friendliness Main effect of Race Interaction between Version/Race	Corr/Friendly: (<i>p</i> <.001) Race: (<i>p</i> <0.01) Interaction: (<i>p</i> <0.05)	Friendly: (4.15) > Correct: (3.27) EA: (3.80) > AA: (3.44) Dark and EA: (3.8258) Light and AA: (3.8158) Light and EA: (3.7875) Dark and AA: (3.2286)
AAVE Male	Correct versus Pleasant sounding	Main effect of Correctness versus Pleasant	Corr/Pleasant: (<i>p</i> <.001)	Pleasant: (4.19) > Correct: (3.27)

In both friendliness and pleasantness, the SAE stimulus was perceived as more correct than friendly or pleasant by all of the respondents. There is also a statistically significant difference between the perceived correctness and friendliness/pleasantness in the results of the African-American male using AAVE as well (see Table 8). In each ANOVA, the pleasantness and friendliness of his speech was rated more highly than the correctness of his speech.

4 Discussion

According to these results, African-American females and males are both impacted by the effects of colorism but in different ways. In this study, the lighter complexioned African-American male is favored by respondents more heavily in social traits (attractive looking, attractive sounding, friendly looking, and pleasant looking). Meanwhile, European-American and African-American respondents favored the lighter skin-toned African-American female in traits relating to professionalism (trustworthy sounding, professional sounding, educated sounding, and comprehensible). Particularly in African-American respondents, there was a trend of favoring the lighter complexioned African-American female in social (pleasant sounding) and professional traits (formal sounding, educated sounding, and educated looking). Furthermore, African-American female respondents found the lighter complexioned African-American female more trustworthy sounding and more educated sounding. This countered the perception of African-American males who rated the darker complexioned African-American female as more trustworthy sounding.

Irrespective of skin tone, there was also a gender effect where female respondents of both races tended to rate the African-American female higher in professional traits (correct English, professional sounding, and formal sounding) and social traits (attractive sounding, attractive looking) than male respondents. African-American respondents rated the African-American male using AAVE higher in professional traits (educated sounding, comprehensible) than European-American respondents, regardless of skin tone. Conversely, European-American

males gave higher ratings in social traits (friendly sounding, pleasant looking) than African-American respondents.

In the African-American community, I hypothesized that a lighter complexioned African-American female will be perceived more favorably socially and professionally as more physically attractive, as having a more pleasant sounding voice, and as sounding more professional. My results supported that the lighter complexioned African-American female was perceived as more professional sounding than the darker complexioned variant. The lighter complexioned African-American female was found to be more pleasant sounding to the African-American respondents.

I also hypothesized that respondents, regardless of race, would perceive a lighter complexioned African-American male more favorably professionally, and socially as more friendly, trustworthy, and attractive visually and audibly. My results supported that the lighter skin-toned African American was perceived as more friendly looking, trustworthy sounding, attractive looking, and attractive sounding than the darker skin-toned version. The participants with lower socioeconomic status found the lighter skin-toned African-American male as significantly more trustworthy looking than the darker skin-toned version. Contrary to my hypothesis, the race of the respondent played a role in how friendly the African-American male using AAVE was perceived to sound, with European-American respondents reporting higher ratings than the African-American respondents.

Based on Preston's (2004) proposed tradeoff between correctness and friendliness/pleasantness, I hypothesized that AAVE will be perceived as more friendly/pleasant than correct by both European-American and African-American respondents and that SAE would sound more correct than friendly or pleasant by European-American and African-American respondents. My results support these hypotheses. Colorism has historically been perpetuated by both African-American people, such as through the paper bag test, and by European-American people choosing lighter skin-toned enslaved African Americans more often to work inside the household than darker skin-toned enslaved people. Since there are results where the skin tone of the image influences the perception (with the lighter skin-toned variant being rated more favorably) regardless of the race of the respondent, this indicates that colorism against African Americans is still prevalent among both European-American and African-American people in their perception of professional and social traits. In instances where there is a statistically significant interaction between the variables of skin tone of the image and the race of the respondent, the African-American respondents more strongly favored the lighter variant compared to European-American respondents. This potentially suggests that favoring lighter skin-toned African Americans may be even more of an issue within the African-American community.

In conclusion, this verbal-guise study provides an innovative way to explore questions of race and linguistic traits, showing that a difference in skin tone can affect respondents' perception of a speaker's voice, and that respondents from different racial backgrounds may perceive this contrast in a differential way. Colorism is a phenomenon that is still present to this day and even affects attitudes regarding how a person sounds. These findings have far reaching societal implications that African Americans can experience unjust prejudice in their personal and professional lives due to the tone of their skin and the style of English they use. To reduce the influence of these outdated views, professional and academic debiasing programs should include units on colorism and AAVE, and public government policies should be put in place to reduce the professional discrimination that could result from these prejudices. In order to create a more inclusive society, it is important to draw attention to the existing biases that people hold to take strides towards reducing their influence.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

