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Shaila Kumbhare

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Résumé de l'article

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Shaila Kumbhare
McMaster University

Abstract: The present study investigates the experiences of second generation South Asian-Canadian women with shadeism. Two narrative interviews were conducted and analyzed thematically. Results indicate that collaborators had a desire to be fair that was shaped by their generational and intra-familial relationships as well as the media they were exposed to. This desire led to their use of make-up and skin-lightening creams to achieve fairness. Insecurity about their skin tone had a negative affect on their relationship with themselves and their social networks, including their dating life and friendships.

Keywords: *South Asian, Canadian, second-generation, shadeism, colourism, cultural, diaspora, postcolonial*

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is a popular Western expression that means we all have unique tastes in what we find beautiful. However, it also implies that beauty is determined on an individual level, decontextualizing it from socio-historical factors that construct beauty standards. What we find beautiful is not as natural and apolitical as it seems. Historically, scientists have linked beauty to facial symmetry, purporting that human attraction to certain features is natural and unavoidable (Cheng, 2000). However, studies have shown that public perception of beauty is intrinsically linked to media and cultural representations, such as advertising campaigns that portray white features as ideal and exclude South Asian women (Jones, 2008; Thakore, 2013). Beauty is far from a universal truth, but rather shaped by historical structures that maintain power hierarchies by perpetuating whiteness as superior (Cheng, 2000).

Shadeism is another word for the more popularly used "colourism," which refers to the global preference for fairness and whiteness and to shade-based discrimination within communities (Dhillon, 2016). Dhillon (2016) noted that the term colourism was created and operationalized for the Black community. Like Dhillon, I have chosen to use the term shadeism instead of colourism to avoid appropriating a term meaningful to the Black community, though the words have equivalent meanings. In South Asia, colonialism and the

caste system worked in tandem to establish whiteness as the beauty ideal. The resulting shadeism continues to affect South Asian women today. This paper explores the narratives of two second-generation South Asian-Canadian women relating to skin colour dissatisfaction and shadeism. I highlight the narratives of South Asian-Canadian women, exploring how they feel about their skin, how these feelings have affected their South Asian identity, and what effects skin dissatisfaction may have had on them. The intent of analyzing these experiences is to reveal how the colonial construction of whiteness as superior continues to influence the lives of modern second-generation South Asian women living in Canada.

Population

Given the sociohistorical position of Canada as a settler state with a large immigrant population in urban centres, and a stated if not often realized commitment to multiculturalism, it is necessary to investigate the experiences of racialized immigrant women. To avoid falsely generalizing experiences, these communities should be researched specifically; this paper begins the work of understanding the experiences of racialized immigrant women with shadeism by focusing on South-Asian Canadian women. There is a substantial body of literature on colourism and how it shapes the lives of Black individuals, but there is much less attention to shadeism and South Asian women.

Ghosh (2013) argued that even the construct of "South Asian" was born out of colonial practices and ideas; countries are included or excluded from the label of "South Asia" by Western scholars based on their relationship to British colonization (Ghosh, 2013). The term South Asian was developed by colonizing nations when South Asian people began to immigrate to their countries to distinguish them in census data from the rest of the population (Ghosh, 2013). South Asian-Canadian women experience Othering in a multitude of ways and their experiences cannot be extricated from the colonial history of South Asia or the colonial ideas embedded in Canadian culture.

While men and first-generation South Asians are also affected by shadeism, this paper focuses solely on the experiences of second-generation women. Gender and second-generation status greatly affect one's experience of shadeism. Second-generation South Asian-Canadians often struggle to find belonging in both dominant Canadian spaces and South Asian spaces (Aujla, 1999), while women experience the influences of sexism as well as shadeism. First-generation South Asian women may also experience challenges in finding belonging in Canada, but their experiences cannot necessarily be equated with those of women who never lived in South Asia or held South Asian citizenship and whose entire identity was constructed in Canada.

Despite men also experiencing benefits from being attractive, "It is generally accepted that physical attractiveness plays a bigger role in the everyday lives of women than men (Sarpila & Erola, 2016, p. 6). Physical attractiveness has also been correlated with positive personal outcomes such as higher self-esteem and higher personal satisfaction for women (Kwan & Trautner, 2009). Women's negative relationship with their bodies has been attributed to narrow definitions of femininity and high standards of beauty (Sarpila & Erola, 2016). Attractiveness also plays a role in the job market; compared with similarly qualified unattractive women, conventionally attractive women are more often hired,

promoted, and paid higher salaries (Weitz, 2001, p. 673). Additionally, attractiveness holds higher value to men in marriage markets (Jha & Adelman, 2009). For many South Asian women, marriage is the only way to improve their financial standing (Nagar, 2018). Thus, a woman's skill in performing beauty—that is, her engagement in practices that increase her chances of meeting beauty standards such as fairness—can lend her advantages in labour markets and access to financial security (Haas & Gregory, 2005; Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Nagar, 2018; Weitz, 2001). Further, since beauty is associated with "goodness" (Bazzini et al., 2010) and beauty is synonymous with whiteness (Jones, 2008), whiteness also becomes associated with "goodness" (hooks, 1992). Correspondingly, darker skin becomes associated with ugliness and "badness." The performance of beauty, of which whiteness is a part, can be vital for a women's ability to succeed in her career, access higher self-esteem, achieve personal satisfaction, and be seen as "good" by her peers.

