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A Cross-Regional Analysis of Colorism Experiences in High Schoolers in India and the United States

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ABSTRACT

Around the world, various beauty standards are often portrayed in the media and expressed by people living in that region, which devolve into unconscious biases. Previous research points to a worldwide skin tone perception standard: dark skin is undesirable. Slavery in the United States and the caste system in India, among other historical phenomena, have played a role in creating this common perception. This study investigates colorism, defined as prejudice against dark skin tones, and aims to examine experiences of colorism and self-esteem through an online survey sent to high school students in India and in the United States. This research paper is unique because a comparison study of regions is not commonly found in the existing literature and, high school students, living in a globally connected world, will provide new perspectives on the cross-cultural issue of colorism. 122 responses (90 from India and 32 from the United States) were collected. A T-test comparing India to the United States found that students in India reported higher colorism than those in the United States ($t = -70.219$, $p < 0.01$), and students in the United States reported lower self-esteem ($t = -53.33$, $p < 0.01$) compared to those in India. However, skin tone was not significantly correlated with self-esteem or colorist experiences in India or the USA. These results show that the stigma of dark skin tones has not been mitigated and also suggests that there may be other variables apart from skin tone that have greater effect on self-esteem.

Introduction

History of Colorism in Asia and the United States

Colorism is defined as prejudice or discrimination against people of a dark skin tone. Hunter (2016) explains that while racism affects an entire group of people simply because they are a part of that race, colorism is defined by the intensity of that discrimination which is dependent on one's skin tone. Colorism has deep historical roots in various ethnic groups across the world. India's colorist ideologies have extended for centuries. Hundreds of years ago, Indians were organized based on a caste system. People who were lower in caste would likely work in manual labor, while those higher in caste could live a life of comfort indoors. Therefore, people lower in caste tended to be tan with darker skin tones, while those in higher castes tended to have fairer skin tone complexions. Skin tone was often associated with a person's financial status. Those with fairer skin tones were seen as more desirable because they were thought to have more status, especially women (Mishra, 2015). Even though the Indian caste system was a method of social organization used centuries ago, it continues to have cross-generational effects on colorism. To date, it is rare to find a successful and revered dark-skinned Indian female actress. Furthermore, many marriage ads in the newspaper still list fair skin as a desirable trait. Researchers also found that 78% of men in a study mentioned light skin color in the description of pretty (Mishra, 2015). Colorism also played into the success of *Fair and Lovely*, a popular skin-lightening product

across many regions in Asia (Shaikh, 2017). These lightening products contain compounds such as mercury and have been associated with mercury poisoning and cancer risk (Shaikh, 2017). A study investigated the pressure to change skin color and found that 84% of female users of *Fair and Lovely* products knew the harmful effects of using bleach but continued using products that contain that ingredient (Shaikh, 2017). Additionally, 36% of the total sample population uses these bleaching products (Shaikh, 2017). These ideologies also affect the Indian diaspora. When participants were asked how they felt about their skin color in a case study, all respondents immediately classified themselves by how "fair/light" or "dark" they were and gave insights into what would be seen as desirable within their respective South Asian societies (Shaikh, 2017). The interviewees explained that "gori" or fair was used synonymously with beauty throughout South Asia and that "khala," meaning black, is sometimes used by the South Asian community to speak poorly of darker-skinned Indians and even Black Americans suggesting colorism can influence perceptions across cultures as well (Shaikh, 2017).

Colorism in the United States is also deeply rooted in its history with slavery. When slavery was legal in the United States, from the early 1600s to 1865, many slaves were sexually assaulted by their masters and gave birth to children of mixed skin tones (Stamps et al., 2018). These children were often given preferential treatment. For example, lighter skin children were given housework instead of hard labor in the field. However, despite the varying opportunities presented to these slaves, they were all considered black. This meant that a wide range of people was categorized under a race umbrella, but societal treatment depended greatly on skin tone. These forms of discrimination and a sense of superiority for light skin existed well after slavery was abolished. In the early 20th century, many African-American organizations, such as social clubs, churches, fraternities, and sororities, used several "tests" to admit members into the society. For example, the "Paper Bag" Test involved asking a prospective member to stand next to a paper bag. If their skin was the same shade or lighter, they were admitted to the group; otherwise, they were rejected (Stamps et al., 2018). Another test performed was the comb on a string test. If a comb got stuck in a person's hair, meaning their hair was of a kinky texture, they would not be admitted. Only those who could pass through the comb without getting stuck were admitted (Stamps et al., 2018). Lastly, interviewers would ask to see a person's arm to see if they could spot blue veins. If they could, it would help the applicant get admitted. These are clear ways that lighter blacks would separate themselves from darker-skinned blacks. In addition to admissions tests, societies and social clubs had "color tax" parties. The darker a person's date, the higher the "tax" they would have to pay at the door (Bryant, 2013). The phenomenon of early exposure to colorism hit the public eye in the 1950s study when African American children were shown a black and white doll and were asked which doll was pretty and which was ugly. Kids told the experimenter, "he's pretty 'cause he's white" or "he's ugly 'cause he's black' ' demonstrating that children have acquired harmful underlying messages regarding colorism in the world around them from a very young age (Clark & Clark, 1958). Although it may seem that colorism is a phenomenon of years past, these ideologies continue to be entrenched in media and in society today.

The Influence of Media on Self-Esteem and Perpetuating Colorism

Power is the ability to influence others and exists at the very core of society. It determines the leadership and organization of groups of people (Voyer & McIntosh, 2013). Power is largely why colorist ideology has maintained a hold on so many people worldwide: the power of the media.

