ABSTRACT

SIMPSON, CHANIQUA DARIEN. Colorism Across Families: Skin Tone and Children’s Perceived Relationship Closeness with Parents. (Under the direction of Maxine S. Thompson).

Scholars suggest that skin color plays a major role in the lives of people of color, and many note that skin color is especially important for personal interactions, dating, and mate selection. Despite this, little research is known about the relationship between skin color and other interpersonal interactions, especially as it relates to families and familial relationships. Drawing from literature on colorism/pigmentocracy and Latin Americanization, this research investigates the relationship between child’s skin color and her/his perceived relationship dissatisfaction with their parents. Particularly, this research looks at the relationship between skin color and relationship closeness across racial categories and brings attention to gender, class, and immigration status as mediating mechanisms. Using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent and Adult Health (Add Health), a relationship dissatisfaction scale was created and OLS regression techniques were used. Results suggest that gender and skin color are related to relationship dissatisfaction with darker skinned girls reporting higher levels of dissatisfaction than boys and lighter skinned girls. Additionally, boys report lower levels of relationship dissatisfaction than girls, with darker skinned boys reporting the least amount of relationship dissatisfaction. The results of this study highlight the importance of skin color and skin color ideologies and their roles in family relationships and socialization.
Colorism Across Families: Skin Tone and Children’s Perceived Relationship Satisfaction with Parents

by
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DEDICATION

Dedicate to my family, especially my mother and my grandmother who pushed me to do my very best even in the face of adversity. I appreciate all that you have done for me. This is also dedicated to my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Coleman, who told me that I should go to graduate school, before I even knew what it was. Thanks!
BIOGRAPHY

Chaniqua Darien Simpson was born in Brooklyn, New York. Her parents are Althea Simpson and Cecil I. Simpson. She completed her undergraduate degree in Sociology and Professional Writing at Fayetteville State University in Fayetteville, NC. During her time in undergrad she participated in the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Scholars Program and the Summer Research Opportunities Program at The Ohio State University. Her current research interests include, race, class, and gender studies and social movements.
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Figure 1. Predicted Scores for Relationship Dissatisfaction with Mothers .........................29
In response to the influx of immigrants and the rise in multi-racial identifying Americans, top journalists, digital designers, and artists have been imagining what future generations of Americans will look like (Schoeller 2013). These images usually depict a racially ambiguous man or woman, with curly hair and tan skin. Predictions for the “browning of America” (Bonilla-Silva 2010) were made as early as 2003. However, while multiracial births have increased, scholars have suggested that this darkening of America is actually due to the influx of immigrants (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2009) and have termed this change in racial composition and racial relations “Latin Americanization.” It is hypothesized that this new system of racial hierarchy will resemble stratification systems of Latin America and that America’s White/Black racial binary will transform into a tri-racial stratification system increasingly based on skin color, with collective whites at the top, honorary whites in the middle, and a collective black stratum on the bottom (Bonilla-Silva 2010).

According to social scientists, the Latin Americanization of America has already begun and manifests itself in economic, social, and attitudinal outcomes (Forman, Goar, and Lewis 2002; Murguia and Saenz 2002; Bonilla-Silva 2004, 2010; Bonilla-Silva Dietrich 2009). These findings suggest that Whites and those included in the White category are more financially and socially stable and earn more than those in the other stratum. These findings also suggest that those in marginalized groups align their racial and social views with Whites; the ability to do this; however, depends greatly upon skin color (Tezler and Vazquez Garcia 2009). Scholars have documented the relationship between skin color, mate selection, attractiveness, and socialization noting that darker skinned people of color generally
experience negative social, psychological, and economic outcomes. Social scientists refer to this negative treatment, or the privilege and high status bestowed upon those with lighter skin, as colorism (Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, and Ward 1987; Bodenhorn 2006). Scholars note that colorism exists in within-group interactions (Chavez-Dueñas et al. 2014); however, minimal empirical research exists on the relationship consequences of colorism across families.

While most scholars, with the exception of those who study mate selection, have generally failed to acknowledge the potential relationship between skin color and personal interactions, fiction and non-fiction authors of color suggest that family interpersonal relationships are not immune to skin tone bias (Thurman 1929; Walker 1983). One recent study of African American families living in Georgia and Iowa has examined the impact of child’s skin color on parenting quality, discrimination, and racial socialization (Landor et al. 2013). The authors found that skin color is related to parental quality and socialization. Parents in the study showed preferential treatment towards their lighter skinned daughters and darker skinned sons and children. Although this study solidifies popular examples of interpersonal colorism within African American families, it is important to consider the ways in which colorist ideologies may exist across families in the United States. As literature on Latin Americanization and colorism suggests, colorist ideologies exist within Latin American, Asian, African, Caribbean, Native American, and multi-racial communities across the world. Despite this existence, little is known about the relationship between parent and child relationships across racial/ethnic categories.
Guided by the current literature on racial socialization, colorism, and the Latin-Americanization hypothesis, posited by Bonilla-Silva (2004), the present research examines the influence of colorism, or the preferential treatment based on skin color, across families in the United States. In this paper, I will answer the following overarching questions using OLS regression techniques: (1) does a relationship exist between child’s skin tone and perceived dissatisfaction with parents? If so, does this relationship differ for mothers and fathers?; and (2) does the relationship between skin color and child’s perceived parental relationship dissatisfaction differ by sex, class, and/or nativity status? I will answer these questions using the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), a nationally representative study of adolescent youth.