Power, History, and Modern Shadeism

History of Shadeism in South Asia

It is difficult to trace a clear history of shadeism in South Asia because "Colonial-era and postcolonial Indian writings on the issue may themselves have been influenced by European notions of caste, culture, and race" (Glenn, 2008, p. 289). Sen, Iyer, and George (2002) provide the following definition of the caste system: "The term caste refers to inherited social class and has been established as a persistent form of socioeconomic division in South Asian cultures" (as cited in Bhagwat, 2012, p. 4). However, there are some general arguments that researchers seem to agree on. Shadeism has existed in South Asia for centuries (Bhagwat, 2012). People of higher caste had paler skin because they did not work outside as labourers, and the assumption that fair-skinned individuals were of higher class became ingrained in the culture (Bhagwat, 2012; Shankar & Subish, 2007). However, the pre-colonial history of shadeism does not nullify colonization's contribution to solidifying the colour hierarchy (Glenn, 2008). Rather, British authorities were able to exploit existing bias and magnify its impacts to reinforce their power (Bhagwat, 2012). Takamune (2015) has argued that the British intentionally constructed the idea that white people were more modern, intelligent, and progressive, creating an association between whiteness and these qualities as well as with wealth. Soon, the desire for fairness became entrenched in South Asian culture (Shankar & Subish, 2007). Fairness became a determining consideration in a woman's marriageability (Shankar & Subish, 2007). Historically, marriage was one of the only ways a woman could elevate her caste, making fairness an important factor in her ability to access safety and financial security (Nagar, 2018). America's growing beauty industry also played a role in constructing whiteness as beautiful through the use of marketing strategies that portrayed the ideal woman as white (Jones, 2008; Saraswati, 2010). Advertisements for bleaching soap often suggested that fairness could help you get a husband (Hussain, 2021). By 1980, with the help of globalization, American beauty companies had sold the ideal of whiteness worldwide (Jones, 2008). As such, the caste system and British colonization worked together to construct the idea that whiteness was superior.

The threat of the "colour bar" in modern times is demonstrated clearly through the continued popularity of skin-bleaching agents among South Asian women in Canada (Dhillon, 2016). The calculated construction of fairness as superior and essential to marriageability by British occupiers and advertising companies made it easy to sell bleaching products to South Asian women (Hussain, 2021). The use of skin lightening creams such as Fair & Lovely (now called Glow & Lovely) became increasingly popular despite adverse side effects such as irritation, scarring, and nerve damage, among other symptoms (Shroff, Diedrichs, & Craddock, 2018). These toxic whiteners are heavily marketed to racialized populations (Mendoza, 2014). Many companies sell skin bleaching products globally that do not meet Western safety regulations (Glenn, 2008). Regulations are put in place to protect Western citizens, with the assumption that the negative effects of lightening products will be felt overseas. However, these products end up being sold under the counter in Canada (Glenn, 2008; Dhillon, 2016). Despite it being illegal to sell these products in Canada, the demand is high enough that businesses continue to take the risk to sell them under the counter at South Asian grocery stores (Glenn, 2008).

Shadeism in Modern Diasporas

Scholars have begun to do important work on understanding shadeism in South Asian-Canadian women. Sahay and Piran's (1999) research indicated that South Asian-Canadian female university students had higher levels of skin dissatisfaction than their European-Canadian counterparts, establishing shadeism as an issue for South Asian women in Canada and subverting cultural mosaic rhetoric that paints Canada as a multicultural utopia. Sahay and Piran (1997) noted that the majority of South Asian-Canadian women expressed a desire for light skin, with darker-skinned women expressing the greatest desire to be lighter.

This could have been due in part to the continued emphasis on fairness in dating markets (Jha & Adelman, 2009). In a study of Indian dating sites that included participants from India as well as the Indian diaspora, Jha and Adelman (2009) found that men showed a strong preference for fairness in their search for a bride. In fact, the women who found a husband through Indian dating sites were almost entirely light skinned (Jha & Adelman, 2009). Many South Asian women strive for marriage; their desirability to South Asian men being so tied to their shade doubtlessly has negative impacts on their skin colour satisfaction. As Aujla (1999) wrote, "The unattainable ideal of 'whiteness' is strived for both mentally and physically.

Authors like Gokani (2013), Dhillon (2016), and Sadika (2021) have begun the work of presenting more recent experiences of South Asian-Canadian women experiencing shadeism. However, in Gokani's (2013) work investigating the impact of imperialism on South Asian Hindus, shadeism was mentioned as a consideration under the theme of "internalization of inferiority or colonial mentality". Participants in their study expressed being socially conditioned to believe that lighter skin made someone more intelligent and sophisticated and were able to connect their beliefs back to colonization (Gokani, 2013). While shadeism arose as a topic in the interviews, participants were not asked directly about this topic. As such, this study is well-contextualized, but the impacts of living with shadeism are not fully explored.