The media greatly influence people. When beauty brands advertise a certain product or procedure, they are telling their viewer that they do not look beautiful as they are and that by purchasing the product or getting the procedure done, their appearance would improve. Essentially, these brands capitalize on people's low self-esteem about their physical self and prompt a need for them to change their appearance. In the fashion and beauty industries, looks are marketed so heavily that their target populations use their products daily. When

respondents were asked how likely they were to wear makeup in six different scenarios, the most popular answers for all situations were "somewhat likely," "likely," and "very likely," illustrating that makeup is valued and worn in many situations in a college woman's life (Britton, 2012). Beyond purchasing cosmetics, the number of cosmetic surgeries performed has drastically increased in the past few years (Britton, 2012). Therefore, these industries can heavily influence people's perceptions of themselves and their need to change their appearance. This not only results in profit for many beauty industries but also creates a positive feedback loop where the marketing of products leads to lower self-esteem, which in turn bolsters companies to continue marketing those products.

Sometimes the advertisement of a product is not required to make people feel like they need to change their appearance. Selective media and lack of representation also send indirect signals about how society, and therefore other people, would perceive someone else. A study examining Iranian textbooks found females are significantly less represented than males. It concluded that female/male visibility could perpetuate sexist ideologies by suggesting implicitly that women are not as important as men and do not need to be mentioned (Amini & Birjandi, 2012). This thought process also carries over regarding skin color. The omission of stories of people of certain races in history and media can influence people's perception of who is important and, more importantly, who is not. For example, Krishna, in Hindu mythology, was a god with dark-colored skin; Krishna itself translates to "black," In many religious references, however, he is continuously depicted as blue or white (Mishra, 2015). The omission of dark skin in various spaces may be one factor that can lead people to believe that their skin color is not celebrated if they don't see it represented in the media they are exposed to. In another example, up until the 1980s, black women rarely were shown in working roles in offices or other professional spaces. Studies have shown that in the 1990s, blacks with lighter complexion and more caucasian features were more frequently found in advertisements versus editorial photos (Fears, 1998). This lack of representation conveys the implicit message that black women are not found in offices or professional settings and possibly that they don't deserve to be there.

Sometimes, colorism is much more apparent in the media. A study investigating the animated series Proud Family described the nuances of colorism depicted by some characters. Dijonay May Jones is Penny Proud's best friend in the show. Dijonay is portrayed as the comic relief and is the character most overtly sexualized. She is short, has a thicker build, and has dark skin and full lips. She also has dyed blond hair. Throughout the show, she is constantly mocked for her hair because it demonstrates her unsuccessful efforts to attain the American beauty standard of white skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. (Steele, 2016). A viewer watching the show could get the implicit message that certain physical characteristics, dark skin, and full lips, are unattractive, and they may develop insecurities if they display those features. Another student's investigation found that minorities are often depicted in stereotypical roles that portray darker-skinned individuals in demeaning roles, while lighter-skinned actors are perceived as intelligent (Leary, 2018). This finding emphasizes that colorism in the media, especially film, is not a one-time phenomenon but a consistent trend that can slowly affect viewers' perceptions of themselves.

Although recently there have been some changes, especially in beauty industries, with regards to providing products to a diverse array of people, this change took a long time. This is because these industries won't support an ideology unless it benefits them. For the longest time, the beauty industry profited from telling dark-skinned people to purchase skin-lightening products. Now, however, after so many years of limited options of foundations and other beauty products for people of dark skin tones, the success of Rhianna's Fenty beauty, a brand that, by offering extensive dark shade options for people with deeper skin tones, started a new trend in beauty. Suddenly major companies in the cosmetic industry expanded their foundation shade offerings to include people of dark skin tones (Frisby, 2019). The reason for this shift was simple: by offering an overlooked population more items, the company's sales would increase profit.

Skin-Color Discrimination in Academia & Employment

New research published in a dissertation suggests that a teacher's rating of students varies depending on the teacher's race and surrounding environment (Grissom & Bartanen, 2022). Other researchers found that African American female adolescents with darker complexions were almost twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their white counterparts (Blake et al., 2017). Interestingly, this finding did not hold for African American female students with lighter skin complexions. A literature review examining academic delay in elementary school children of different skin tones found that Dominican American boys whose phenotypic features appeared to be Black showed an increase in academic delay after pre-kindergarten. In contrast, those whose phenotypic features appeared to be White showed a decrease in academic delay. The researchers concluded that these boys were impacted by their teachers greatly, who showed colorist biases (Crutchfield et al., 2022).

The "halo effect" is the tendency for physical attractiveness to be linked to positive characteristics such as intelligence and kindness (Hunter, 2016). A study explains that light-skinned people are more likely to experience the halo effect with teachers, forming better relationships with them and having a more positive experience in school. These positive interactions hold for teachers' interaction with light-skinned parents as well and their interactions with teachers may be viewed more favorably than their dark-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2016). Since the way a student is promoted or not can affect their mentality about their abilities, self-confidence, and skin color, unconscious biases portrayed by teachers in the school system can have a very real effect on individuals and the greater student body.

Employment also plays a role in the presence of colorism in society in both the United States and India. In the United States, a study found that minorities who "whitened" their resumes by removing any references to their race were more successful in getting hired (Kang et al., 2016). Another study found that white subjects preferred to hire a lighter-skinned black man with a bachelor's degree and limited work experience over a darker-skinned black man with an MBA, bachelor's degree, and managerial experience (Marira & Mitra, 2013). These two studies show that underlying colorism can affect much more than a person's self-esteem but also their economic prospects in life.

