

**Struggling to Escape Colorism:  
Skin Color Discrimination Experiences of South Asian Americans**

A Thesis Presented to the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan

By

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<sup>1</sup> Wasay, Mohammad, Ismail A. Khatri, and Subhash Kaul. 2014. "Figure 1: Map of South Asia in Stroke in South Asian Countries." *Nature Reviews Neurology* 10:135 – 143. Retrieved April 3, 2017 (<http://www.nature.com/nrneuro/journal/v10/n3/full/nrneuro.2014.13.html#contrib-auth>).

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## ABSTRACT

My study explored how South Asian Americans understood their own and others' skin color within the United States. Using qualitative methods, I conducted 16 interviews with 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5, and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation South Asian Americans and analyzed their interview responses to identify how they learned about the meanings associated with skin color and about racial hierarchies and if there were differences based on gender and generation. I found that 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian American community members and relatives were the main teachers of colorism within the South Asian American context. In terms of skin color discrimination within the United States, personal experiences of discrimination and exposure to mass media played a role in educating South Asian Americans about their place in the racial hierarchy. Within the United States, issues surrounding skin color became even more pronounced as American beliefs about race and color were layered onto South Asian beauty ideals. Additionally, I found that the experience of skin color discrimination was gendered, meaning that for women skin color issues were intensified. Women experienced both skin color discrimination within and outside the community more than men. Furthermore, colorism was passed down by 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian American immigrants. This research provided insight into skin color beliefs among South Asian Americans and expanded on the limited but existing research on the South Asian American community. As the South Asian American community becomes larger, it will be necessary to conduct more studies on this community in order to better understand the implications of colorism in careers, marriage, housing, and others areas of life and on how colorism shapes attitudes towards other racial groups in the U.S.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Miss me with that Fair & Lovely, 'stay out the sun', shadism and colorism. See this melanin??? #unfairandlovely” - Mohana on Instagram (Barnes 2016).

Here, Mohana took part in a campaign called *Unfair and Lovely* questioning the oppressive South Asian beauty ideal that lighter is more beautiful. In 2015, Pax Jones, a Black woman, started a photo series along with Mirusha and Yanusha Yogarajah and called the campaign *Unfair and Lovely* in the United States to produce awareness around the idealization of lighter skin tones (Barnes 2016). The campaign's name was a play on words of the commonly used South Asian skin lightening product, Fair and Lovely. The *Unfair and Lovely* movement addressed how darker skin toned people of color were just as beautiful as fair skin toned people and didn't need to lighten their skin to conform to beauty norms. The initial 2015 photo series by Pax Jones focused on South Asian women, specifically those with roots in India and Sri Lanka, and gained astounding coverage and was even featured in BBC, CNN International, and the Huffington Post (Pax Jones 2017). Mirushu and Yamusha Yogorajah were the models in the photo shoot and challenged the South Asian beauty ideal that you had to be fair skinned to be beautiful. Shortly after, the photo campaign became a social media phenomenon as darker skin toned South Asian women posted daring photos of themselves with the hashtag #UnfairandLovely (Barnes 2016). Many women with roots in South Asia like Mohana, who specifically identified as Bengali, posted photos of themselves posing with their darker skin tones. To note, people who identify as Bengali have roots in the region of Bengal, a region that is split between Pakistan and India. Some women even wrote their personal experiences dealing with previously hating their darker skin tone and how the movement helped to liberate them from discriminating against their own skin tone.

The movement created opportunities for women of South Asian descent to call out skin color discrimination in the South Asian community and to begin to accept their own browner toned skin color. Further, the campaign highlighted that skin color discrimination was an issue that negatively impacted South Asian American women and needed to be further addressed. The prevalence and reach of this campaign made clear that skin color discrimination within the South Asian American community was and still is an issue that needs to be tackled.

Despite the prevalence of skin color discrimination, research on this topic is limited. Although there is little research on South Asian Americans in general, there is an even less on skin color discrimination. Furthermore, skin color discrimination has real consequences. It creates divisions within the South Asian American community, can negatively impact individuals' life chances, has negative psychological implications, and leads to devaluation of dark skin toned South Asian American community members. Thus, my qualitative research study sought to address these gaps in existing South Asian American literature and focused on South Asian Americans' desires to have a lighter skin tone, skin color discrimination, and how these beliefs varied by generation and gender. My main research question was "how do South Asian Americans understand their own and other's skin color within the United States?" In order to better understand this, my sub-questions included: "what institutions (school, media, social ties, and etc.) teach South Asian Americans about skin color and discrimination and how do they experience it within the United States?" and "do gender and generation make a difference in one's understanding of skin color and experience with skin color discrimination?" When I refer to the term "colorism," I mean prejudice and discrimination against darker skin tones within the South Asian American community. I use the term "skin color discrimination" to define all unjust treatment on the basis of skin color both within and outside of the South Asian American

community. The topic of colorism is important in sociology and race studies as it highlights how skin color transcends and is tied to issues of racism. Next, the literature review section introduces existing research on skin color discrimination and how it relates to South Asian Americans.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review starts out with a general discussion on South Asian immigration to the United States. I use the term South Asia to mean Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka. The first section on South Asian immigration to the United States sets the context of South Asian migration to the United States and explains a bit about the current ethnic populations. This section provides a little background on the community that my research focuses on.