Dhillon's (2016) work focused on the experiences of South Asian-Canadian beauticians with skin lightening products; this left unexamined the experiences of South Asian-Canadian women who do not use skin lightening products but still experience the effects of shadeism. Women who are not involved in the beauty industry may have less first-hand knowledge about and experience with bleaching practices, and knowledge of these harmful products may have coloured the perceptions of Dhillon's participants.

Sadika's (2021) work presents the most recent investigation of shadeism among South Asian-Canadian women, using a survey methodology and a much larger sample size of 169 women. Sadika also interviewed 13 participants using semi-structured interviews that produced meaningful conversation, for instance, about the emotional and mental health impacts of shadeism. Sadika's findings demonstrated that participants had experiences of shadeism that led to negative perceptions of their skin and for which they developed coping strategies. However, Sadika's (2021) interview guide included a high quantity of questions, some of which used directive wording that assisted Sadika (2021) in exploring pre-determined themes. However, a method that uses minimal, non-directive questions would allow themes to arise naturally from participants' narratives, allowing for new themes and ideas to emerge. None of the previous studies have focused on the experience of second-generation women specifically. According to Grossman (2019), there are six characteristics of diaspora: transnationalism, community, dispersal and immigration, living outside the homeland, continued orientation to the homeland, and group identity. In other words, South Asian-Canadian women share a community and identity that persists in orientation to, but beyond, the geography of South Asia. Aujla (1999) describes this phenomenon best as, "Never quite Canadian enough, never quite white enough, these women remain "others" in their own land." (p. 41). Canada's general fear of terrorism perpetrated by South Asian or South Asian-presenting people (Ghosh, 2013) also aligns with colonial narratives of white/Western countries as good/safe and Othered countries as bad/dangerous.

Shadeism is a remnant of colonization and the caste system that continues to affect South Asian women living in diasporic communities. This paper fills gaps in the literature by focusing specifically on the experiences of second-generation South Asian-Canadians with shadeism, including those who may not have participated in bleaching practices, and by employing interview strategies that allowed collaborators to direct their own narrative. As such, this paper seeks to draw attention to the ways second-generation South Asian-Canadian women are influenced by shadeism and the potential for resulting skin colour dissatisfaction as they attempt to straddle two cultures.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Feminism (CRF)

I examined collaborators' stories through a Critical Race Feminist and Post-Colonial Theory (PCT) framework. Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses the racism that has become "so enmeshed in the fabric of the U.S. social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this society" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 264). CRT encourages us to understand how ideas

that seem natural are actually constructed; race and shade-preference are two distinct concepts that have been constructed to support one another. Of CRT, Reece (2019) writes that, "…racism is woven into the fabric of American life and its institutions in ways that ensure White people dominate the racial hierarchy" (p. 4). The idea of light skin as superior works to fortify the power of races constructed as white. Consequently, people of colour with lighter skin tones are able to access more privilege because of their perceived proximity to whiteness (Reece, 2019).

CRT alone does not account for the added pressures women face to be beautiful, especially in South Asian culture, which places a high value on women's marriageability (Nagar, 2018; Paul, 2016). In Western societies created by and for white men, white male perspectives have been seen to represent "Normality, Neutrality, Objectivity, and The Truth" (Wing, 2003, p. 1); the interests of racialized women are often subjugated and silenced. Even in feminist spaces, the perspectives of white women are often privileged over those of women of colour (Wing, 2003). Critical Race Feminism (CRF), a branch of CRT, addresses the specificity of women's experiences with whiteness (Razack, Thobani, & Smith, 2010). As Wing (2003) noted, "CRF provides a critique of the feminist notion that there is an essential female voice, that is, that all women feel one way on a subject. Instead, CRF notes that the essential voice actually describes the reality of many white middle- or upper-class women, while masquerading as representing all women" (p. 7). CRF supports scholars in theorizing the experiences of women of colour outside the limits of essentialism, which is the idea that people of particular identity categories have essential characteristics.

Post-Colonial Theory

Post-colonial theory (PCT) can help us understand how constructed dichotomies of white/centre and Black/periphery have led to the Othering of racialized groups (Chilisa, 2012, p. 74), challenging us to step away from binary conceptions of Occident and Orient (Western and Eastern) and instead consider how we are all implicit in colonial systems (Spivak, 1988). Canadian society is built on Indigenous genocide, the imposition of Western values and ways of knowing and governing, and a belief in Western superiority (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015). Colonizers justified their actions through a saviour narrative of helping colonized subjects through the civilizing mission (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015). Every person living in the diaspora contributes to the fortification of this mission by participating in systems and structures built on logics that portrayed the West as civilized/superior and the East as savage/inferior (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015).

As a second-generation Canadian I was raised in Western culture, so it was even more necessary for me to practice reflexivity throughout this research. Given my positionality, I ensured that I focused reflexive analysis specifically on ways that I might have adopted the position of the colonizer. Moreover, I follow Spivak's (1988) concerns about the dangers of essentialism. Spivak asserted that presenting marginalized groups as homogenous allows Western intellectuals to speak on behalf of them (Spivak, 1988). This is a form of silencing marginalized communities and can pave the way for further Western influence (Spivak, 1988). To combat this silencing, I seek to spotlight the voices of South Asian-Canadian women, whose perspectives may be subjugated in other spaces. This goal

is supported by both CRF and PCT as both theories challenge essentialist ideas about marginalized groups.