Another study found that when 17 participants were asked to line up pictures of several middle eastern women from most hireable to least hireable, the lightest skin candidate with blue eyes was selected first by the majority of participants, eight out of seventeen, and the second lightest skin candidate was selected first by five out of 17 participants. A participant who identified as black was asked to elaborate on his decision to hire a light-skinned woman and explained that "you know ...society would choose white girls...so I would choose them too" (Bahraini, 2021). This study showed that even people who recognize society's implicit biases might go along with them simply because they don't want to challenge those ideas.

A study about women's career opportunities in India found that fair-skinned people are viewed as more beautiful, worthy, intelligent, and competent. In contrast, darker-skinned people are considered dirty, lazy, and ignorant. The article argues that a woman's dark skin can exclude her from entering positions requiring her to interact with people such as news anchors, sales associates, flight attendants, and receptionists because people will judge her as unattractive and not worthy (Sims & Hirudayaraj, 2016). This is yet another example of how appearance and likeability greatly influence the way someone is perceived and whether or not they are hired. These studies demonstrate that colorism can present real economic barriers for some people when their appearances can demote or promote their credentials. On the other hand, a study in India investigated the job opportunities for Indians of various skin colors interviewing for the same position. Resumes were graded based on an education rating, experience rating, resume rating, interview, and presentability. However, there was no significant difference in mean rating scores across skin tones (Vijaya & Bhullar, 2022). Despite these mixed results, it is crucial to note that behaviors and decisions can change when people are aware of their unconscious biases. Unconscious bias training exercises, where participants learned about their implicit gender biases, led them to rate a female as a candidate more competent and hireable than a male candidate who had not participated

in the training exercises (Atewologun et al., 2018). Unconscious bias training related to skin color biases might similarly mitigate stigma and promote greater equality.

The Present Study

It is clear that external sources, such as family, media, academic institutions, and employers, have continued to perpetuate historical colorist ideologies in the United States and India. However, what is not clear is if young people today continue to face colorism on a daily basis and if it affects their self-esteem. Thus far, studies have been conducted with older age populations, such as college students and adults; by examining high school students, it can be possible to identify the ingrained biases earlier. Understanding trends in colorist perceptions of high school students can further help stakeholders to address issues with perpetuating colorism through initiatives such as colorism awareness and unconscious bias training.

Additionally, a cross-cultural comparison of experiences of colorism in the west, the United States, and the east, India, is lacking in the literature. By directly comparing the experiences of high school students from India and the United States, it can help identify if the issue of colorism has been mitigated or if it continues to affect people in different regions of the world disappropionately. Comparing the regions could provide insight to the roots of the problem. It is possible that the west, given its growing representation, diversity, and inclusivity, will report higher self-esteem among darker-skinned people which may not be present in the east where beauty standards and the media have remained stagnant. Understanding predeterminers of colorism is critical because only by evaluating the experiences people have undergone, is it possible to raise awareness about the issue and push for the accessibility of opportunity.

It is also evident that these external influences, such as media and family, can affect a person's self-esteem including their need to change their physical appearance to align with the beauty standard. Therefore, it is also necessary to evaluate a person's self-esteem, given that repeated exposure to colorism can prompt people to change how they present and view themselves.

This study examines the relationship between skin tone and region by colorism and self-esteem in high school students. Data was collected through a questionnaire where students provided valuable insights into colorism experiences they have faced in their lives as well as their self-esteem related to their skin tone. I predict that high school students in India will report higher perceived colorism compared to the United States because that population has darker skin and a less diverse media compared to that in the United States. Further, I predict that in both regions there will be a correlation between skin tones and rated colorism such that darker skin tones rate higher levels of perceived colorism. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the study was that region of residence and skin tone show no relationship with perceived colorism and self esteem. The alternative hypothesis was that region of residence and skin tone do show a relationship with perceived colorism and self esteem. This investigation will further the work in the psychology of colorism by providing a fresh perspective by sampling a younger population for the study and by comparing the responses of participants from two very different places in the world.

Methods

An Institutional Review Board, created through the Regeneron STS process, reviewed and approved the protocol for this study. 122 high school students participated in this research. 90 survey responses were collected from a school in Tamil Nadu, India, and 32 responses were collected from a school and a museum in Connecticut, United States. Students were between the ages of 14 to 17. After providing assent, and parent consent to participate in this study, students completed a 5-10 minute survey. Students were also asked to report their region of residence, gender, race, and perceived skin tone based on the Fitzpatrick Scale.

From India, 30 (33.33%) respondents identified as male, 59 (65.55%) identified as female, and 1 (1.11%) respondent identified as non-binary. From the United States, 9 (28.13%) respondents identified as male, 20 (62.5%) respondents identified as female, and 3 (9.38%) respondents identified as non-binary. From India, 80 (88.88%) of the participants identified as Asian. 1 (1.11%) identified as Black. 7 (7.77%) identified as other, and 2 (2.22%) identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native. From the United States, 10 (31.25%) participants identified as Asian. 11 (34.38%) identified as White. 1 (3.13%) identified as Black. 4 (12.5%) identified as Hispanic/Latinx. 6 (18.75%) identified as other.