Next, my second section addresses colorism and has multiple sub-sections. To start, the colorism section focuses on studies of colorism in terms of how the Black and Latino American community experience colorism within the United States. Most studies on colorism within the United States have focused on these two racial communities. The colorism section also includes a brief segment on Asian Americans and skin color discrimination as well. For the most part, these studies on skin color discrimination examine how colorism negatively impacts people of color and the importance of studying skin color as a topic. Additionally, there are some parallels between the experience of colorism between Black, Latino, and South Asian American communities. Black, Latino, and South Asian American communities are all marginalized and lower on the racial hierarchy than whites. Also, all three of these communities have ranges of skin tones with some members having quite dark skin tones. Thus, due to these similarities, it is crucial to mention these prior studies. Next, another sub-section focuses more specifically on colorism within South Asia. In this part, I explain belief systems on skin color within South Asia, because South Asians bring these ideas with them when they migrate to the United States. Lastly, I address studies on colorism within the South Asian American community. This section highlights what research already exists on this topic and where my work ties into previous work.



To end, the conclusion focuses on the contributions of my study to literature on skin color and South Asian Americans.

### South Asian Immigration to the United States

The relatively short immigration history of South Asian Americans might begin to explain why there is limited research on this group. Most South Asian immigration occurred after 1965, with most South Asian Americans identifying as 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5, or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.

Migration of South Asians began around the 1820s, with a small number Sikh Punjabis moving to the United States for work. Punjabis are people that originated from the region of Punjab which is now split between Pakistan and India. Unfortunately, that immigration was later halted due to United States exclusion laws (Lee 2015). Specifically, the Immigration Act of 1917, also called the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, was the act that temporarily stopped South Asian immigration to the United States.

Following World War II, immigration laws began to change. The Luce-Celler Act of 1946 made it possible for those of South Asian descent to become naturalized in the United States. This mostly applied to people from India and the quota was set at 100 individuals per year. I use the term India here to specifically refer to those who came from the country of present day India. After 1947, Bangladesh (East Bengal) and Pakistan became separate countries, and West Bengal became part of what is now considered India (Bald 2013). It wasn't until the 1965 Immigration Act that significant numbers of South Asians were able to immigrate to the United States (Lee 2015). Following the 1965 Immigration Act, South Asians immigrated to America in three distinct waves (Nandan 2007:391). From 1965-1975, the first wave of South Asian immigrants came to the United States, and they were often ambitious, single men searching for jobs. The second wave ranged from 1976-1985 and included families that migrated for better

opportunities and the flourishing economy in the U.S. This wave was composed of mostly professionals and highly educated individuals. The last and third wave was pushed by the Family Reunification Act of 1990 which allowed immigrants to bring direct relatives to the U.S (Nandan 2007:391). This final wave started around 1990 and is still ongoing.

During the 1990's some South Asian Americans utilized the U.S. Diversity program, also known as the Green Card Lottery, to settle in the United States (Moore 2011:1668). Each wave was made up of individuals from various South Asian countries, with the largest group being those with Indian heritage. Today, Indian Americans make up the largest proportion of South Asian Americans in the U.S. (Lee 2015). Pakistani Americans make up a small portion of the South Asian American population, but are still a relatively large community in the U.S. at around 400,000 people (Moore 2011). While accounts of South Asian American groups other than those from Pakistan or India are limited, some researchers such as Bald (2013) have wrote about these communities.

Vivek Bald (2013) accounted for the history of the Bengali American community in the United States and discovered what is often considered the “lost” history of this community. He conducted interviews with Bengali Americans. He found that many Bengali Americans lived in predominantly Black and Latino communities during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and also intermarried with these communities. His interviewees worked in the steel and auto sector, as traders, and even as street vendors. His research showed that at least some South Asian American communities formed ties with other people of color communities. Whether this is something that occurs amongst other South Asian ethnic community remains unknown.

Overall, little is known about South Asian Americans in the United States. Largely, South Asian Americans are known as newer immigrants to this nation and are still learning to navigate

race and race relations in the United States. Further, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation primarily makes up the South Asian American community due to the groups newness to the United States. My study adds to this literature by also including the experiences of more South Asian Americans. It examines South Asian Americans views on colorism, skin color discrimination within the United States, and the intersection of gender and generation. My findings suggest that women in this community experience both colorism and skin color discrimination at a greater extent than men. Additionally, my findings show that 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans are usually the teachers of colorism practices.

### Colorism

Russell-Cole, Wilson, and Hall (2013) defined colorism within the United States as “the prejudices and discriminatory practices surrounding skin-color differences that occur not only among African Americans, but also among other populations of color such as Latinos and Asians, both in this country and around the world.” Further, “colorism, or skin color stratification, is a process that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark in areas such as income, education, housing, and the marriage market” (Hunter 2007).

Hunter (2007) researched colorism within the United States and explored how it impacted people of color, specifically African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans by examining previous research. She looked at various studies conducted on colorism within these groups and defined the ways that colorism functioned. She considered colorism as a phenomenon that is dependent on one’s skin color and privileges light skin tones over darker skin tones. A person's experience with discrimination was influenced by race and their skin tone. How dark or light a person’s skin color was significantly impacted their experience with discrimination (Hunter 2007:238). Further, she explained that colorism and racism worked together to

negatively impact one's experience and that colorism was just one form of racism. Within the United States, the system of colorism has linkages to slavery and colonization where lighter skinned Blacks were given more power on plantations. Black slaves that were freed from slavery were often lighter skinned as well. Furthermore, Hunter's analysis of previous work focused a bit on colorism within the Asian American community. In this community, light skin tones were considered better due to its ties to European colonial history where Europeans had high status as colonizers, were white, and had Anglo facial features (Hunter 2007:239). These ideas of status and beauty were still reinforced even when the colonizers were not longer in these countries.