1. **Image X: How correct was this person's English?**
Least Correct English 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Correct English
2. **Image X: How ATTRACTIVE did this person's voice SOUND?**
Least Attractive 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Attractive
3. **Image X: How PLEASANT did this person's voice SOUND?**
Least Pleasant 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Pleasant
4. **Image X: How FRIENDLY did this person's voice SOUND?**
Least Friendly 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Friendly
5. **Image X: How POLITE did this person's voice SOUND?**
Least Polite 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Polite
6. **Image X: How TRUSTWORTHY did this person's voice SOUND?**
Least Trustworthy 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Trustworthy
7. **Image X: How PROFESSIONAL did this person's voice SOUND?**
Least Professional 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Professional
8. **Image X: How FORMAL did this person's voice SOUND?**
Least Formal 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Formal
9. **Image X: How CASUAL did this person's voice SOUND?**
Least Casual 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Casual
10. **Image X: How EDUCATED did this person's voice SOUND?**
Least Educated 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Educated
11. **Image X: How easily could you comprehend the speaker?**
Very Hard to Comprehend 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Easy to Comprehend
12. **Image X: How ATTRACTIVE did this person's image LOOK?**
Least Attractive 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Attractive
13. **Image X: How PLEASANT did this person's image LOOK?**
Least Pleasant 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Pleasant
14. **Image X: How FRIENDLY did this person's image LOOK?**
Least Friendly 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Friendly
15. **Image X: How POLITE did this person's image LOOK?**
Least Polite 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Polite
16. **Image X: How TRUSTWORTHY did this person's image LOOK?**
Least Trustworthy 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Trustworthy
17. **Image X: How PROFESSIONAL did this person's image LOOK?**

Least Professional 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Professional

18. Image X: How FORMAL did this person's image LOOK?

Least Formal 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Formal

19. Image X: How CASUAL did this person's image LOOK?

Least Casual 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Casual

20. Image X: How EDUCATED did this person's image LOOK?

Least Educated 1 2 3 4 5 6 Most Educated

21. Image X: What is the individual's socioeconomic status?

Working Class Lower Middle Class Upper Middle Class Upper Class

22. How would you identify this person?

White Brown Black American Caucasian Asian-American African-American
European Asian Spanish Hispanic African
Of European Descent Of Asian Descent Of Spanish Descent
Of African Descent

Demographic Information

Gender:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Are you a native English speaker?

Yes

No

Socioeconomic Status









Working Class Lower Middle Class Upper Middle Class Upper Class




Education Level:

Where were you raised?:

Appendix B

Table 9: Survey images and sentences in order

Version 1	Version 2	Dialect	Sentence
Distractor 	Distractor 	SAE	“My father’s note would say great things to laugh about. In one, a toy plow fought through a storm and then she hid for safety.”
Tester: Light Skin-toned African-American Male 	Tester: Dark Skin-toned African-American Male 	AAVE	“For real though, they had went to West Atlanta for my birthday.”
Distractor 	Distractor 	Chicano English	“Have you ever been happy just because you were together?”
Distractor (see Appendix C) 	Distractor (see Appendix C) 	Southern Accent	“For a long time, we didn’t really know that we were different for any other reason other than that’s just the way it was or that’s the way it’s supposed to be.”

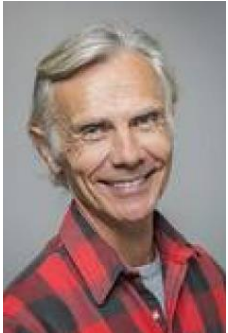

<p>Distractor</p> 	<p>Distractor</p> 	<p>SAE</p>	<p>“I believe crowned bodies do flood with lies fit to panic fate and let all suppose notes put meaning to voice.”</p>
<p>Tester: Light Skin-toned African-American Female</p> 	<p>Tester: Dark Skin-toned African-American Female</p> 	<p>SAE</p>	<p>“She hid a great laugh saying, ‘Oh my,’ and threw the note in the shape of a toy plane, which plowed into her father. ‘Would you laugh about this elsewhere?’ And then they fought.”</p>

Appendix C

Southern American Accent Removed from Data Analysis

Originally, there was another experimental image where the same Southern accented voice was attached to either an African-American or European-American male (see Figure 4). It was hypothesized that people would perceive the audio of the Southern voice as less educated when it is attached to an African-American male than a European-American male. All of the results related to the change of race of a speaker with a Southern accent were discarded due to the lack of comparability between the associated images. Even though the questions were asked in a way attempting to isolate physical and audio perception, since the audio and image were not isolated when delivered to the participants, the natural interaction between the two makes it improbable to ask about one factor without having the influence of the other. The images associated with the Southern audio were not comparable since the independent variable of race was not perfectly isolated due to the fact that it is difficult to realistically alter the race of a person in a photo.

Table 10: Image and sentence(s) in the survey

Version 1	Version 2	Sentence(s)	Dialect	Incorporated Traits
		“For a long time, we didn’t really know that we were different for any other reason other than that’s just the way it was or that’s the way it’s supposed to be.”	Southern Vowel Shift	Monophthongization of [aj] [ow] fronting