Methodology

In keeping with the principles of CRF and PCT, which are concerned with elevating the voices of marginalized groups and shedding light on diversity within said groups (Spivak, 1988; Wing, 2003), I chose to conduct a narrative inquiry, consisting of in-depth narrative interviews with two second-generation South Asian-Canadian women. Narratives were analyzed through thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017). I present the narratives of second-generation South Asian-Canadian women in context in order to 1) give voice to the women of this community by centring their often-subjugated voices and 2) demonstrate how the unique intersections of second-generation South Asian-Canadian women's identities act as a rebuttal to essentializing narratives about women and people of colour. This study does not seek to draw any conclusions about the community and instead privileges the narratives of collaborators.

Riessman (2008) stressed the importance of preserving the "complex wholes" of collaborators' narratives. As such, a smaller sample size allowed me to present large sections of the interviews instead of parsing and presenting small fragments of the data. Narrative Inquiry allows collaborators to tell their stories in their own words, leaves space for them to explore the uniqueness of their experiences, and provides them an opportunity to counteract dominant patriarchal and colonial discourses (Creswell, 2013). Collaborators are considered experts on their own experience (Hood, 2016), showing further respect for the knowledge they offer. Collaborators have a lot of control over what is discussed in the interview and largely determine the direction of analysis through what they choose to share (Riessman, 2008).

Sampling

The sampling methods employed were purposive and convenience. Purposive sampling was necessary because I was searching for collaborators who met specific criteria (Hood, 2006): identification as a woman, second-generation Canadian, of South Asian descent, and with lived experience of shadeism. Convenience sampling was best because I was only seeking two collaborators and it allowed me to draw on my network of South Asian-Canadian contacts. To find collaborators, I posted recruitment materials on a Facebook page created for recruitment purposes that was not linked to my personal account. By posting online there was little pressure on people to participate, which allowed them to make the choice they were comfortable with without worrying about the effect on our relationship. The posting received a number of responses. To avoid unduly influencing the selection process I simply included the first two responders. Collaborators were given the opportunity to select a pseudonym at the start of the interview and are referred to by Kavya and Aleena for the purposes of this study.

Findings

Kavya and Aleena are both university-educated women in their twenties who live at home with their families in large Canadian cities. Aleena identifies as being Pakistani; Kavya is from Bangladesh.

Five themes were identified through Thematic Narrative Analysis (Riessman, 2008) and guided by CRF and post-colonial theory. These themes include generational and intra-familial shadeism, use of make-up and skin lightening products, media representation of South Asian women, relationship with self, and relationship with social networks.

Generational and Intra-Familial Shadeism

Collaborators both noted the influence of family on their relationships with their skin. Family members were described as openly criticizing collaborators' skin for being too dark as well as encouraging behaviours that lead to lighter skin tones.

Kavya described the fixation on her skin by saying, "…there's comments from my grandma. She's a bit older and more traditional in some ways, and so I know if in the summer I get darker, they will be like, 'you got dark'." From Kavya's tone, it was clear that these comments were meant in a negative way. Aleena recalled her family's obsession starting when she was only a baby: "My mom said that when I was born, she bleached my skin because she was scared I'd be dark".

Collaborators' families encouraged them to avoid the sun so they would not tan. This led to them changing their behaviour and missing out on activities that other kids were able to enjoy. Aleena describes her family warning against the sun by saying, "And when we would go to the beach and stuff, young kids were playing in the water and stuff, my mom and my aunts would just be like, 'Just don't, you'll get dark.' So, then I used to sit under the big umbrellas and just watch all the kids."

Both collaborators mentioned their families coupling criticisms about shade with negative comments about weight. Kavya said:

> And I remember getting comments always. They'll always comment on my weight if they saw me and my sister they'd be like, 'Oh she still looks the same, she hasn't gained any weight', but for me it was like, 'Oh you gained weight', or, 'You look different.' It's not—it's kind of looked down upon as well. Some aunties will mention it if you gain weight. It'll be always pointed out to you. It's like, 'You gained weight, what have you been doing? Why did you gain weight?' And I was like, 'I still I thought I still look the same.'

Collaborators perceived that beauty is contingent on thinness as well as fairness. Kavya said, "The whole spectrum of being a South Asian woman is not appreciated if you're not skinny." Aleena shared that her existing insecurity about her weight was a motivating factor in avoiding the sun. She said, "Because they already compare me and call me the obese one. So, I'm not about to add to [that to] be the dark and obese one." The compounding effects of both criticisms were stronger than criticism of only one attribute.

Use of Make-up and Lightening Products

Both collaborators talked in detail about the strategies they employ to achieve a fairer look. On top of avoiding the sun, they use make-up and skin bleaching products to appear lighter than their natural tone. Kavya told a story about preparing for a date where she attempted to use make-up to look lighter: "I remember yesterday when I was trying to meet somebody new again, I actually took my roommate's foundation which was way lighter than mine and I mixed it so that I would look lighter. And I was like, 'Why am I doing this to myself?'"

Aleena also recalls using lighter make-up to look paler. When describing the kind of foundation that she buys, she says, "I always try to go to light medium to medium and I use contour powder. I'm like, 'Yep, this is it. This is my validation.' I buy pink or white undertones. I am neither. I am golden, but the pinks make you look paler."