Based on Ronald Hall's study in the 1990s, Hunter (2007) wrote that he thought that colorism was very embedded in culture and had real consequences in terms of socioeconomic disadvantages and negative psychological effects. Furthermore, she wrote that media often reinforced colorism, and most of the time only lighter skinned people of color were represented as the main characters. Additionally, there have been some skin color discrimination cases that have been adjudicated in United States courts (Hunter 2007). Despite this, "most people of color will not end up in court over color bias, but nearly all people of color have experienced or witnessed unfair treatment of others based on skin tone" (Hunter 2007:240).

Next, Hunter (2007) focused on the effects that colorism had in the workplace. Social science research on Latinos showed that Latinos that were generally darker skin toned had higher poverty and unemployment rates. Other research on the impact of skin color showed that this trend applied to African Americans as well. As Hunter (2007) described Mark Hill's study in 2000, she wrote that he found that lighter skin toned African American men did much better in the job market in comparison to darker skin toned African Americans. Overall, research on Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, Cuban Americans, Latinos, and African

Americans that focused on skin color showed that those who are darker skin toned suffered economically (Hunter 2007).

Furthermore, more research studies that Hunter (2007) examined showed that skin color may also be an issue that translates into schools. Based on her analysis of these studies, research conducted by Hughes and Hertel in 1990 on African Americans and Murguia and Telles in 1996 on Mexican Americans showed how colorism functions in education. Dark skin toned African Americans and Mexican Americans were unable to finish as much education as their light skinned counterparts. Also, in Hughes and Hertel's study they found that there was a significant academic gap between light skin toned and dark skin toned Black students. Hunter (2007) believed that the main reason why these gaps in academic achievement existed was because light skin was often associated with positive characteristics, and thus, school counselors might have had color bias in schools. Despite the reasoning, she thought it was clear that dark skin toned people of color were negatively impacted in schools (Hunter 2007).

Following, Hunter (2007) wrote about how lighter and darker skin tones were perceived by Mexican and African American women. In a qualitative study that she conducted in 2005, she found that dark skin toned women of color felt intimidated by lighter skin toned women and often responded by excluding them. Also, light skin toned women were not considered as equal members of the ethnic group and were expected to prove themselves. While these women of color experienced exclusion and negative psychological impacts due to their lighter skin tones, Hunter (2007) emphasized that these experiences could not be equated to what darker skin toned women of color experienced. She highlighted how darker skin toned women were disadvantaged in many sectors of life, including dating and marriage markets, education, employment, and housing (Hunter 2007). She also emphasized that light skinned women did not want to be darker,

while a majority of dark skin toned women wanted to be lighter. In this way, it was clear that lighter skin toned participants benefitted greatly from their lighter skin color (Hunter 2007).

To end, Hunter (2007) mentioned how it was crucial to study colorism. She noted how many thought that studying colorism took away from understanding racism within the United States. Instead, she wrote that understanding how colorism functioned among people of color did not sidetrack from the discussion of race, because understanding colorism allowed us to better conceptualize the larger system of racism. Colorism is an important component of racism, and according to Hunter it will remain until “white racism” is dismantled (Hunter 2007).

Although Hunter (2007) wrote about the importance of studying colorism within the United States, she only briefly highlighted the experiences of Asian Americans. Furthermore, her analysis of Asian Americans only focused on people who had origins in East and Southeast Asia. My research contributes to filling this gap in literature on South Asian Americans.

Next, I focus on South Asian views on skin color. Since South Asian American views may be informed by ideas from their country of origin, specifically when it comes to caste and colorism, it is important to understand this history. Colorism is a global issue that affects everyone, and specifically in South Asia, colorism is common and has a long history tied to colonialism and caste (Hunter 2007; Ayyar and Khandare 2012). Ayyar and Khandare (2012) documented the long history of colorism in India by researching scripture, Aryan racial theory, caste history, and the role of Multinational Corporations in India now. They argued that skin color discrimination practices in India are actually pre-colonial, rather than post-colonial, and based in myths surrounding Aryan/racial theory and linked to caste discrimination. Ayyar and Khandare used the terms skin color discrimination and colorism interchangeably to refer to degrading one’s own skin color. Also, they wrote that degrading dark skinned men and women is

still prevalent in India today. They additionally mentioned that many multinational corporations such as Fair and Lovely took part in advertising and selling skin lightening products, and thus promoted color discrimination (Ayyar and Khandare 2012). Their research is crucial to understanding the long histories of colorism, but they did not write about how colorism practices may be maintained in countries outside of India, which do not have caste based systems. Also, they did not write about colorism in the sense that immigrants from South Asia may still believe in colorism practices. My research shows that ideas surrounding skin color from South Asian countries are ingrained within the South Asian American community, even within the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.

Next, there have been some research studies on the way that colorism remains to be an issue within the South Asian American community. Banks (2015), Sahay and Piran (1997), and Grewal (2009) all studied skin color discrimination within the South Asian American/Canadian community. Banks (2015) defined colorism as a form of prejudice or discrimination in which both South Asians and South Asian Americans were treated in dehumanizing ways based on their skin color. Banks's (2015) work focused on analyzing research on colorism within the South Asian American community. She found that colorism was even common among second generation South Asian Americans and not only based in a Western framework. But at the same time she found that colorism was based in the rhetoric of white supremacy. She did not write more on colorism and focused majority of her analysis on skin color discrimination cases involving South Asian Americans (Banks 2015).

Grewal (2009) conducted over 90 in-depth interviews with college-educated Muslims who identified as either 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Arab or South Asian American. She also interviewed a few 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants from these communities as well. Grewal had her research

participants discuss skin color through the topic of marriage. Grewal (2009) found that an obsession with fair skin not only traveled with South Asian immigrants when they came to the U.S., but that negative perceptions surrounding skin color were strengthened in the United States. 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans often viewed darker skin very negatively and did not want their children to marry darker skinned individuals. While Grewal did study colorism, she only studied it in the context of Muslim Americans. She also only slightly focused on skin color and focused on it from a more religious lens. I extend her research and solely focuses on South Asian Americans, showing that colorism is likely beyond one's religious beliefs.