Measures

The survey consisted of primarily two questionnaires with the addition of a few questions for a total of 19 questions. The first questionnaire, a measure of global self-worth, was a modified version of the Rosenberg Scale. The original Rosenburg scale is a 10-item scale that measures both positive and negative feelings about the self (Rosenburg, 1965). All items used a 4-point Likert scale format with answer choices including 1 = "strongly agree", 2 = "agree", 3 = "disagree", and 4 = "strongly disagree" with some of these questions reverse coded. Examples of items included were "I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others." and "At times I think I am no good at all." The modified scale used in this study consists of 5 statements. A mean self-esteem score was calculated for each respondent. Throughout the rest of the paper the term self esteem refers to this mean score.

The second questionnaire assessed perceived ethnic and racial discrimination, here referred to as colorism. Questions were modified, removed and added to the Brief Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire–Community Version, to better assess perceived colorism (Blair et al., 2021). The original Brief PEDQ-CV questionnaire is a 17-item scale. All items used a 5-point Likert scale format with answer choices including 1= "strongly agree/always", 2 = "agree/often", 3 = "neutral/sometimes", 4 = "disagree/rarely", and 5 = "strongly disagree/never". Depending on the question, some values were reverse coded (Blair et al., 2021). An example of an item is: "Because of the color of your skin, how often have others threatened to hurt you?" However, this questionnaire had many questions that would likely not be applicable to a high school student such as "has anyone damaged your property". Therefore, new questions were added to cover aspects of life that would pertain to a high school student. An example of a new question is "Have family members made positive comments regarding your skin tone?" These new questions were added to gain more insight about the various societal pressures and experiences the respondents have undergone in a variety of aspects in their life. The modified scale used in this study consists of 14 statements. A mean colorism score was calculated for each respondent. Throughout the rest of the paper the term colorism refers to this mean score.

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they believed they can be successful in life and if they believed that they are beautiful. These questions were asked to determine the respondent's view of themselves and their future in the context of the colorism they had experienced. Data was cleaned and analyzed using *R (*R Core Team, 2022). A t-test was used to test the differences in colorism and self-esteem by region (India versus United States). A linear regression model was used to assess the relationships between colorism and self-esteem by skin tone in each country, separately.

Results

Table 1. Perceived Colorism and Self-esteem by Participant Country

	India (N = 90)	**USA (N = 32)**

Perceived Colorism Mean Standard Deviation	 4.29 (0.368)	 3.86 (0.434)
Self-esteem Mean Standard Deviation	 3.00 (0.348)	 2.84 (0.299)

Table 2. Indian Participant's Reported Skin Tone, Perceived Colorism, and Self-esteem

	Light, Pale White (N = 4)	**White, Fair (N = 19)**	**Medium, White to Olive (N = 31)**	**Olive, Moderate Brown (N = 24)**	**Brown, Dark Brown (N = 12)**	**Total (N = 90)**
Perceived Colorism Mean Standard Deviation	 4.02 (0.401)	 4.49 (0.260)	 4.29 (0.309)	 4.29 (0.400)	 4.10 (0.455)	 4.29 (0.368)
Self-esteem Mean Standard Deviation	 2.80 (0.516)	 3.03 (0.315)	 3.01 (0.354)	 2.99 (0.315)	 2.98 (0.422)	 3.00 (0.348)

Table 3. American Participant Skin Tone, Perceived Colorism, and Self-esteem

	Light, Pale White (N = 4)	**White, Fair (N = 19)**	**Medium, White to Olive (N = 31)**	**Olive, Moderate Brown (N = 24)**	**Brown, Dark Brown (N = 12)**	**Total (N = 90)**
Perceived Colorism Mean Standard Deviation	 3.87 (0.415)	 3.94 (0.406)	 3.90 (0.449)	 3.25 (0.455)	 3.71 (NA)	 3.86 (0.434)
Self-esteem Mean Standard Deviation	 2.73 (0.413)	 2.80 (0.283)	 2.97 (0.233)	 2.60 (0.283)	 2.60 (NA)	 2.84 (0.299)