By answering the above questions, this paper allows for the understanding of how families of different racial backgrounds may be experiencing and reproducing colorist ideologies. Additionally, this research provides a starting place for future research on families of color and ways in which colorism may exist within family contexts and interpersonal relationships. Findings suggest that the relationship between skin color and children’s parental relationship dissatisfaction is significant for mothers, but not for fathers. With darker skinned children reporting higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction than lighter skinned children. Additionally, this research suggests that darker skinned girls and lighter skinned boys are more likely to report lower levels of parental satisfaction than lighter skinned girls and darker skinned boys. These findings, while the relationships are small, offer insight into how skin color may be related to personal relationships and private interactions. Similar to Landor et al. (2013), parents in this study may be enacting preferential treatment to
their children based on skin color. By doing so, parents (or mothers in this case) may be altering relationships with their children.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Latin Americanization Hypothesis

Over the last few decades, race scholars have focused their attention to the increasing numbers of non-European immigrants in the U.S., and have hypothesized that race affairs in America are shifting from the traditional Black-White model to something more intricate and stratifying (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Lee and Bean 2007). Scholars debate the direction of this stratification system, but many agree that the increasing presence of immigrants as well as the rising numbers of biracial and multiracial citizens contribute to changing the current racial system in the United States. While some scholars suggest that new race relations in the U.S. will shift from a Black/White binary to a Black/non-Black binary (Lee and Bean 2007), others suggest that racial hierarchy will move to a three-tiered system, similar to those in Latin American and Caribbean countries (Bonilla-Silva 2004). This new system encompasses the changing racial dynamics in the United States, with increasing focus on immigrants and a newer, subtler form of racism, or color-blind racism, which emerged after the Civil Rights movement (Gans 1999; Bonilla-Silva 2004, 2010). Some of these changes, as some scholars suggest, may be already be present (Forman et al. 2002; Bonilla-Silva 2010).

The move to a three-tiered hierarchical racial system can be attributed in part to the influx of immigrants into the United States and the emergence of colorblind racism. Race relations in some Latin American and Caribbean nations are notably different than in the
United States. While U.S. race relations, through a history of slavery, racism and Jim Crow, has primarily consisted of Black-White conflict, racial relations in Latin America already operated in a tri-racial system (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Through colonialization and slavery, most Latin American countries became racially mixed. As a result, racial mixing did not work to change the white racial supremacy (Sue 2009a; Bonilla-Silva 2010: 181). Although people of color outnumbered Whites in Latin American and Caribbean countries, Whites retained economic, social, and racial power. Those who were the product of racial mixing or who were lighter skinned, however, were granted some additional social privileges and often acted as an intermediate group between the smaller group of White colonists and the Black and indigenous peoples. White privilege is also solidified through ideological beliefs in *blanqueamiento* or “whitening” and *mestizaje* (racial mixing) (Martinez-Echazabal 1998; Bonilla-Silva 2010; Aja 2012). This whitening through racial mixing works to grant some social and economic privileges to Latin American citizens. While this racial mixing generally does not challenge racial relationships in Latin American countries, it does work to “to keep race below the social radar and better safeguard White power” (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 182).

Scholars suggest that because of the influx of non-European (Latin American, Caribbean, African, and Asian) immigrants to the United States, the current White-Black race relationship binary will become Latin Americanized (Bonilla-Silva 2004; 2010). This Latin Americanization Hypothesis considers the economic, social, and political positions of both Americans and immigrants to the United States. Based on various factors including nationality, ethnicity, skin color, educational, and economic status, groups are placed into
three different categories: “White,” “Honorary Whites,” and “Collective Black” (Bonilla-Silva 2004).

While Whites remain at the top of the hierarchy, this group becomes even more social constructed, with the boundaries of whiteness expanding beyond European features and background. In the future this expansion of Whiteness, as Bonilla-Silva (2004) argues will include not only European Whites, it will also include select multiracials and Asians, urban Native Americans, and White Latinos (933). Like Whites in Latin America, those in the White category will benefit from economic, social, and political privileges.

Not everyone, however, will be able to join the new symbolic White category; consequently, a second, “honorary white,” category will emerge and work to change race relations in America. As the presence of immigrants and multiracial identifying people increases in the United States, White elites may have to find new ways to classify these newcomers. Thus, the emergence of the “honorary White” category will serve to buffer and to block out racial conflict between Whites and collective Blacks (Bonilla-Silva 2004: 934). This category will consist of light-skinned Latinos, most multiracials, Asian Indians, and Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Middle Eastern Americans. A third category, and lower group, of the tri-racial system consists of economically, socially, and political disadvantaged people, or the “collective Black.” This group consists of poor and refugee Asian immigrants, Filipino Americans1, darker-skinned Latinos, reservation-bound Native Americans, and native and immigrant Blacks (Bonilla-Silva 2004; 2013).

1 The location of Filipinos within this hierarchy has changed since the initial conceptualization of the Latin Americanization hypothesis, with Filipino Americans moving from the “honorary White” category to the
Some scholars believe that increases in multiracial and immigrant populations would only work to change the current racial binary system from the current White/Black model to a Black/non-Black racial hierarchy (Lee and Bean 2007). Because Asians and Latinos are more likely to align themselves racially, socially, and ideologically with Whites (Lee and Bean 2007), these groups would fit into a non-Black category within the new racial hierarchy. Additionally, critics of the Latin Americanization hypothesis have argued that there is no consensus on the model of racial relations in Latin countries and models of racial relations rely heavily on the data that is used (Sue 2009a). Therefore, race relationships and conceptualizations can change based on which Latin American country is being studied. Additionally, just as race relations are changing in America, they are also changing in Latin America. For example, by working to end racial oppression and categorization in Brazil by collapsing the brown and black census categories, Brazilian Blacks are thus promoting a push towards a binary racial model (Telles 2004; Sue 2009a).

Race scholars continue to test and critique the Latin Americanization hypothesis, generally confirming that United States racial relations have and will continue to change as immigrant and multiracial populations increase. Immigrant studies have suggested that Latin Americanization of racial relationships has already begun with gaps in socioeconomic factors, racial categorization, and racial attitudes between Whites, honorary Whites, and collective Blacks (Forman et al. 2002; Bonilla-Silva 2010). For example, Asians and Latinos who are considered in the White and Honorary White category, on average, have higher

“collective Black” (Bonilla-Silva 2004, 2010). This may be due to ethnic and phenotypical features as well as socioeconomic status of Filipino Americans, especially those with darker skin (Kiang and Takeuchi 2009).
incomes than other racial/ethnic groups (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 186). Additionally, racial attitudes among Latin Americans has been found to differ from Whites and from Blacks, thus hinting a movement toward a three-tiered racial system in which Latin Americans (and other groups) act as a barrier between White/Black racial relationships (Forman et al. 2002). While scholars have generally tested the Latin Americanization hypothesis by looking at socioeconomic and attitudinal outcomes, scholars should study whether Latin Americanization might be taking place within personal relationships.