Social media filters were also discussed. Kavya spoke briefly about how photo filters automatically whiten the skin and how this influences the desire for whiteness:

> I wanted lighter skin because I saw pictures of myself that were lighter, like, from the filters on Instagram and stuff, and they make you look a little lighter. I'm dark, I have dark circles and the filter hides it. It seems like I'm more prett[y] when I'm that way. So, I tried to match that shade.

Aleena takes the quest for fairness further than the use of make-up and filters, and described how she used bleaching products for many years:

> And I got really obsessed with skin bleaching. Since I was—I want to say middle school 'till like a year ago, to be honest, not that long ago that I stopped. I was obsessed with skin bleaching. I would try the most harmful things like baking soda. Yeah, and like, Fair and Lovely, which is a common one. Jolen—it's another common one.

For Aleena, the potential negative effects of these harmful products were worth the risk to achieve lighter skin. However, the damage they cause is long lasting. She shared:

> Yeah, I stopped bleaching mainly because it literally started to, I don't know if you can tell, but I have scars or bleach burns. It took me so long to get rid of them. It started to burn my skin. I feel like this was the point that made me stop.

Similarly, Aleena spoke about how her iron deficiency led to paleness, "But I tried everything because I was so obsessed with trying to be light skinned and then I noticed that when I was sick because I have low iron I got so many compliments on my skin too like, 'Look at you, you look so nice and fair. Yeah, I looked disgusting. I looked like I was going to pass out…". This is an example of how health can come second to fairness in South Asian communities.

Media Representation of South Asian Women

Collaborators explained that the lack of accurate and celebratory representations of darker skin tones in both South Asian and Western media affected their self-image. On the prevalence of skin-whitening advertisements in Bangladesh, Kavya said:

> Yeah, that really bothers me because the reason I didn't notice it a lot when I was younger was because when I was in Canada, the commercials back in Bangladesh, are not the same. So, in Bangladesh when I go back and visit sometimes all the commercials, most of them, there will be at least one that will be about Fair and Lovely or soaps you can use and you'll be lighter.

Kavya captured the harms of these advertisements. Aleena discussed the actresses chosen to star in South Asian dramas. Aleena commented that, "In Pakistani dramas, for example, all the actors are freaking white. Yeah, yeah. That's not what we look like. We're brown and we have yellow undertones."

While South Asian media portrays brown women as paler than reality, Canadian media often fails to portray them at all. Kavya explained how she rarely sees South Asian women represented as beautiful in Canadian advertisements:

> I don't see any representation of South Asian women in media in malls as, like, advertising or models…I barely ever see a South Asian model there and representation I think is a huge thing for what people see as beautiful. I don't feel like South Asian women are depicted as being beautiful, so I don't see that. And I don't feel very beautiful. I don't feel like we exist.

Here Kavya identified the relationship between representation of South Asian women in Canadian spaces and social perceptions of beauty. Because she does not see herself in the advertisements for beauty products, she concludes that she is not beautiful. Kavya said, "And I think beauty is always portrayed by, let's say, white women, East Asian, or Black women, because they're trying to allow more diversity, but I think they're forgetting South Asian women, just because I don't see a lot of representations."

On top of the lack of positive representation there are also some negative representations that depict South Asian women as unattractive in Canadian media. Of portrayals of South Asian women in Western media Kavya said:

> They tried almost to picture them into this opening, this white version of what people think is a South Asian woman. So really long, bush-like thick hair and then you know, like, bushy eyebrows and uni-brow. I don't know why that's always shown, but that's not always what South Asian women look like.

Aleena further explained that seeing more dark-skinned women depicted as beautiful would improve her self-esteem and help her be more comfortable with her skin tone. Explaining what could have supported her in coping with shadeism she said, "I think if I saw other dark-skinned girls, there's so many beautiful dark-skinned girls. I see them on Instagram. I see them on social media, I see them in real life. I feel like if I saw more of that, instead of just being around my family and my friends who were relatively light." Similarly, Kavya said, "And I wish if we just showcase[d] different forms of beauty from multiple places, from different groups, then I wouldn't feel so odd and not in the normal of what is typically seen as beautiful."

According to Aleena, finding positive dark-skin influencers was difficult. She explained that Pakistani movies often feature women who are incredibly pale. She said:

> But it was only in my college and uni [that] I started following people who have darker skin. Like, I don't know if you know Irene Kahn. She's Bengali, this beautiful, darker skinned brown girl and she actually buys foundation darker than her skin tone because she's trying to be darker. So, after seeing these people just genuinely love and embrace themselves, that makes a really big difference for me, because I'm like, if they can do it, they're darker than me, then I could do it too. That would have been impactful to see that growing up.

Relationships with Social Networks

Collaborators discussed how the shame experienced because of the colour of their skin and their desire to be light have affected their ability to enjoy activities and social outings. Both were taught in childhood to avoid the sun so they would not tan, and they have continued to observe this practice into adulthood. Aleena described a situation when she had the opportunity to go on a cruise with her co-workers. However, she ultimately decided not to go because of her fear of tanning. She said:

> So, in my last workplace there was a work cruise, and I didn't go to it because my cousin's wedding was coming the next week and my mom was like, 'If you're going make sure you just sit at the bottom because you're going to get dark.' Like, don't sit upstairs. And I'm like, but that's the point of a cruise. Because I want to take pictures of my friends and stuff.