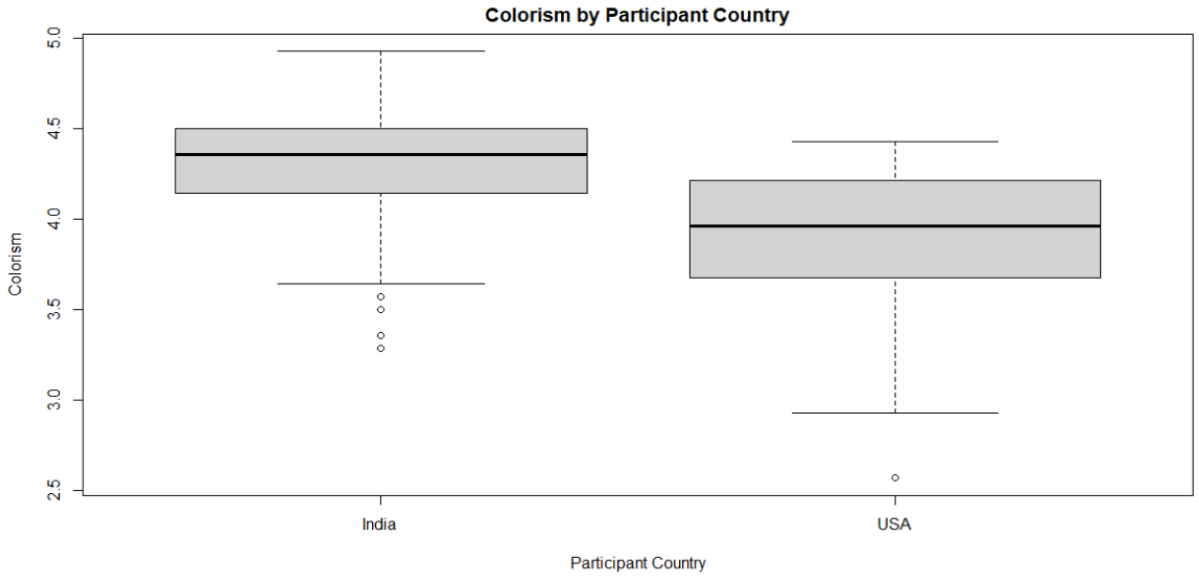

Figure 1. Perceived Colorism by Participant Country. There was a statistically significant difference in mean colorism in India compared to the United States at the level of $p < 0.05$ ($t(241.82) = -70.219$, $p < 0.01$), where India had significantly higher reported colorism (Mean = 4.29, SD = 0.368) than the US (Mean = 3.86, SD = 0.434) .

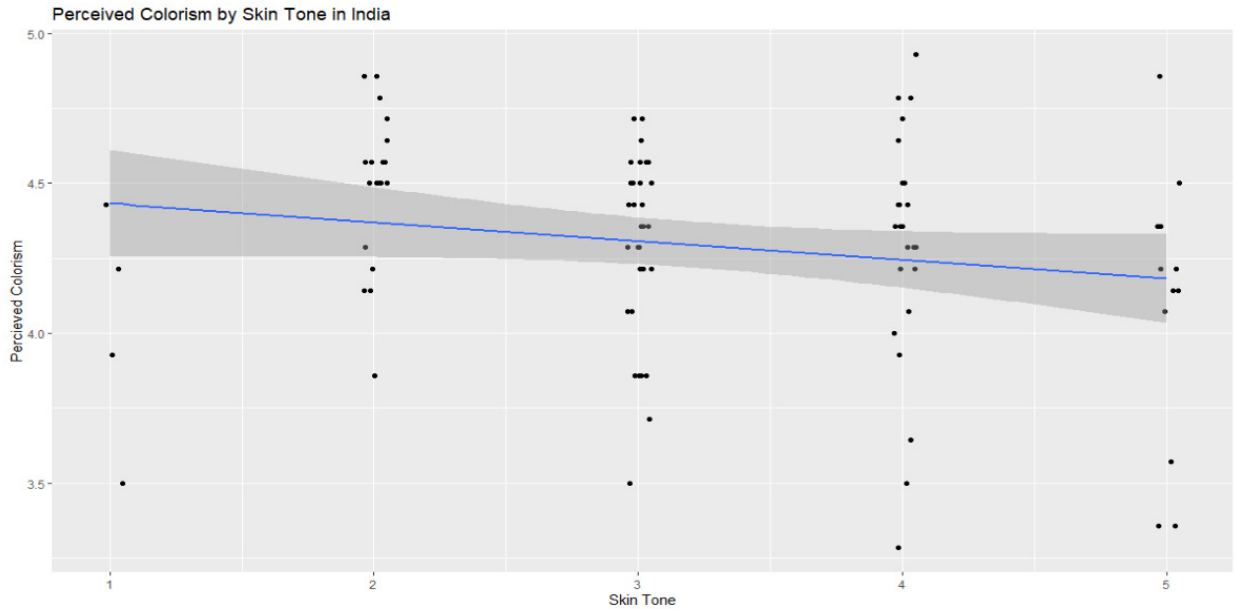

Figure 2. Perceived Colorism by Skin Tone in India. In India, there was a trending significant relationship between skin tone and perceived colorism ($\beta = -0.063$, $p = 0.09$). However, this relationship was not significant at the $p = 0.05$.

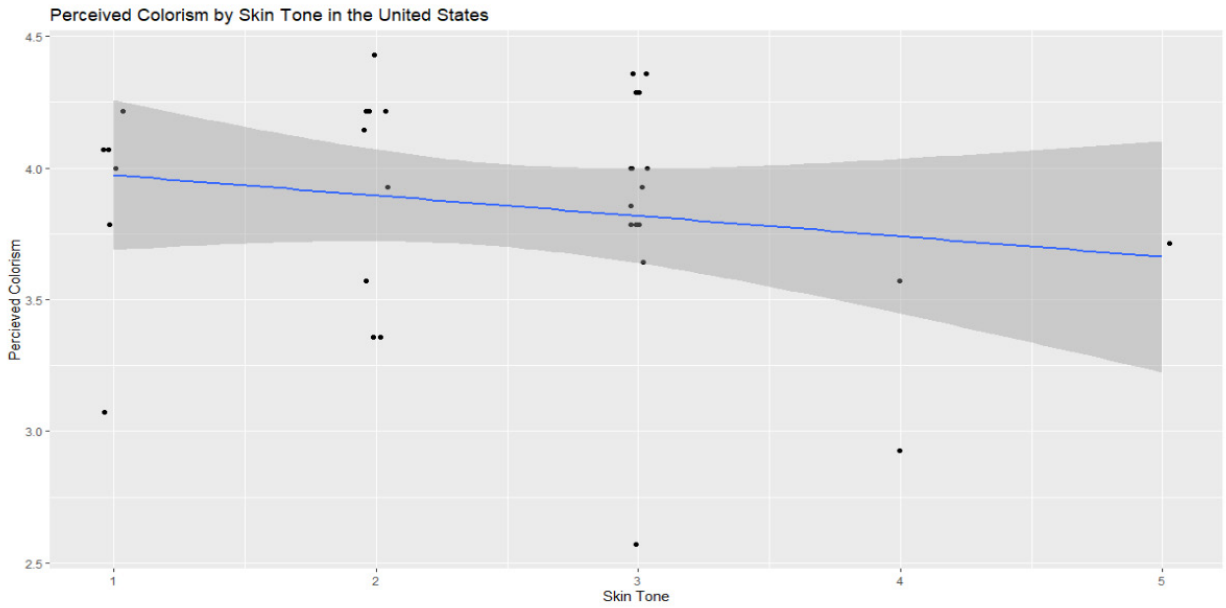

Figure 3. Perceived Colorism by Skin Tone in the United States. In the United States, there was no significant relationship between skin tone and perceived colorism ($\beta = -0.063$, $p = 0.09$).