Colorism and Pigmentocracy

The Latin Americanization hypothesis also points to the ways in which skin color will play a much more instrumental role in the lives of Americans with non-European backgrounds. Under the new Latin Americanization model of race relations, skin color, along with other phenotypical and socioeconomic features, will work to shape racial and ethnic classifications as well as to disadvantage non-White Americans (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 182). Scholars refer to this skin color hierarchical system as colorism or pigmentocracy, and suggest that these color-based systems already exist within the American Black community and other communities of color (Harris 2008; López 2008; Bonilla-Silva 2010; Bhattacharya 2012; Chavez-Dueñas et al. 2014).

As a ranked system, colorism consists of the privileged and/or harmful treatment of people based on their skin color (Walker 1983; Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, and Ward 1987). The preferential treatment of those with lighter skin has been recorded within fiction and non-fiction literature, and more recently, within academic literature. Scholars who focus on colorism note that histories of colonialization and slavery work to reproduce bias towards
darker skin (Bhattacharya 2012; Chavez-Dueñas et al. 2014). This bias affects various psychological and interpersonal outcomes. Most notably, those with darker skin are continuously disadvantaged by the color of their skin and report lower self-esteem and self-efficacy (Thompson and Keith 2001; Hochschild and Weaver 2007; López 2008; Wilder and Cain 2011).

As one of the central tenets of the Latin Americanization hypothesis, skin color ranks and locates members of certain racial groups within the hierarchical structure. Similar to relations in Latin America, those with lighter skin are at the top of the hierarchy, while darker skinned individuals are located within the “collective Black.” Those who are in the “honorary White” category are generally somewhere between White and Black, such as multiracials and light-skinned Latinos (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 180). Others in this group, like Asians and Middle Eastern Americans are granted honorary White status due to their alignment with White, middle class values and views on race (Bonilla-Silva 2010). This system also works to separate members of the same ethnicity and nation of origin group by using skin color as the basis of ethnic identity. Therefore, under a colorized and Latin Americanized system, darker skinned Latinos, West Indians, Asians, and multiracials, regardless of their ethnic identification, will be placed within the “collective Black” stratum (Bonilla-Silva 2010). This has already been happening in Latin American, Indian, and Asian countries that operate under a stratified pigmentocracy, albeit in varying degrees (López 2008; Chavez-Dueñas et al. 2014; Bhattacharya 2012).

Scholars have generally focused on the effects of colorism within African American communities; however, scholars have begun to focus on colorism within other colonized
nations. Histories of colonialization and slavery have allowed whiteness or lightness to act as a commodity or a form of social capital (Hunter 2002); thus, those who are White or who appear to be close to White are granted special privileges and opportunities (Bhattacharya 2012). This has been true in most countries and nations that were under European colonialization, and those with lighter skin or European features are often socially and economically better off than those with dark skinned (Hunter 2007; Harris 2008). Within some colonized Asian countries, for example, darker skin is associated with spending too much time in the sun due to manual labor (Rondilla and Spickard 2007).

Internalized colorist views have led to skin color-based discrimination. This discrimination manifests itself by causing additional divides between members of the same racial, ethnic, and national group. Skin color divisions amongst Latin Americans serve as a stark example of the ways that groups perpetuate colorist ideologies. While Latin American countries advocate *mestizaje*, which consists of racial mixing and favors the promotion of a national identity over an ethnic/racial identity, divisions within Latin American countries continue to exist and many darker skinned Latin Americans, like those in Brazil live in extreme poverty (Telles 2004, 2009; Mikulak 2011). Latin American governments and *mestizaje* advocates work to ignore past histories of slavery, colonialization, and racism thus ignoring problems of skin color and colorism within respective countries (Chavez-Dueñas et al. 2014). Further literature on colorism reveals that dark-skinned minorities are more likely to have lower levels of self-esteem, more likely to use drugs and alcohol and live in poverty, less likely to marry, and are less likely to be perceived as attractive (Hill 2002; Hochschild
and Weaver 2007; Hunter 2007; Bhattacharya 2012; Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, and Freeman 2010). Personal, socioeconomic, and psychological outcomes are also important in understanding the disadvantage that people face within a racist and colorist society.

Skin Color, Mate Selection, and Racial Socialization

Latin American histories of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* point to another way in which colorism works to affect interpersonal relationships. These ideological beliefs suggest that in order to make the race better one must work to “whiten” the race through racial mixing (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Chavez-Dueñas et al. 2014). Those committed to the race or their ethnic communities would exemplify their loyalty by being selective with their potential romantic partners. This is the case not only for Latin Americans, but also for African Americans and Asian Indians as well (Hughes and Hertel 1990; Bodenhorn 2006; Bhattacharya 2012). Racial mixing, however, is generally done for different reasons. For some Black Americans, color homogamy was a way to maintain status (Hughes and Hertel 1990; Bodenhorn 2006). Here, skin color and lightness are constructed as social capital and as a commodity that can be exchanged for elite class standing.

European domination also allowed for the diffusion of European standards of beauty within colonized countries. After all, European-ness was associated with power, respect, and privilege. Those who were colonized internalized Eurocentric ideologies, and thus placed higher value on those with lighter skin and more European features, such as straight hair,
narrow noses, and thinner lips (Hall 1995, 1997). For some people of color a few of these features were easily obtainable through hair relaxing, skin bleaching, and plastic surgeries (Hall 1995, 1997; Glenn 2009; Thomas 2009; Rondilla 2009; Russell-Cole, Wilson, and Hall 2013). These practices may work to reinforce European standards of beauty and to create divides within communities of color around the world. Scholars who study race and racial interaction suggest that people of color use certain names and scripts to refer and allude to status, privilege, and disadvantage (Parrish 1946; Wilder 2009). Names to describe those with darker skin were generally more negative, while those with lighter skin were usually more positive and conferred status and honor.