Sahay and Piran (1997) conducted a quantitative study comparing the body satisfaction of 100 European Canadian students to 100 South Asian Canadian students. Their sample consisted of women from the University of Toronto. They used the Body Cathexis Scale to allow students to rate body satisfaction on a Likert Scale. They included skin color as an item on this scale to see if body satisfaction was linked to skin color. Additionally, they had the Visual Analogue Scale as a measure to determine participants' skin colors. For each participant, both the researcher and the participant rated skin color. The skin color scale was based on the white cultural ideal in Canada, meaning very light skin.

After conducting ANOVA tests, Sahay and Piran (1997) found that South Asian Canadians were less satisfied with their physical appearance when it came to skin color than the European Canadians in their sample. The more South Asian Canadian women differed from the white cultural ideal, the lower their reported body satisfaction was. Also, contradictory to what one would expect, Sahay and Piran (1997) found that South Asian American women who had a medium skin tone were less satisfied with their skin color. They thought this might be because these women were neither light nor dark and thus could still change their skin color and due to



this were more dissatisfied with their current skin color. My research does not support this view, and more research must be conducted to explain Sahay and Piran's (1997) findings.

Sahay and Piran's (1997) study presented quantitative evidence that South Asian Canadians had internalized colorism and also showed which groups of women were most likely to be susceptible to colorism. Although this study specifically focused on South Asian Canadian women, it is likely that a quantitative study with South Asian American women would produce similar results. Their study was limited in the sense that it only focused on women and also did not explore what institutions might lead to this unhappiness with one's skin color. Although it showed that colorism was an issue for these women, it was unclear why this might be. My study attempts to fill this gap. I identify some of the key institutions influencing South Asian Americans desire to have lighter skin and include both men and women.

Rathor (2011) conducted a qualitative study on second generation Indian and Hindu women from New Jersey. She conducted 10 in-depth interviews with these women and focused on the topic of marriage. She found that skin color seemed to be a minor factor in marriages, but my study suggests otherwise. She explored how many factors including skin color influenced women's desirability in marriages and their own personal feelings on attractiveness. Since she focused on many factors, including past relationships, religion, education, and skin color, there was not really a chance for participants to fully discuss if skin color mattered to them or not. In comparison, I asked multiple questions on skin color and discrimination, in order to address the issue of colorism. While skin color may not be an important factor in marriages, I find that it is a factor that negatively impacts South Asian Americans frequently.

## Conclusion

My research helps to fill a large gap in literature on colorism within the South Asian American community. While Hunter's (2007) study focused on the consequences of colorism within racial and ethnic communities within the United States, it has failed to show how South Asian Americans understand their own and others' skin color. Although South Asian Americans experience of colorism is not vastly different from other ethnic and racial groups, concepts of skin color originating from South Asia make the experience of colorism within the South Asian American group slightly different. My study highlights that understandings surrounding colorism develop from both the South Asian beauty ideal and the racial hierarchy within the United States. Colorism negatively impacts South Asian Americans as well, primarily women.

Ayyar and Khandare's (2012) research explained how ingrained colorism is within South Asia. It is no surprise then that South Asian Americans continue to be influenced by many of these beliefs. My research shows that even 2<sup>nd</sup> generation South Asian Americans still know how to speak about skin color in a more South Asian context and struggle with internalized colorism. Furthermore, although Ayyar and Khandare (2012) only spoke about the skin lightening product Fair and Lovely within the context of India, it is clear from my study that the product Fair and Lovely is also sold within the United States. These products continue to promote skin color discrimination and negatively impact South Asians perceptions of their own skin within the United States. Additionally, I find that South Asian beauty ideals are often maintained by 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans.

Next, I expand Bank's, Grewal's, Sahay and Piran's research on colorism to show how prevalent colorism is within the South Asian American community. Colorism continues to be an issue within the South Asian American community, even though many of my interviewees grew

up within the United States. Grewal (2009) and Rathor (2011) both treated marriage as an entry point to discussing skin color, and thus were not able to focus on skin color in depth. In comparison, my interview addressed many issues of race and skin color, and thus I am able to better identify what institutions contribute to understandings of skin color and discrimination.

Although Sahay and Piran (1997) did groundbreaking work on representing how skin color impacted body satisfaction, it was limited to only South Asian Canadian women. While my results support Sahay and Piran's (1997) findings in that colorism negatively impacts South Asian women, it also shows how colorism influences South Asian men. Through qualitative methods, I am able to assess how social ties and institutions such as schools influence views on skin color. Additionally, through in-depth interviews I do examine how gender and generation are related to colorism. Grewal (2009) did limited research on comparing the experiences of South Asian American men and women, but in my study I directly compare the experiences of men and women in regards to skin color. Furthermore, both Grewal's (2009) and Rathor's (2011) studies were limited by religion. My research includes multiple religious' communities and shows that colorism is likely an issue despite one's religious beliefs.

Ultimately, my research helps fill a huge gap in knowledge on South Asian Americans. Although there is work on South Asian Americans immigration patterns, research beyond that is scarce. Studies of South Asian Americans and skin color were limited by gender or religion, and my research shows that colorism is something that South Asian Americans are influenced by despite generation and gender. Still though, gender plays a role in how women experience the world. Lastly, my research highlights how generation also contributed to colorism within the South Asian American community. 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans are usually the teachers of colorism.