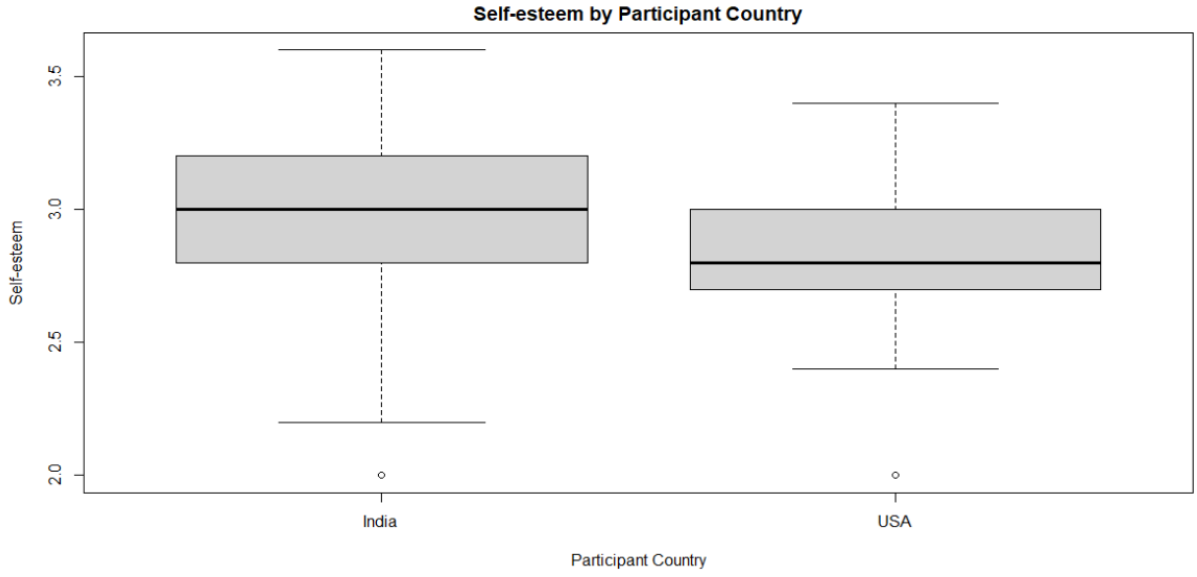

Figure 4. Self Esteem by Participant Country. There was a statistically significant difference in reported mean self-esteem in India compared to the United States ($t(227.53) = -53.33$, $p < 0.01$) at the level of $p < 0.05$ where India had significantly higher reported self-esteem (Mean = 3.00, SD = 0.348) than the US (Mean = 2.84, SD = 0.299) .

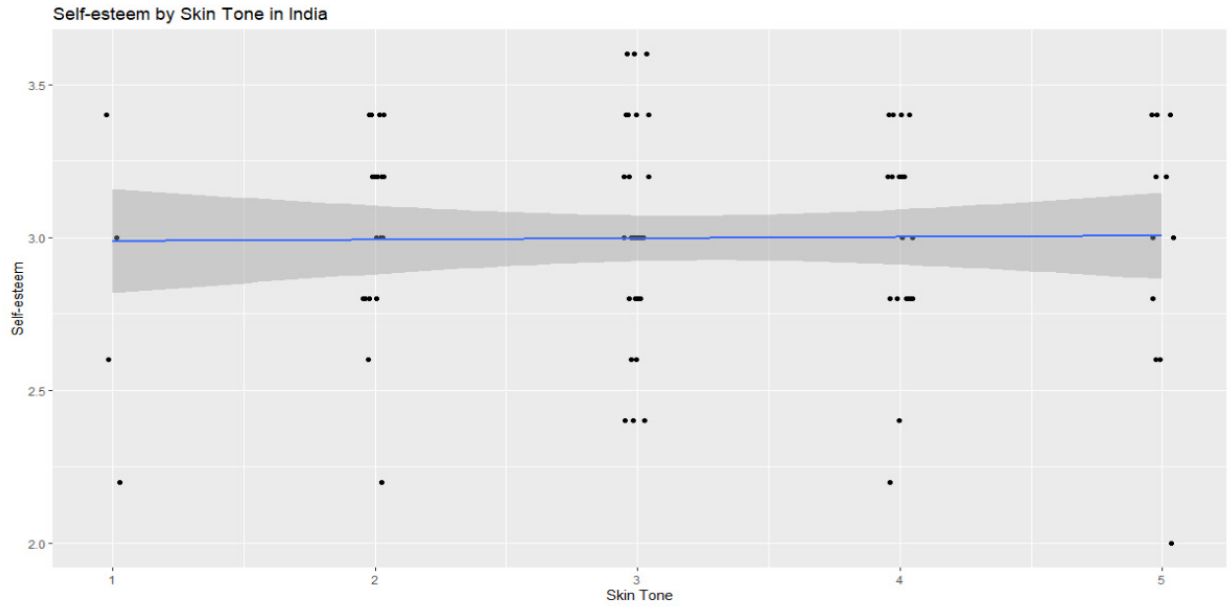

Figure 5. Self Esteem by Skin Tone in India. There was a trending significant relationship between skin tone and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.0044$, $p = 0.9$). However this is not a significant result at the level of $p < 0.05$.