Current findings on skin color, mate selection, and perceptions of attractiveness reflect the transmittance of European ideology within colonialized countries. Because lighter skin and European features are more valued and considered as more beautiful, those with darker skin are subsequently considered undesirable. Family and race scholars suggest that Latin Americans, African Americans, Asian Indians, Asians, and Filipino Americans have highly internalized skin color and Eurocentric ideals of beauty and power, and thus attempt to “marry up,” by mating with lighter skinned people within their group or marrying outside of their racial group, usually to those with European ancestry (Hall 1997; Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2009; Sue 2009b; Vaid 2009). Women on the marriage market in India have increasingly used color terms, like “fair” to suggest that they are lighter or fair skinned (Vaid 2009). By doing this, women may be using their lighter skin to compensate for their relatively low status within the caste system (Vaid 2009). Under ideological beliefs in
mestizaje, those preparing for marriage in Latin American countries are encouraged to marry those with lighter skin (Sue 2009b; Bhattacharya 2012), and African Americans are celebrated for marrying lighter and producing lighter skinned (coded as more beautiful) offspring (Wilder and Cain 2011; Russell-Cole et al. 2013).

Racial mixing; however, does not guarantee status or lighter-skinned offspring (Sue 2009b). This, as Bonilla-Silva (2010) points out, can be damaging to personal relationships; as families become divided by race and color, they may begin to engage in differential treatment to darker skinned family members (182). Family scholars point out that this differential treatment is sometimes not meant to be damaging; it is meant to socialize family members, especially children for life within the lower rungs of a racial hierarchy that is increasingly based on skin color (Wilder and Cain 2011; Landor et al. 2013). However, these preparations may result in lower feelings of closeness, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and independence among darker skinned youth and adults (Thompson and Keith 2001; Wilder and Cain 2011; Landor et al. 2013). With the exception of a few recent pieces (Wilder and Cain 2011; Landor et al. 2013), racial socialization literature has largely ignored the role in colorism on how parents socialize their children (Burton et al. 2010). Additionally, scholars tend to ignore the ways in which colorism may affect different types of families and their relationships.

Literature on family socialization suggests that racial socialization includes both verbal and nonverbal messages that involve the “meanings and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity”
(Lesane-Brown 2006: 403). As the first and primary agent of socialization, families work to racially and ethnically socialize their children. Racial socialization depends greatly on parents’ race-related experiences and racial identity (Tezler and Vazquez Garcia 2009; White-Johnson, Ford, and Sellers 2010). For some Black families, racial socialization occurs overtly and covertly and is based not only on parents’ experiences of racism and prejudice, but also their children’s ages and own racial experiences (Lesane-Brown 2006; Snyder 2011; Banks 2012). While parents begin racial socialization at early ages (Lesane-Brown, Brown, Tanner-Smith, and Bruce 2010), some have been selective of the racial messages that they give to their children, noting that younger children are not usually developmentally prepared for some aspects of socialization (Richardson 1981). Racial socialization messages generally include messages of ethnic and racial pride (Lesane-Brown et al. 2010); notes on how to cope with racism, racial barriers, and discrimination (Friend, Hunter, and Fletcher 2011); awareness and preparation of potential experiences with racism and racial inequality (Snyder 2011); and lessons on the politics of respectability (Snyder 2011). Parents form these messages based on their own experiences based on their experiences within a racist society (Lesane-Brown 2006).

Other family and racial socialization scholars suggest that the frequency and types of racial socialization depend on a myriad of additional factors including socioeconomic status and racial composition (Lesane-Brown et al. 2010; White et al. 2010; Snyder 2011; Banks 2012). For instance, middle class Black families, similar to White middle class families, often utilize concerted-cultivation practices when socializing their children (Lareau 2011;
Banks 2012), introducing their children to art, art collecting, classical music, and structured activities. Furthermore, Black children of racially mixed households where at least one parent was Black reported higher levels of racial socialization and preparation than children in other kinds of mixed-race families (Snyder 2011), while children in Native American household received racial and ethnic socialization more often than those in Hispanic, Asian, Black, and Native/Pacific Islander families (Lesane-Brown et al. 2010). Studies on the causes and frequency of racial socialization provide insight into the ways in which parents attempt to prepare their children for living under a racial hierarchy.

**Skin Color, Parenting, Socialization, and Relationships**

Research on skin color satisfaction, perceptions, and self-esteem among youth also suggest that parenting socialization, along with other experiences, may influence the ways that children feel about themselves and their skin color (Butts 1963; Williams-Burns 1980; Ferguson and Cramer 2007). Children (and adults) with darker skin have usually reported lower levels of skin color satisfaction and self-esteem (Thompson and Keith 2001). Despite the prevalence of lower self-esteem among darker skinned youths, little has been done to explore the connection between skin color and self-esteem and how it might affect personal relationships (Burton et al. 2010). Studying children’s relationships with their parents may be telling of the ways in which colorism may be evident in how parents interact with and express love, warmth, and care for children. Literature on parental styles suggests that in addition to other factors, like psychological well-being of the parent and contextual support, children’s characteristics affect parenting styles (Belsky 1984). Thus, by examining whether
child’s skin color is related to their relationships with their parents, the present study seeks to understand whether and to what extent colorism operates across families.

A recent study, conducted by Landor and colleagues (2013), focuses on experiences of discrimination and colorism within African American families and points to the ways in which parents may reproduce skin color ideologies in their racial socialization and interactions with their children. In a similar approach this study seeks to expand on Landor et al.’s study by looking at the ways colorism may be related to children’s perceived parental dissatisfaction for families across racial backgrounds. While Landor et al.’s study reveals the important of skin color in African American family relationships, it does not look at how colorism may exist for other families who may experience colorism. The current study seeks to add to the current knowledge on colorism, Latin Americanization, and family relationships by 1) including families of different racial backgrounds and 2) by using a nationally representative sample of school-aged children.