Aleena decided that she would rather stay home than spend the whole trip below deck to avoid the sun. Moreover, she is unable to date men who have lighter skin than her. About her dating life, she said, "If he's lighter than me it means he looks good. Even if he's ugly I'm like, look how light he is compared to me. I can only be with people who are darker than me. I can't be with a man that's lighter than me because I feel really insecure."

Kavya also said that her social life has been affected by shadeism. She says, "It's just how I interact with people. My self-confidence is going down because I feel like I'm not seen as attractive if I am a brown colour or darker shade." She recounts going out with her friends and feeling ignored because of the way she looks. She said:

> Recently my friends wanted to go to this Korean conversation club to hangout. So, I went and one of the people, he's not Korean but East Asian, I believe, and I just recall that I was completely ignored and not even treated like I existed and he was a host, and he talked to the girls next to me who are East Asian and [had] more lighter skin than [me]. I felt like I was not even human because he would not even talk to me, acknowledge me, make eye contact, nothing, and I was in the middle so the fact that he just kept erasing me from the conversations... It just didn't feel good at all.

Kavya's skin colour prevented her from enjoying the evening. Awareness of how others perceive her skin caused her to be self-conscious. In Aleena's case, skin colour affected her relationships with her friends as well. Of her light-skinned Pakistani friends she said:

> Yeah, with my friends, it definitely would have been different because they've always commented on my skin tone, because they're like the white Pakistanis. It was like the ones who, you know, the ones that came from Afghanistan? Migrated. So, they look like a white person if you see them. And I feel like they bonded really well

> together because they had, I don't know… they had so much in common. And I just felt like I always feel insecure with them…Because I'm like, great, I'm the dark one in the group.

Again, this exhibits how skin colour affects South Asian women's relationships and their ability to participate in social settings. Like her family, Aleena's friends also encouraged her to stay out of the sun. She said, "They also told me that too, they would be like, 'Oh stay away from the window, we have a wedding to go to next week and we don't want you looking dark.'"

Relationship with Self

It is clear that both collaborators have internalized very negative views about their skin. When asked how she felt about her skin Aleena stated, "Oh my God, I hate it. I really do. I feel like every day, when I look in the mirror it's the first thing I see. How can I—how can I make myself lighter?" Kavya echoes this by saying, "I honestly, as a South Asian woman, don't feel like I'm beautiful at all. It seems like being white is more attractive. The idea around that, white people are seen as a base of universal beauty. Their features are seen as the beauty standard."

> As a result, Aleena tries to distance herself from her South Asian identity:
>
> And there were some points where I feel like I internalized it so much that I hated being brown as a whole. Like, I didn't think being Pakistani was cool. So, in high school, whenever people would ask me where I'm from, I would be like, 'I'm Canadian. I was born here.' And they'd be like, 'No, like, you're brown.' And I'm like, 'No, I'm not.' And I'd get so defensive even though I am brown.

Kavya has similar feelings about being South Asian. She said, "It just didn't feel good at all, and more and more I keep feeling like being brown, being South Asian and a darker tone…. I don't like it. I wish I wasn't. Sometimes I wish I looked more, just, different or Latino or something. But I'm South Asian." This dissatisfaction with their skin tone pushed the collaborators away from their South Asian identity and caused them to distance themselves from their culture.

Discussion

The following section explores themes identified above through a post-colonial and critical race feminist perspective. Collaborators' stories have provided insight into the challenges South Asian-Canadian women face with skin colour dissatisfaction.

Generational and Intra-Family Shadeism

Though both collaborators were modern, Canadian-born women in their twenties the history of shadeism in South Asia was still present in their stories, particularly in their descriptions of their family members. Shaikh (2017) argued that elder Indian women pass shadeism on to women of younger generations. However, the actions of these elder Indian women cannot be examined without historical context. The fact that Indian women pass shadeism down suggests that Indian women are responsible for shadeism, however, there are underlying causes of shadeism that trace back to colonization. As Aujla (1999) writes,

negative attitudes about dark skin can be seen as "remnants of British colonial attitudes toward other women" (p. 59). The imparting of shadeism onto younger South Asians ensures that colonial attitudes continue to affect new generations.

Correspondingly, while the continual criticism from family members can be incredibly taxing on young South Asian women, it can be seen as a defense mechanism and an attempt at protecting their younger relatives. Having been raised in a system that rewards light-skinned individuals with privilege (Glenn, 2008), it is natural that South Asians would attempt to access this privilege for the young women in their family. Fairness could make a woman more marriageable (Shankar & Subish, 2007), which for many years was the only way a woman could elevate her financial position. Older generations try to guide their daughters to safe and financially secure futures by making them as marriageable as possible (Nagar, 2018).

South Asian men's role in the continued emphasis on fairness in marriageability cannot be overlooked. Indian men have historically shown and continue to show a strong preference for light skinned women (Jha & Adelman, 2009). South Asian men's continuance of these traditional preferences in diasporic settings maintains the patriarchal conditions under which women are held to higher, more restrictive standards of beauty than men. Given the socio-historical context, shadeism cannot be blamed on older South Asian women even if elders hold a great deal of influence in their communities.