## RESEARCH METHODS

My main research question was “how do South Asian Americans understand their own and other’s skin color within the United States In order to better understand this, my sub-questions included: “what institutions (school, media, social ties, and etc.) teach South Asian Americans about skin color and discrimination and how do they experience it within the United States?” and “do gender and generation make a difference in one’s understanding of skin color and experience with skin color discrimination?” This section details what I did in order to answer these research questions.

I conducted in-depth interviews as my primary method but also distributed a short demographic survey. I created my own survey through the Qualtrics survey software and then distributed anonymous survey links through various South Asian American based email lists. For reference, my recruitment scripts are attached below in Appendix A. Once respondents agreed to an interview via my survey, I contacted them and scheduled interviews. I conducted 16 in-depth interviews with South Asian Americans from across the United States. Following, I fully transcribed my interviews by listening to audio recordings. Then I developed codes (or categories) based on themes such as skin color and categorized interview responses. After coding, I decided I wanted to focus on discussion surrounding skin color, and gathered quotes and data related to skin color. Then I analyzed my results, and lastly drew conclusions from the data.

For this study, I defined South Asian Americans as people with roots in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, based on South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation’s (SAARC 2009) definition of South Asia, and have now moved to the United States and settled in the United States. In addition, I used Rumbaut’s (2008)

definitions of immigrant generations to define 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5, and 2<sup>nd</sup> generations. I defined 1<sup>st</sup> generation as those who moved to the United States after the age of 12, 1.5 generation as those who were born abroad and moved to the United States as children at or before the age of 12, and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation as those who were born in the United States to immigrant parents (Rumbaut 2008:209).

### Survey Methods

My Qualtrics survey included a brief introduction explaining my research study, the participant's role in the study, confidentiality, and the IRB contact information. The participant then had the option to either continue the survey or opt out. The survey was sent through an anonymous link and included questions about the participant's name, contact information, age, race, socioeconomic status, location in the United States, country of origin, how long they had lived in the United States, and whether they were 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation. Later, I re-categorized responses to also include 1.5 generation South Asian Americans. Towards the end of the survey, I also included a few questions about racial attitudes. As a final question, I included a question asking participants if they wanted to participate in an interview. For reference, the demographic survey questions are attached in Appendix B. I analyzed the demographic data to better understand my research participants and their racial views.

### Interview Methods

After people had agreed to an interview, I contacted them via email and sent them the informed consent form. For reference, the informed consent form is attached below in Appendix D. I scheduled interviews through a meeting scheduling application called youcanbook.me, and I then followed up with interviewees the day of the interview to confirm the interview time. Often I also emailed interviewees asking them to complete their consent forms prior to the interviews.

In some instances, the participants filled out the consent form right before the interview. Once I received each participant's consent form, I conducted interviews. Overall I completed interviews with 16 South Asian Americans that identified as either 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5, or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.

Interviews were conducted via phone, via video chat, and in person, depending on what people preferred. Generally, the interviews ranged from 1 hour to 1.5 hours. These interviews took place between June 2016 and January 2017. All interviews were conducted in private spaces in order to protect confidentiality and were all audio recorded via QuickTime player and a voice recorder. The interview questions covered multiple topics including:

- a) engagement with institutions such as school, work, media, shows and more;
- b) engagement with South Asian countries;
- c) conversation about South Asian culture;
- d) ideas and views about skin color;
- e) marriage/dating preferences;
- f) police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement;
- g) and views of parents, family, friends and other social ties on race and racial issues and how these individuals influenced them.

For reference, a comprehensive list of interview questions is included below in Appendix C. The interview questions provided insight into the participant's racial views and the institutions that informed their views. The range of interview topics allowed me to understand participant's views on a wide range of issues. I attempted to be unbiased, but when participants expressed racially intolerant views, it became very hard for me. Despite this, all interviews were conducted successfully. In rare instances, I expressed my own opinions but only if the participant asked me

about my views. In most cases when participants asked questions they agreed with me on racial views and wanted to learn more about why I was conducting this research study.

During the interview I never disclosed that I was Pakistani American and Muslim, so many seemed to assume that I was Indian American and Hindu. I did not mention my identity, because I did not want participants to alter their views based on how I identified. Regardless people recognized that I was a member of the South Asian American community. I was able to understand many of their references to regions and words in South Asian languages.

Furthermore, my identity might have factored into the ways that people spoke about skin color as well. Since I already had the understanding of what South Asian beauty ideals, people generally discussed these concepts without hesitating to ask if I understood what they were talking about. This may have been different if I had not been a South Asian American interviewer. Despite this, as I have a fair complexion for a South Asian American, my appearance might have influenced what people were willing to say in person and in video chat interviews. I benefit from colorism within the South Asian American community, so people may have not been as honest. The interviews were quite emotionally draining, and at times I had to take breaks from conducting interviews. Between November 2016 and December 2016, following the election, I had to take a break from interviewing and instead focused on other sections of the thesis.

I gave pseudonyms to the participants so that they would not be identifiable. At first I considered giving participants South Asian names, but I thought this might create confusion over identification. I did not want people to think that the participants were individuals with South Asian names they knew in real life. Instead, I searched for common American names via Google and randomly selected names. I tried to pick names that did not have religious affiliations. In addition, I compiled all interview participants' information in an Excel sheet. It included data

such as generation and major/profession and information based on a combination of survey and interview responses. I kept all this information safe by keeping it in a private folder on my password protected laptop.

After interviews were completed and recorded, I transcribed them through careful listening. I listened to the full audio recording of the interview in order to get a better picture of each participant as a person, and tried to type out exactly what participants said if I planned on using it for my final thesis. At times, interviews were selectively transcribed if the participants spoke about topics unrelated to their racial views.