Colorism and race are invariably linked; however, experiences with colorism are suggested to be more salient within in-group interactions (Chavez-Dueñas et al. 2014). Because skin color is also related to mate selection and dating, it is necessary to understand whether skin color also operates across family relationships as well. If American race relationships are to become Latin Americanized and increasingly based on skin color, I argue that Latin Americanization and colorism should be evident across family relationships. Those who study family relationships, racial socialization, and colorism suggest that, similar to racial socialization, families overtly and covertly teach their children lessons on skin color
and colorism, especially to their darker skinned children who may experience more discrimination due to their skin color (Sue 2009b; Tezler and Vazquez Garcia 2009; Wilder and Cain 2011; Landor et al. 2013). These lessons on colorism may impact the relationships that parents have with their children, especially if parents reveal disappointment in their child’s skin tone (Sue 2009b; Wilder and Cain 2011). Similar to the research findings on colorism and self-esteem, skin color is shown to be related to reports of parenting quality, with darker skinned youth reporting lower levels of parenting quality than lighter skinned youth (Landor et al. 2013). These findings suggest that parents may enact differential treatment and socialization towards their children based on skin color. Based on these findings, I propose the following hypothesis:

**H1**: Respondents with dark skin tone will report higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction with parents than respondents with lighter skin tones.

**Skin Color, Gender, Class, and Immigrant Status**

Literature on colorism has suggested that colorism operates differently for women than for men (Thompson and Keith 2001; Rondilla 2009; Sue 2009b; Wilder and Cain 2011; Glenn 2009; Landor et al. 2013; Mucherah and Frazier 2013). While Eurocentric standards of beauty remain universal and applicable to both men and women, women are often subjected to constant judgment and ridicule for not subscribing to beauty ideals. As evidenced in current literature, women are more likely to be the targets for skin lightening salves and creams (Glenn 2009), hair straightening products (Weitz 2005; Robinson 2011), and are
more like to be encouraged to marry lighter skinned males (Wilder and Cain 2011). Scholars find that the relationship between skin tone and parenting quality differs between boys and girls, with darker skinned girls reporting lower levels of parenting quality than darker skinned boys and lighter skinned girls (Landor et al. 2013). Similarly, past studies on the relationship between skin color and self-esteem also suggest that skin color is a predictor for self-esteem for women, but not men (Thompson and Keith 2001).

As a result of gendered colorism, women, especially mothers and mother-like figures, are more likely to perpetuate colorism to their children, especially to girls (Sue 2009b; Wilder and Cain 2011). Qualitative studies on colorism reveal that despite practicing mestizaje or mating interracially or lighter, mothers may express disappointment in the manifestation of African or non-European features in their children and some children may internalize these feelings (Sue 2009b). Because women assume responsibility for caring and socializing within the family (DeVault 1991) and because girls are more likely to receive colorist messages and are generally the primary targets of beauty and skin lightening I offer the two following hypotheses,

\[ H2a: \text{I hypothesize that the relationship between darker skin tone and parental dissatisfaction should be greater for mothers than fathers} \]

\[ H2b: \text{The relationship between skin color and parental relationship dissatisfaction varies between girls and boys, with darker skinned girls reporting higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction than darker skinned boys.} \]

Scholars posit that the effects of skin color are different for those with higher socioeconomic status (Thompson and Keith 2001; Telles 2009). Scholars have found that
darker skinned people, are more likely to live in poverty (Telles 2009) and some scholars also suggest that having lighter skin color is associated with better economic and psychological factors (Thompson and Keith 2001; Bodenhorn 2006; Kiang and Takeuchi 2009). Under Latin Americanization, skin color becomes more important for economic mobility, thus those with already high socioeconomic status might not perpetuate colorism as much because they have achieved financial and economic security. I will examine the following hypothesis:

H3: The relationship between skin color and parental relationship dissatisfaction depends on social class status. Respondents of darker skin tone in families with higher social class will report higher parental dissatisfaction.

In his conceptualization of the Latin Americanization of the United States, Bonilla-Silva (2004, 2010) points out that this change in race relations is due to the increase in immigrant populations, particularly those from Latin American and Caribbean countries. With new racial and ethnic groups, the U.S. will have to rethink their racial classifications and understandings, consequently paying more attention to differences in skin tone. Scholars have begun to explore the relationship between skin color discrimination and immigrants, noting that darker skinned immigrants with legal status receive 16-23 percent less income than lighter skinned immigrants (Hersch 2011). Other scholars suggest that skin color ideologies in Latin American and immigrant countries are so pervasive that colorism within immigrant-American communities has existed for some time (Murguia and Saenz 2002). These ideologies have worked to affect self-perceptions, ethnic identity, and racial socialization for Filipino, West-Indian, and Mexican, and other Latin American immigrants.
H4: As ideologies of skin lightening and race whitening have already existed in Latin American, Caribbean, and Asiatic cultures, I expect to find that immigrant status (indicated by first or second generation immigrant status, immigrant=1) will moderate the relationship between skin color and parental dissatisfaction. Specifically, I expect darker skinned immigrant youth to report higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction with their parents than those with lighter skin (Hypothesis 2c).