In discussions about their families, collaborators revealed a connection between skin tone and weight. In India, weight was another factor that greatly influenced a woman's marriageability (Nagar, 2018). Fixation on thinness may be another way that older South Asian women attempt to access a higher quality of life for their descendants.

Colonization has also affected the increasing standard of female thinness in a way akin to its influence on light skin preference. The preference for thinness in South Asian communities is not surprising, as this is also the standard in the West. Bakhshi and Baker (2011) explain that while countries like India have been historically more accepting of fuller figures, the globalization of Western beauty standards has led to fewer inter-culture differences in expectations for appearance. The ideal image of a beautiful woman that is being sold to South Asians is not only light-skinned, but also thin. The colonial imposition of standards demanding thinness combined with the patriarchal focus on women's marriageability may lead to weight standards having a similarly harmful effect as shade standards on South Asian women.

Use of Make-up and Lightening Products

Aleena disclosed her use of skin-lightening products and how this caused lasting damage to her skin. In South Asia, skin-bleaching creams are marketed aggressively, with advertisers telling women their lives will improve if they become lighter and that they are dirty if they remain dark. Paul (2016) pointed out the ridiculousness of these advertisements using the example of an "intimate wash" used for lightening the genital area. The tag line for said product was, "Life for women will now be fresher, cleaner and more importantly, fairer and more intimate" (Paul, 2016). In this tagline, fairness is associated with cleanliness suggesting that dark skin is dirty. Fairness is also described as "more important" than

cleanliness and as a way to achieve more intimacy, implying that women who want intimacy and do not want to be perceived as dirty must use the lightening product.

The compliments Aleena received on her skin tone while sick similarly exhibit the idea that fairness is more important than South Asian women's health. Despite her obvious illness her light skin tone was viewed as a positive outcome by the South Asian community. A similar phenomenon exists with respect to bleaching creams, as for many South Asian women the desire to be fair outweighs the fear of negative health outcomes. For Aleena's friends and family, her fair skin was worth the price of her poor health.

Skin Colour Representation in Canada and South Asia

Representation of darker-skinned South Asian women was an important factor affecting both women's relationship with their skin. Shankar and Subish (2007) point out that the prevalence of skin whitening ads in South Asia can be traced back to colonization and the powerful influence of American culture. The markets for skin lightening products are largest in racialized countries where Western capitalism and culture are most prominent (Glenn, 2008). Bakhshi and Baker (2011) claim that Indian media is one of the main drivers of whiteness in South Asia, as demonstrated in Aleena's statement that, "…all the actors are freaking white." Industries have worked hard to create homogenized ideals of beauty worldwide so they can sell the same products to different countries (Jones, 2008). Unfortunately, one of these ideals is whiteness, and industries continue to sell whiteness through television, films, and advertising.

Western corporations and media sources are responsible for fuelling the desire for lightness in South Asia, but they also perpetuate the fair-skin ideal on their own soil. Aujla (1999) argued that portrayals of South Asian women in Canada exclude them from national belonging by reinforcing the "us" and "them" mindset of Canadians. This is clearly felt by both collaborators, who expressed frustration with the negative or non-existent portrayal of South Asian women on Western television programs. While bleaching products are not advertised to lighten skin in Canada, the exclusion of South Asian women entirely from media perpetuated fair-skin preference in similar ways to lightening ads. Thus, the concerted effort to perpetuate whiteness as the ideal beauty standard affects women in both South Asia and Canada.

Regardless of the origins of shadeism in South Asian communities, caste did not appear to affect Kavya or Aleena's relationship with their skin directly, as neither woman mentioned it in their narratives. This could be due to the Western context they were raised in, where caste would only affect them socially within South Asian communities and would likely not affect their ability to access employment, education, or social services as it would in South Asia. Skin tone was further historically used to indicate whether a person was required to labour outdoors, indicating the financial and social position that would correspond to their caste (Shankar & Subish, 2007; Bhagwat, 2012). This same logic is unlikely to be applied in a racially diverse Canadian metropolitan context.

Relationship with Social Networks

Dating arose unprompted in both collaborators' stories, demonstrating the topic's importance. Marriageability is traditionally important in most South Asian cultures, especially for women, and fairness is heavily connected to one's value as a spouse (Nagar,

2018). Aleena described feeling that people with lighter skin than her are automatically more attractive than her, regardless of their other attributes. Aleena expressed that she currently only dates people darker-skinned than her because when she dates light-skinned men she feels too self-conscious. This is in contrast to how older generations may have sought partners, as they may have been required to make dating decisions based on considerations of status and financial security. Returning to the idea of beauty as power, if fairness is beauty, then it provides a certain level of power. Older South Asians seek partners for their children who are fairer than them, as they feel this will elevate their status. Aleena does not prioritize caste elevation in her search for a partner and prefers to be the lighter-skinned partner. This allows for the elevation of the status of her partner while avoiding the insecurity of being the darker skinned partner in her relationships. Given the limitations of this study I cannot conclusively say why this might be the case or if this divergence from older generations' preference for light skin is common among young diasporic women. However, as a Canadian citizen accessing higher education, Aleena's reliance on marriage to secure financial stability is likely lower than those of older generations living in South Asia. Her experience as a second-generation South Asian woman established in Canada deviates from that of older South Asian women, and this may affect the way she selects partners.