Once interviews were transcribed, I decided on which codes or categories I wanted to use to characterize responses. Qualitative coding was used to categorize interviewee responses. I came up with majority of these codes based on my interview questions prior to the interview and a few based on what people said during the interview. For example, the codes ‘American Media and Shows,’ ‘Race Talk,’ ‘South Asian Culture Talk,’ and ‘Skin Color Talk’ all came from interview questions in which I asked about race, television shows, South Asian culture, and skin color. I made these codes based on themes I had picked up on in conversations with other South Asian Americans in daily life. From personal experience, I knew that South Asian Americans routinely spoke about South Asian culture such as food and events. Additionally, I created the code ‘Race Talk,’ because I believed everyone had something to say about race. In terms of the codes ‘Black Lives Matter – Good’ and ‘Black Lives Matter – Bad,’ I realized that the movement was an easy talking point and that everyone had a view point on it. Additionally, I came up codes related to institutions in order to identify what institutions informed individuals views, since Sociology is focused on the study of institutions. These institution codes were: ‘American Media and Shows,’ ‘Other Institutions,’ ‘South Asian Country Influence,’ and ‘Views



of Others.’ I formed the code ‘American Media and Shows,’ because I noticed that American media teaches people about race and skin color and reinforces racism and colorism as well (Hunter 2007). Codes such as ‘Islamophobia Talk’ and ‘Police brutality discussion’ were codes I came up with following the interviews so that I could better organize what interviewees said. Throughout the interview, people continuously brought up the issue of Islamophobia due to the current political climate and thus, I created a new code to categorize this discussion. The same was true for the code ‘Police brutality discussion.’

I coded via the qualitative data analysis program called Dedoose. I chose to use this social science program, because it was accessible, and allowed me to export coded responses. The Dedoose social science program considers overarching/main codes as parent codes and codes that fall under these larger categories as child codes. I didn’t have child codes for all of the parent codes. I used each parent code to identify the various institutions that participants encountered and to categorize their own and others experiences. I used these codes in order to gain a better understanding of each participant as a whole individual. Below are the codes I used, their descriptions, and purpose:

- Parent code: American Media and Shows
  - This code was used to group discussion on television shows, programs, music, Netflix shows, videos, books and other media that participants engaged with. It helped me to understand if media was informing understandings of race and skin color.
- Parent code: Islamophobia talk
  - This code organized conversations on discrimination and fear of Muslims in any context, whether it was their own experiences or what they had heard about. The

purpose of this code was to assess if people thought of Muslims as a racial group and/or if they were concerned about Islamophobia.

- Parent code: Other Institutions
  - This code categorized additional institutions that people had engaged with outside of American media and shows such as schools and towns. The goal of it was to examine what other institutions informed people's views.
- Parent code: Race talk and child codes: Black Lives Matter – Good, Black Lives Matter – Bad, Police brutality discussion, and Racist Talk
  - The code 'race talk' was utilized to classify any discussion that was race related such as racial demographics or how people defined race.
  - The child codes were used to categorize specific responses in terms of discussion on race. 'Black Lives Matter - Good' was used when people spoke highly of the Blacks Lives Matter movement and 'Black Lives Matter - Bad' was used when people spoke poorly about the movement. 'Police brutality discussion' was used in instances when people spoke about police shootings, unlawful arrests, and/or police brutality in general without referring to the Black Lives Matter movement. 'Racist talk' was used in instances when people spoke about experiences of discrimination or if they said something that was racist. All these codes were used to determine individual's views on these specific race topics.
- Parent code: Racial Solidarity
  - This code was used in instances when interviewees spoke about supporting other people of color and in instances when people mobilized or did activities in order

to support other racial groups. It was used to find out which interviewees cared about other racial groups.

- Parent code: Skin color talk and child code: Colorism
  - The code ‘Skin color talk’ was used when people spoke about their own or others’ skin color in any instance. The child code ‘Colorism’ was used when people spoke about their skin color in a degrading manner or spoke about how others critiqued skin color within the South Asian American community.
- Parent code: South Asian Country Influence
  - This code was employed when people spoke about how often they went back to South Asia, how long they had lived there (if applicable), and how long their trips in South Asia had been. The purpose was to assess the influence of South Asia on their lives and to find out what their generation was.
- Parent code: South Asian Culture Talk
  - This code was used in any instance when participants spoke about South Asian culture whether it be movies, holidays, language, and etc. It was used to see how much of a role South Asian culture played in participants lives, if at all.
- Parent code: Views of Others and child codes: Views of friends, Views of other social ties, and Views of parents and family
  - ‘Views of Others’ was used in any circumstance where participants spoke about others views. ‘View of friends,’ Views of other social ties,’ and ‘Views of parents and family’ were all used to categorize whose views they were talking about. These codes were utilized to further understand what social ties were informing participants’ views.

After coding the interviews, I read through my excerpts and decided where the most relevant data was. Then I decided I wanted to focus on skin color. I analyzed my results based on grouping quotes related to South Asian beauty standards and skin color concerns in the United States. By using past literature on skin color and race as guidance for analyzing participant's responses, I wrote my thesis, and once I had completed this I drew conclusions. Lastly, I wrote three additional sections "Discussion," "Limitations," and "Directions for Future Research" to further analyze my findings, discuss what was missing in my research, and provide suggestions to future researchers who plan on studying colorism within the South Asian American community.

My 16 research participants had origins in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh and their time living within the United States varied. They were from all across the United States, but mostly from the Midwest. Table 1 below or on the following page describes my interviewees.