By testing the above hypotheses, this paper will add to a small, but growing body of literature on colorism and family social reproduction through racial socialization. I argue that bringing attention to skin color and colorism within the family context may shed light on how families perpetuate skin tone differences and reinforce colorism ideologies to their children. Scholars suggest that the effects of skin color are often reproduced more within intragroup relationships (Chavez-Dueñas et al. 2014; Fordham and Ogbru 1986; Martinez and Dukes 1987). For instance, Black children have had high ratings of self-esteem when compared to Latino and White students (Martinez and Dukes 1987); however when comparing within group, skin color takes prominence (Thompson and Keith 2001). Centuries of slavery and racial mixing have worked to maintain skin color bias and discrimination with certain privileges granted to lighter skinned Black women and men. While scholars highlight the legacy of slavery, skin color discrimination, and Eurocentric ideals of beauty on psychological and economical outcomes, many have ignored colorism within personal and social relationships. Researchers do, however, point to the relationship between skin color, attractiveness, and mate selection, but many fail to explore colorist socialization and the reproduction of colorism. This study will bridge the gap between colorism literature and family literature by seeking to understand the ways in which families, as a primary agent of socialization (and racial socialization) may maintain skin color ideologies. Understanding
this process may also shed light on the ways less formal private interactions shape the lives
of people of color.

DATA AND METHODS

Data and Sample

The analysis for this study is based upon data from Wave I and Wave III of The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent and Adult Health (Add Health) (Carolina Population Center 2012). I used this dataset because it provides information about family closeness and relationships and because it includes a skin color indicator. The Add Health is a longitudinal, nationally representative sample of students who were in grades 7-12 in the 1994-95 school years. During Wave I of data collection, structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with students, their parents, siblings, fellow students, school administrators, and romantic peers. Four additional waves were completed since 1994. For the purposes of this study, I used Wave I, which included questions about parental interaction, relationships, and communication. Wave III was also used for the purposes of this study because it included a measure for skin tone.

All Add Health participants included in this study answered questions about their resident mother or father, or both resident mother and father. Participants were allowed to legitimately skip these questions if they reported that they did not live with their mother or father. Thus, two samples and two dependent variables indicating relationships with mothers and relationships with fathers were used. As it was not appropriate to multiply impute
relationship dissatisfaction scores for those who do not live with their mothers and/or fathers, missing cases for the dependent variable were dropped from the analysis. This leaves a total sample size of 12,296; however, because participants were allowed to answer questions about both of their resident parents or one resident parent, there are different sample sizes for both dependent variables. The sample sizes for relationship dissatisfaction with mothers and fathers are 11,708 and 8,922, respectively.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for this analysis. Respondents used in this study were 56% White, 20% Black, 13% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 0.6% Native American, and 5% Multi-racial. Those who had missing cases for race, age, skin color, and parental education were dropped from the analysis. Roughly 52% of the respondents in the sample were female, and the mean age in years is 16. The mean for skin color is 4.23 indicating that a higher percentage of respondents were identified by interviews as having white and light brown skin tones. Roughly 77 percent of the respondents were identified as light brown and white, while 23% were identified as having medium brown, dark brown, and black skin tones. Twenty-four percent of responding parents identified that they had a college degree or higher, and 7% of respondents indicate that they are first or second generation immigrants.

Dependent Variables

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2 In the future, multiple imputation will be used for appropriate variables.
Relationships with Mothers and Fathers. Respondents were asked a set of questions which sought to understand relationships with parents. These questions were asked separately for both the mother and father. The dependent variable is a summation of responses to five items measuring mother/father caring, closeness, warmness and lovingness, and satisfaction with relationship. These questions allowed for respondents to reflect on multiple dimensions of closeness.

To assess the potential differences in relationship dissatisfaction between mothers and fathers, two separate Parental Relationship Dissatisfaction indices were created, one for the relationship with mothers and one for the relationship fathers. Factor analyses were conducted on the five variables used for the index by using a polychoric correlation matrix. The polychoric correlation matrix measures the association between ordinal variables and was thus appropriate for the analysis (Ekström 2011). The factor loadings for relationships with mothers were 0.83 for closeness, 0.75 for caring, 0.78 for warmth and lovingness, 0.85 for satisfaction with communication, and 0.90 for overall satisfaction with relationship. These scores suggest that the variables used in the index are a good estimate of “perceived relationship dissatisfaction with mother.” The factor analysis for relationships with fathers also indicates that the index is a good approximation of the concept “perceived relationship dissatisfaction with father.” The factor loadings for relationship with fathers were 0.85 for closeness, 0.77 for caring, 0.85 for warmth and lovingness, 0.88 for satisfaction with

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3 Depending on the section of the question, response categories varied from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) and 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Variables were recoded to allow for responses to flow from positive to negative: 1 (strongly agree or very much) to 5 (strongly disagree or not at all). Therefore, results from this analysis will predict relationship dissatisfaction scores.
communication, and 0.92 for overall satisfaction with relationship. Factor analysis along with an estimate of reliability (Cronbach’s alpha scores) of 0.84 for mothers and 0.88 for fathers respectively, indicate that the items form two concepts, or the dependent variables for the analysis “perceived relationship dissatisfaction” for mother and father.

Independent Variables

Skin Color. Wave III of the Add Health Data includes a variable for skin color which is assessed by the interviewer. Interviewers were required to complete an Interviewer’s Report as soon as they left the respondent’s home. As a part of the Interviewer’s Report, interviews were asked to subjectively rate the respondent’s skin color on a scale of 1-5. The categories for this rating are: 1-black, 2-dark brown, 3-medium brown, 4-light brown and 5-white. Although a categorical variable, skin color is treated as a continuous variable for the purposes of this analysis.

Control variables. Several control variables were used in this analysis including: race, age, gender, parent’s highest level of education, and immigration status.

Race. The Add Health data includes constructed race variables which includes measures for racial categories: White, Black, Native American, and Asian status. Black (=1), Native American (=1), Asian (=1) respondents were then coded as dummy variables.

Although Latin and Hispanic background is considered among researchers as an ethnic category, I created a mutually exclusive category denoting Hispanic or Latin

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4 Joyce Tabor, email correspondence, October 29, 2014.
5 Tests for multicollinearity between race and skin color suggest that race category Black and skin color are highly correlated. This is to be expected since skin color can be used as a proxy for race. The variance inflation factor (VIF) scores were 3.67 for Black, 3.39 for skin color, 2.22 for Hispanic, and 2.01 for immigrant.
American (Hispanic=1) origins. Additionally, multi-race was included and respondents who indicated that they are biracial and multiracial were also included in a mutually exclusive category (Multiracial=1).