While shadeism affects men as well as women, there are more political ramifications for women than men. Fixation on women's appearance is one way patriarchal societies use women's bodies to exert power over them and control their actions. This also reflects the fact that men value physical attractiveness more in dating (Jha &Adelman, 2009). The fixation on skin colour makes shadeism a way patriarchy and whiteness work together to exert power over racialized women. In past relationships, Aleena felt inferior to light-skinned partners and this undoubtedly influenced the distribution of power within their relationship. She now prioritizes her feeling of security over having a partner that would be viewed as more attractive to her community. Aleena's partners automatically hold more privilege than her as they are male; being the lighter-skinned partner in the relationship may allow Aleena to access privilege that minimizes the power imbalance.

Kavya's description of her experience of shadeism in her relationship with others focused on the way she compares herself to her friends. This is reminiscent of the way colonizers encouraged comparison between Indians and the British to establish one as better and subordinate the other. This negative comparison supports the project of colonization by making South Asian women feel inferior to their peers, which may encourage them to try harder to assimilate to gain acceptance.

Relationship with Self

Collaborators depicted a concerning picture of skin-colour related distress and dissatisfaction. Both women spend time trying to alter their skin tone and believe that darker skin makes them less attractive. Many of their statements demonstrate feeling a lack of acceptance and a desire to better fit in with their lighter-skinned and non-South Asian, friends. Unlike first-generation women and women living in South Asia, second-generation women spend their formative years in Canada, where they experience direct comparison to white women as the beauty ideal; this is an even more severe standard than the ideal of fair skinned South Asian women they would experience back home.

However, collaborators moved beyond dissatisfaction with their skin and identified some level of dissatisfaction with their racial identity in general. Kavya not only wished to change her skin colour, but her entire race, while Aleena tried to distance herself from the labels of "brown" and "Pakistani." Studies show that second-generation South Asian women struggle to straddle the cultural divide between their Canadian and South Asian identities (Handa, 2003; Malhi et al., 2009). In Canada, regardless of how second generation South Asian women personally identify, others will essentialize them based on their skin tone (Malhi et al., 2009). Here collaborators are touching on the negative experience of being essentialized; their words and personal presentation will never affect the way they are perceived as much as their skin tone because their identity as South Asian women has been boiled down to an essential character (Spivak, 1988). This essentializing subsequently affects the way they view and identify themselves (Malhi et al., 2009). The experience of being essentialized is one thread in a matrix of overt and covert racism that feeds feelings of Otherness. Collaborators drew connections between their dissatisfaction with their skin and their dissatisfaction with their racial identity, suggesting that racism and shadeism may be intertwined. It appears that embarrassment about one's skin can affect pride in one's ethnic identity within diasporic contexts. However, further, more directed investigation is necessary to solidify these findings.

Conclusion

While this work has illuminated the perspectives of two South Asian-Canadian women with shadeism, the small sample size means that the findings cannot be generalized to the wider South Asian-Canadian population. Instead, this study is intended to provide rich information about experience. More data are needed to further understand this complex topic. Further, this study was conducted using the interpretive practice of thematic narrative analysis. As such, this paper has been shaped by the interpretive perspectives of the researcher and collaborators. Collaborators' insightful interpretations of their experiences are this project's greatest strength. As Razack et. al. (2010) wrote, CRF considers racialized women to be the experts in their own experience. It is their interpretations that make their knowledge so unique and valuable.

Future work should continue to investigate the experiences of South Asian-Canadian women with shadeism. The construction of South Asians as "model minorities" (Debbarman, 2019) may be a consideration for future projects exploring shadeism, as this construction affects South Asian's experiences in ways that may be relevant to how they feel about their skin. Collaborators in this study brought up several unforeseen topics such as the relationship between weight and fairness, the effect of skin colour on dating experiences, the influence of lightening beauty filters on social media applications, and the relationship between skin colour satisfaction and identity satisfaction. While this study has introduced these themes, each of these areas warrants further investigation.

Collaborators' stories showed how the "colour bar" can affect the wellbeing of South Asian women. Collaborators discussed how generational and familial ideas about fairness were passed on to them by the elder women in their family. The emphasis on fairness in South Asian families can be viewed as a strategy to access higher social status for their

daughters, who, in recent history, would have relied on marriage to access a higher quality of life and social status. Collaborators further discussed the impact of South Asian and Canadian media representations of dark-skinned South Asian women, which they felt were non-existent or inaccurate. Absence of these positive representations lead to internalized shadeism. Finally, skin colour dissatisfaction affected collaborators' relationships with others and themselves. In friendship, family, and romantic relationships, they struggled with the feeling of powerlessness and a lack of acceptance from themselves and others because of their skin tone. The impacts of this dissatisfaction are so strong that collaborators distance themselves from their South Asian identity and try to use skin lightening makeup and harmful bleaching products to access more power in their relationships. Skin colour dissatisfaction continues to have a significant impact on the wellbeing of some South Asian-Canadian women.

Declarations

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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