<b>Table 1. Summary of Interviewee's Demographic Data</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Count of participants (N=16)</b>
<u>Method of Interview</u>	
Phone	9
Video	2
In Person	5
<u>Family Annual Income</u> *	
Less than \$42,000	1
\$42,000 - \$125,000	5
More than \$125,000	10
<u>Student vs. work status</u> **	
Student	10
Working	6
<u>Religious Affiliation</u> ***	
Islam	4
Hinduism	8
Jainism	1
Sikhism	1
Christianity	1
No religious affiliation	1
<u>Immigration Generation</u>	
1 <sup>st</sup>	3
1.5	4
2 <sup>nd</sup>	9
<u>Country of Origin/Birth Country</u>	
United States	9
Pakistan	2
India	5
<u>Ethnicity</u>	
Pakistani American	4
Indian American	11
Bengali American	1
<u>Gender</u>	
Female/Woman	8
Male/Man	8
<u>Age Range</u>	
18 - 30	14
50 and older	2
<u>Notes</u>	
* Family annual income was based on the survey questionnaire.	
** Working participants included those who recently graduated from Universities.	
*** For religious affiliation, those that identified culturally with the religion were also included whether they were practicing or not.	

## RESULTS

As Banks (2015) and Grewal (2009) found, colorism is an issue within the South Asian American community. Within the United States, though, issues surrounding skin color become even more pronounced and are layered with understandings of beauty standards and ideals within South Asia and with the racial hierarchy within the United States.

My results indicate that many institutions informed my participants' understanding of their skin color, both in terms of concepts of skin color in South Asia and within the United States. The first subsection focuses on colorism within the South Asian American community. I found that for 8 of my research participants, their families reinforced the idea that fair skin is considered more beautiful, either directly or indirectly. For another 4 of my research participants, the South Asian American community, whether it was friends, classmates, or aunties (older women in the South Asian American community), reinforced the ideal of fairer skin.

The second subsection focuses on skin color discrimination within the United States, outside of the South Asian American community. In terms of the United States, American media and television shows played a large role in informing participants of the racial hierarchy, in addition to schools and personal experiences with discrimination. Overall, all my research participants had directly or indirectly been impacted by colorism or skin color discrimination, whether they fully recognized it or not.

The third and final subsection focuses on how generation and gender connect to colorism and skin color discrimination. Experiences of colorism and skin color discrimination were gendered, meaning that South Asian American women were more negatively impacted by colorism and skin color discrimination than men. Despite this, men still experienced and/or internalized colorism, if had a darker skin tone. In most circumstances, colorism was passed

down by 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian American immigrants to 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation South Asian Americans, and although many participants did not find colorism acceptable, they struggled to challenge it.

### South Asian Culture and Colorism

Among my interviewees, everyone generally spoke about skin color in terms of fairness and darkness. For the purpose of this study, I use the words fair, white, and light to mean the same thing. Often people from South Asia use the word fair. While participant responses varied, they all referred to where their skin color fell on the spectrum of South Asian skin colors, skin tones that range from white to dark brown. A darker skin color was considered less desirable, while a fairer complexion was characterized as more beautiful. 3 of my research participants began to speak in these terms when I asked my initial question about skin color, “how do you feel about your own skin color?” For example, Ivan is 19 years old and a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Pakistani American man currently studying at a university in the Midwest. I conducted the Ivan’s interview in person, and noticed that he was quite brown toned. He was very kind and was willing to elaborate on his experiences during the interview. He used these terms to describe his skin color and his friends:

“That is something I have been talking about with my [darker skinned South Asian American] friends. I am obviously darker. A lot of Pakistanis are a lot fairer.”

Maddie is 20 years old and a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Indian American woman studying at a university in the Midwest. I conducted my interview with her on the phone, and she also spoke about her complexion using terms related to fairness and darkness:

“I am pretty fair on the spectrum for Indian skin colors. I am not super dark and closer to the middle in terms of skin color.”

Nicole is 30 years old and a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Indian American woman currently finishing up a medical fellowship program in the Midwest. I conducted her interview via phone as well, and she responded to my question by saying:

“I am medium colored. If you would ask an Indian auntie, she would probably say that I am darker.”

All three of these research participants spoke in terms of lightness and darkness almost immediately, without any prompting questions. I never mentioned South Asia, and they immediately had a sense of what I was asking. All these participants placed themselves in reference to the skin color spectrum of the country they had roots in as well. Nicole’s comment about skin color demonstrated who was telling her about South Asian beauty ideals in the United States. In this case it was an auntie. Ivan found that he could talk about his darker skin complexion with his South Asian American friends who also had a darker skin tone like him. These quotes begin to show how ingrained ideas of fairness/darkness are among some South Asian Americans, even for those who grew up in the United States.

Consequently, terms describing skin color in South Asian languages also followed along with ideas of fairness/darkness. When Ivan’s family members described skin color they often used the the term “gori” which directly translates to “white” and refers to a woman being fairer skinned. Often, women who are characterized as “gori” are also characterized as better marriage partners or more beautiful (Rathor 2011). “In many Indian languages, the words *fair* and *beautiful* are often used synonymously” (Sahay and Piran 1997). Ivan’s family members’ characterizations of the word “gori” seemed to combine the word fair with beauty, suggesting that other skin tones were not as beautiful. Also, Ivan spoke about how South Asians commented on darker skin tone by using the word “khala” in a more derogatory fashion. “Khala” directly translates to black in Urdu. The use of the word “khala” is also sometimes used by the South



Asian American community to speak poorly of Black Americans as well. Randy and Harry both used other words in Urdu to describe their skin color. Randy is 55 years old and is a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Indian American, and I conducted his interview on the phone. He defined his skin color as “gueyna,” which translated to a “wheat-ish” color in Urdu, meaning a skin color which he said was neither fair nor dark. Additionally, Harry is 25 years old and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Pakistani American man and international student. I conducted his interview via phone, and he used the Urdu word “gundum(i)” to describe his skin color, saying that it was the color of wheat grains in Pakistan and considered an average complexion. Another common word that South Asians use to describe a medium skin color is the word “samla” (Grewal 2009). All three words, “gueyna,” “gundumi,” and “samla” are different words used to describe a medium brown color on a South Asian skin tone spectrum. These characterizations of skin color attempt to find a way to define skin color in terms of distancing themselves away from darkness. When phrases related to darkness (and blackness) are brought up, they refer to a lack of desirability. These understandings of skin color tied into people’s concern over their skin color and their desire for a fairer skin tone.