*Age* was calculated from Wave I of Add Health by using the respondents’ birthdate and the date of the interview. Respondents’ birthdates were subtracted from the date of the interview to provide an approximate age at the date of the interview. The reported age was then rounded to the nearest whole number. Respondents’ ages ranged from 12 to 21, with a mean of 16. *Sex* was reported by the respondents and was included to test whether sex interacts with skin color to affect relationships between children and their parents. In the present analysis, sex is indicated by a dummy variable with female=1.

*Immigration Status.* To test whether immigration status moderates the relationship between skin color and relationships with parents, I included a measure for immigrant status (immigrant=1). Because the goal of this study is to determine whether any immigrant status moderates the relationship between skin color and relationships with parents, first and second generation immigrants (those with at least one parent born in another country) are included within this dummy variable.

*Class.* Education, a stable measure of social class (Galobardes, Shaw, Lawlor, and Lynch 2006), is the control variable in the analysis. Responding parents were asked, “*How far did you go in school?*” and were given 10 answer choices to choose from, ranging from “never went to school” to “professional training beyond a 4-year college or university.” Responses were then used to create a dummy variable that indicates parents with a college degree or higher, (college degree or higher = 1).
Estimation Techniques. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all racial/ethnic groups used in the analysis. Because the nature of the dependent variables is continuous, OLS regression was performed using Stata 13.0.

FINDINGS

Table 2 presents side-by-side results of children’s perceived relationship dissatisfaction with mothers and fathers. Model 1 reveals the effects of skin color relationship dissatisfaction. This model suggests that skin color, while ignoring all other factors, is related to relationship dissatisfaction with mothers, but not for fathers. This model predicts that a one unit standard deviation increase in skin color would result in a corresponding 0.018 standard deviation increase in relationship dissatisfaction with mothers. Although this finding is marginally significant, with a p-value of 0.056, it does point to a weak relationship between skin color and children’s perceived relationships.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

In Model 2, the effects of sex, age, and class were introduced. For mothers, Model 2 suggests that skin color, net of sex, age, and class is related to perceived relationship dissatisfaction with mothers. When controlling for sex, age, and class, skin color gains significance, and the model predicts that a one unit standard deviation increase in skin color is associated with a 0.018 standard deviation increase in relationship dissatisfaction with mothers. Not surprisingly, for both mothers and fathers, sex and age, are suggested to be related to relationship dissatisfaction. Here, girls are predicted to have higher relationship dissatisfaction with their mothers and fathers. Additionally, net of skin color and gender,
each one year standard deviation increase in age is suggested to correspond with a 0.141 standard deviation increase in relationship dissatisfaction for mothers or a 0.179 standard deviation increase in relationship dissatisfaction for fathers. Consequently, these results offer minimal support for Hypothesis 1, which posits that darker skinned youth will report higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction with parents than respondents with lighter skin tones. Hypothesis 1 is partially supported within the second model, but only for relationships with mothers.

When adding race to the models, skin color loses significance (Model 3). This may be due to the multicollinearity between race and skin color. Skin color may also lose significance for relationships with mothers due to the high levels of dissatisfaction among multiracial youth. Skin color variability amongst multiracials may contribute to higher relationship dissatisfaction with mothers. For mothers, Model 3 suggests that multiracial respondents report higher relationship dissatisfaction than White respondents. Although marginally significant, Black and multiracial respondents report higher relationship dissatisfaction with their fathers than Whites. Model 3 also predicts that Hispanics will report higher relationship dissatisfaction than White respondents.

The last model, Model 4, includes a control for immigrant status. Again, skin color is insignificant in both mothers and fathers. Immigrant status is not significant for the relationship between skin color and parental relationship satisfaction. Sex and age remain significant throughout the models, indicating the importance of sex and age on relationship dissatisfaction.
The results from the main effects models in Table 2 offer minimal support for hypotheses H1 and H2a. While Models 1 through 3 for mothers offer some support for Hypothesis 1, the inclusion of racial categories erases this support; therefore, it is not appropriate to reject the null hypothesis. Hypothesis 1 is not supported. Additionally, although skin color is significant for Models 1-4 for mothers and not significant for Fathers, further analysis and a comparison of the coefficients was conducted to test Hypothesis 2a, which tests whether the effects of skin color and parental dissatisfaction was greater for mothers than fathers. A test of comparison across models was conducted, and produced non-significant results, thus suggesting no support for Hypothesis 2a. 

*Interaction Models*

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

To test Hypotheses 2a-2c, I created four interaction models, which are presented in Table 3. Model 5 suggests that the association between skin color and relationship dissatisfaction with mothers differs by sex. This relationship is marginally significant, with a p-value of 0.06. Specifically, girls with darker skin report higher levels of relationship unhappiness with their mothers than lighter skinned girls. Darker skinned boys, on the other hand, report lower levels of relationship dissatisfaction with mothers than boys with lighter skin. Additionally, this model also suggests that boys experience less relationship dissatisfaction than girls. This model offers marginal support for Hypothesis 2b, which posits that the relationship between skin color and parental relationship dissatisfaction varies between girls and boys, with darker skinned girls reporting higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction than darker skinned boys. Figure 1 offers a visual of the interaction between
skin color and sex on parental dissatisfaction with mothers. The interaction between skin color and class and skin color and immigrant status were not significant; thus Hypothesis 3 and 4 are not supported and I fail to reject the nulls.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