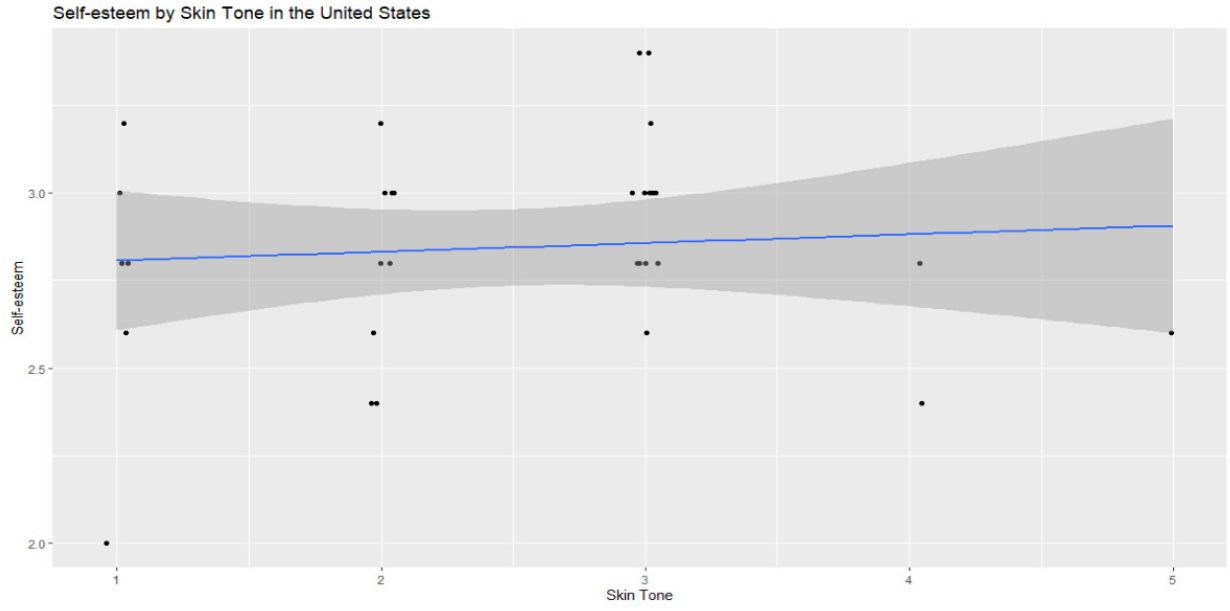

Figure 6. Self Esteem by Skin Tone in the United States. There was no significant relationship between skin tone and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.025$, $p = 0.66$).

A t-test was used to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in perceived colorism in India versus the United States. The perceived colorism differed across countries ($t(241.82) = -70.219$, $p < 0.01$), with India reporting higher colorism compared to the United States. Therefore, there is a difference across countries in the relationship between colorism and region. Because of this difference, the relationship between colorism and skin tone was then assessed in each region.

To test the relationship between perceived colorism by skin tone in India, a regression model was used. In India, there was a trending significant relationship between skin tone and perceived colorism ($\beta = -0.063$, $p = 0.09$). This suggests that with an increase in darkness of skin tone, high school students reported a lower rating of perceived colorism, however this is not a significant result at the level of $p < 0.05$ (Figure 2).

Another regression model was used to assess the relationship between perceived colorism by skin tone in the United States. It was determined that there was no significant relationship between skin tone and perceived colorism ($\beta = -0.077$, $p = 0.34$). This suggests that regardless of an increase in reported darkness of skin tone, there is no significant difference in the rating of perceived colorism (Figure 3). However, the lack of significant results found here may be due to the smaller US sample and the lack of representation in darker rated skin tones. Additional research is needed.

Since region of residence affected perceived colorism, the relationship between region of residence and self-esteem was then evaluated. It was shown that self-esteem did differ across countries, ($t(227.53) = -53.33$, $p < 0.01$). The United States reported lower self esteem compared to India. Overall, there is a difference across countries in the relationship between self-esteem and region.

To test the relationship between self-esteem by skin tone in India, a regression model was used. In India, there was a trending significant relationship between skin tone and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.0044$, $p = 0.9$). This suggests that with an increase in darkness of skin tone, high school students reported a higher rating of self-esteem, however this is not a significant result at the level of $p < 0.05$ (Figure 5).

Another regression model was used to assess the relationship between self-esteem by skin tone in the United States. It was determined that there was no significant relationship between skin tone and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.025$, $p = 0.66$). This suggests that regardless of an increase in reported darkness of skin tone, there is no significant difference in the rating of self-esteem (Figure 6). However, just like the previous calculations on perceived colorism, the lack of significant results found here may be due to the smaller US sample and the lack of representation in darker rated skin tones. Again, additional research is needed.