CONCLUSION

The current study does not find support for the relationship between skin color and parental relationship dissatisfaction. This is unexpected, given current findings on parenting quality, socialization, and skin color (Wilder and Cain 2011; Landor et al 2013). While earlier models suggested that skin color may be related to parental satisfaction, this relationship was eliminated with the introduction of racial categories. This may be due to multicollinearity issues discussed earlier. Race and skin color, specifically Black and skin color had high VIF scores of 3.39 and 3.67, respectively. Thus, race may mutes the relationship between skin color and parental dissatisfaction, for both mothers and fathers. To test whether this was true, I also created restrictive models that did not include race variables. Not surprisingly, skin color remained significant for relationship dissatisfaction with mothers across the models. This suggests that race categories may eliminate the relationship between skin tone and relationship dissatisfaction. This also suggests that skin color may operate as a proxy for racial categorization, as evidenced in literature on skin color and racial identity (López 2008). Skin color variability among multiracials may also provide an explanation for the skin color effects in the race models. Future research should direct attention to multiracials and their experiences and relationships with their parents.
An important finding in this study is the association of sex and skin color and how this relationship works to change predictive maternal satisfaction scores. This finding is consistent with literature suggests that the effects of skin color operate differently for boys than for girls (Thompson and Keith 2001; Landor et al. 2013). These findings, although marginal, also suggest that mothers may be more likely to transmit colorist ideologies (Wilder and Cain 2011). Because skin color operates differently for women than for men, and because the history of colorism is rooted in a deep history of racism and Eurocentric ideals of beauty, mothers may reproduce skin color ideologies. Literature on racial and skin color socialization suggests that mothers, because they generally provide nurturing and caring, may reproduce dominant ideologies, usually in an attempt to prepare their children for discrimination or to teach their children of injustice (Hughes et al. 2006; Wilder and Cain 2011; Landor et al. 2013). Ideological reproduction, along with the organization of caring as women’s work, thus may influence the findings in this study. Further research should focus on within-family relationships to assess whether mothers (and fathers) may be reproducing skin color ideologies to children.

It is important to note, however, that darker skinned boys reported less relationship dissatisfaction than lighter skinned boys and darker skinned girls. Boys, regardless of skin color, also reported lower levels of relationship dissatisfaction than girls. There are two reasons this might be the case. First, traditional gender socialization, regardless of race, promotes masculinity and masculine traits. To be a boy, is to possess emotional restraint and exert dominance and assertiveness (Connell 2005). Therefore, boys may not evaluate their relationships with their mothers and fathers in the same ways that girls do. They may provide
more attention to instrumental tasks of both their mothers and fathers, while girls are socialized to focus on more expressive behaviors. Additionally, because the effects of skin color are different for women and men, some mothers may be aware of this, and may treat their sons differently than their daughters. Future research should analyze siblings and family relationships and processes to assess whether this is the case.

This study is not without limitations. One of the biggest limitations is the absence of indicators for parental race and skin tone. As literature has suggested, parental characteristics, as well as other features may affect how parents treat their children (Belsky 1984). Darker skinned parents may reproduce or negate colorist ideologies within their families. Future research should examine both parental race and skin tone as factors that contribute to the reproduction of inequality within the home. Additionally, I did not include a measure for income or other socioeconomic factors, like employment or government assistance. These variables were excluded because of high levels of missing-ness.6 These factors are shown to moderate the relationship between skin tone and various outcomes and should be considered in future studies.

While the main focus of this study was to ascertain the extent of Latin Americanization and colorism on informal relationships, future studies should look at colorism within family contexts, specifically whether the relationship between skin color and family processes or interactions differs for siblings in the same households. This research is important because families operate as a primary agent of socialization and can work to

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6 In future research, I would perform multiple imputation techniques on these variables.
reproduce dominant ideology. Differences amongst siblings may point to a more intricate way in which colorism may operate to disadvantage certain family members based on skin tone or other features. Furthermore, this study sets up a discussion for intersectionality within literature on Latin Americanization and colorism. This study suggests that for some families of color, skin color may be important for relationships; however, the importance of skin color, as revealed by other scholars in the field, varies by sex. Latin Americanization and color-line scholars may find that focusing on sex and class may be fruitful in their understanding of changing racial dynamics in the United States.

Families play a crucial role in socialization, and how families socialize and interact with their children has consequences for how the children feel towards and about their relationships with their parents and family members. The findings in this study provide insight into this relationship by analyzing the ways in which skin tone, which operates as an important factor in racial socialization, might affect a child’s perceived closeness to his/her family. Since social institutions are invariably linked, racial hierarchical practices and ideologies are all encompassing and are not solely regulated to the public sphere. Personal and familial relationships are also shaped by experiences with race and colorism. The various forms of racial socialization and their consequences within the home are often taken for granted. Because scholars and writers have already shown the importance and debilitating effects of skin color on self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, experiences, and mobility, understanding colorism in the context of family relationships allows scholars, family activists and researchers to realize the importance of the family in the perpetuation of colorism and dominant ideological beliefs and practices.
References


(http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth)


### Table 1: Variables and Descriptive Statistics

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Unstandardized coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses * p < .05 † p < .10
Table 3: OLS Regression Table Predicting Children’s Relationship Dissatisfaction with Mothers and Fathers (Interactions Effects)

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<tr>
<td>Multi Race=1</td>
<td>0.101*</td>
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<td>0.0864†</td>
<td>0.0863†</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.038)</td>
<td>(0.038)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.0226</td>
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<td>(0.035)</td>
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<td>(0.043)</td>
<td>(0.172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female* Skin Color</td>
<td>-0.0241†</td>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>-0.0201</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.012)</td>
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<td>(0.018)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skin Color* Parent’s Education</td>
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<td>-0.0309</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.020)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-----</td>
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<td>(0.032)</td>
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<td>(0.039)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skin Color* Black</td>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>0.300*</td>
<td>0.344*</td>
<td>0.347*</td>
<td>-0.0589</td>
<td>-0.0484</td>
<td>-0.0363</td>
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<td>(0.098)</td>
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<td>(0.095)</td>
<td>(0.129)</td>
<td>(0.126)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>adj. R²</td>
<td>0.030</td>
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<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.042</td>
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<tr>
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<td>33.04</td>
<td>33.04</td>
<td>39.96</td>
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<td>36.38</td>
</tr>
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Unstandardized coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses * p < .05 † p < .10
Figure 1: Predictive Scores for Relationship Dissatisfaction with Mother