Furthermore, 34 (28%) people surveyed reported feeling that they are “always” or “often” not represented in the media. 26 (21%) people reported that they “agree” and “strongly agree” that the color of your skin can affect the promotions and job offerings one receives. 33 (27%) people reported that they “agree” and “strongly agree” that the color of their skin determines how attractive they are perceived to be. However, only 5 (4%) respondents felt the need to change the color of their skin using bleaching products. Overall, 105 (86%) people reported either “agree” or “strongly agree” when asked if they believe they will be successful in life in regards to the survey and 87 (71%) people reported either strongly agree or agree when asked if they believe they are beautiful in regards to the survey. All of these statistics show that despite some respondents having experienced or recognized colorism in their environment, people are generally confident in their abilities and in themselves.

Discussion

These results are novel findings, the first being that colorism experiences may not be affected by skin tone but rather by the region of residence. The second is that there may be other contributors apart from colorism that more greatly affect a person’s self-esteem.

This study reinforces some similar conclusions from the existing literature: region can heavily influence a person’s experiences, as it was determined that there is a significant difference in reported perceived colorism between India and the United States, with India reporting higher colorism. This was expected given the Indian media industry’s weak efforts to increase representation as well as the persistent culture of colorism in India that was outlined in previous literature. The marketing of skin whitening products not only implied that whiteness equaled success and social mobility but also conveyed that darker skin was of a lesser and poor socioeconomic status. (Vijaya & Bhullar, 2022). On the other hand, in recent years there have been a rising number

of western organizations adopting unconscious bias training (Atewologun et al., 2018). These studies collectively demonstrate the slightly more inclusive culture that western nations are beginning to foster compared to that of countries from the east, such as India. Therefore it was expected that respondents to the survey in India would report higher colorism.

However, surprisingly, while India reported higher colorism experiences, the United States reported lower self-esteem. Seeing that colorism, among other forms of discrimination can greatly affect a person's view of themselves, this finding may point to other environmental stimuli that more greatly affect self-esteem. An example of an external factor that could affect self-esteem would be social media. Researchers have found that there is a relationship with social media use and self-esteem in which an increase in social media use results in a decrease in self-esteem (Jan et al., 2017). It may be possible that youth in the United States have greater access to smartphones and social media compared to those in India given that India is still a developing country and the United States is a highly developed country.

The most surprising finding however was that this study found that skin tone may not affect the colorism young people experience because there was no significant relationship in reported self-esteem and colorism based on skin tone within each region, meaning that people of all skin tones share similar experiences in regards to colorism and have similar levels of self esteem. This study makes the conversation about colorism more than just skin-deep. Rather, the cultural atmosphere in which someone resides can more heavily influence a person's life. Understanding this can help address the culture of colorism in developing countries such as India. There are campaigns such as "Unfair and Lovely" which teach the younger generation that all skin tones are valid (Shaikh, 2017). By promoting the messages of those organizations and reflecting it in society by increasing the number of dark-skinned people represented in the media, it may decrease the negative experiences Indian students have had in regard to colorism.

There were a few limitations in this study. While this study provides some insights into perceived colorism and self-esteem in the United States, the sample size from this region was small. A larger and more representative sample of the United States would allow for stronger conclusions about these relationships. In addition, sampling from multiple locations in India and the United States as well as other countries could also be a good future step to ensure a more diverse and varied understanding of the relationship between perceived colorism and self-esteem in high school students.

Additionally, in future studies, greater representation may help. In this study, only one person identified themselves as black in the United States. Furthermore, there was a lot of skew in the scatterplots with limited light skin values in India and limited dark skin values in the United States. No respondents from both regions identify themselves as a six on the scale. In a follow up study, I would try to survey more people from diverse communities to ensure that these results are representative of a wide range of experiences.

Some next steps for this study would be to determine a different way of testing perceived colorism and self-esteem. The IAT is the implicit association test, which measures the strength of associations people have about groups of people and certain stereotypes (McConnell & Leibold, 2001). In a previous study, participants who revealed stronger negative attitudes toward blacks versus whites on the IAT exhibited more negative social interactions with a black experimenter versus a white experimenter and also reported relatively more negative black prejudices on other explicit measures (McConnell & Leibold, 2001). If a follow up study were to include a modified version of this test in respect to colorism, it would be interesting to see how biased people are in India and the United States. In this follow-up study, the colorist experiences that each participant outlined in the questionnaire could be compared with the participant's colorism score on the modified IAT. Other observations could be made such as how strong the colorism score is and whether that correlates with the perceived colorism.

Throughout this study, there were some assumptions made such as the media would influence people's reported perceived colorism. However, media consumption by the participants was not assessed extensively. Although it was asked if respondents feel like they are represented in the media, it may have been beneficial to

understand how much media people in India and the United States consume to determine how influential it was in their daily lives.

A follow up variable that could be collected to explain the relationships found in this study would be the participant's social media usage. Questions pertaining to this variable include but are not limited to: how many hours the respondent spends on social media per week, what apps are most frequently used, how the respondents feel after using those apps, at what age they started using social media, etc. These questions could provide more information about the self-esteem variable in the study and may explain why the United States shows lower self-esteem. Another piece of information that may have been interesting to examine are what careers the respondents see themselves majoring in. As established previously, industries such as modeling, beauty, fashion, and acting industries rely heavily on appearance. Determining career prospects and whether or not participants saw their skin color interfering with those goals would have been intriguing. Some interesting open-ended questions that could have been asked to allow the respondents to elaborate on their personal experiences include: list any colorism experiences you have had, briefly describe the beauty standards of the place you are living in, do people around you show colorist biases, and are people around you affected by colorism. These allow the participants to share their stories in a case-study format and could bring insights that go beyond the specific items asked in the study.

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