Next, many of my research participants talked about how having a lighter skin tone was seen as a beauty ideal in South Asia. Daphne is 19 years old and is a 1.5 generation Indian American studying at a University in the Midwest. I conducted her interview via phone. She said:

“In India, it is a huge thing. Fair and Lovely which is [a] skin bleaching [product] in India that makes a lot of money. So there are commercials that talk about making your skin lighter to be prettier. And that brainwashes people... Well you shouldn’t have to bleach your skin to be considered pretty or whatever. Plus, it goes into European standards of beauty.”

Here, Daphne discussed the issue of colorism specifically in India and how it had been corporatized by multinational corporations such as Fair and Lovely. Fair and Lovely is “regarded as one of the most popular and largest selling fairness creams in India, marketed by Hindustan Lever Limited (HLL), a subsidiary of Unilever” (Ayyar and Khandare 2012:90). Daphne’s views of India are also supported by Ayyar and Khandare’s (2012) work studying colorism in India. Here we can see that South Asian media teaches South Asian Americans about colorism and promotes prejudice against those with a darker skin tone. Further, Daphne talked about how the desire to have lighter skin was tied into larger issues such as white standards of beauty. These understandings of skin color are connected to white supremacy and the fact that whites continue to have power in the world. It is also connected to the impact that the caste system continues to have. It is no coincidence that people continue to desire a lighter skin tone in India and Pakistan, even though they they are no longer ruled by British colonizers.

However, when I spoke to Daphne she didn’t seem to think that colorism was an issue for South Asian Americans, but Ivan, who grew up in the United States, said this:

“I have been thinking about this a lot... I am darker than my parents and the rest of my family. I do not know why [having a darker skin tone] annoys me. I think it is because everyone emphasizes fair skin. I know it is not a problem any more. Then honestly I think about it, and I am not too dark. I literally thought about it. I really wonder if Fair and Lovely does really work? Should I try it? If I do that I will be giving it to that notion that I need to have fairer skin?”

Ivan felt that colorism was still a prevalent issue for him personally and impacted him here within the United States. He also talked about how colorism is less of an issue than it used to be in South Asia. There is less privilege associated with being fairer skinned now in South Asia, although it is clear that colorism has still not been fully addressed. Although it seemed that Ivan never actually used the skin bleaching creams, based on what he told me in the interview, he still thought of using the product Fair and Lovely to lighten his skin tone. Despite spending most of

his life in the United States, he was familiar with the product Fair and Lovely. Randy also mentioned Fair and Lovely soon after I asked him about his opinion on skin color. This demonstrates that this product has reached outside of India and influences those in the United States as well. Although Ayyar and Khandare (2012) did not write about Fair and Lovely's reach outside of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, Ivan's views on his skin color supported their argument that multinational corporations, such as Fair and Lovely, have a devastating impact on how darker skinned individuals view themselves. Due to colorism, Ivan continuously struggled to accept his own skin color, although he knew that he might be giving in to the beauty ideal if he used skin lightening products.

To continue, Nicole further spoke about how pronounced South Asian beauty ideals are within the United States and said this:

“I guess this didn't really hit me until maybe college. That lighter was more beautiful. I mean everyone wishes that they were lighter. Before my best friend's wedding, I was like 'oh my god I am so tan.' I should I have not gone to Miami. I wish I was more light. I mean it is not like I did anything to change that.”

Nicole identified that it was common to desire a lighter skin tone and even brought up how beauty ideals came into play before traditional South Asian ceremonies like weddings. She used the word “everyone” to explain how common it was for South Asian Americans. Also, her college classmates served as educators on what skin color beauty ideals are. Later, she also spoke about how she had heard Indian aunties instruct, “do not get dark before someone's wedding.” This idea of being lighter before weddings crept into Nicole's own view about her skin color when it came time for her friend's wedding, although she said she did nothing to change her skin color. Due to the beauty ideal, Nicole even questioned taking a vacation trip to Miami. This represents how problematic skin color ideals can be, especially for darker skin toned South Asian Americans.

Based on what Ivan and Nicole reported, while they both desired a lighter skin tone at one point in their lives, neither participant ever acted on it. In contrast to this, one participant named Stephanie said that she did attempt to change her skin color through various methods, including skin bleaching products. Stephanie is 18 years old and a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Indian American woman studying at a university in the Midwest, and I conducted her interview in person. She was very honest and open about her experience with her skin color, and she told me this:

“I remember going through this phase in middle school when I had just come back from India and seen all the [skin] bleaching products and I really wanted to try it. I can’t believe that I was that stupid to think that was ever [an option] ... I remember like trying to. We would go to the Indian store. I would see all the products and try to find ones that didn’t specifically say bleaching or like lightening, fair skin, Fair and Lovely products... And sometimes [my mom] would actually consider [letting me buy them]. But she thought that I could be fair from scrubbing my face and if I just used mud masks and exfoliated somehow my skin pigment would come back to what it is was like before I was like out in the sun for like 3 hours... Both my mom and dad would make comments if I was coming back inside after a tournament if I was really dark if my forehead looked burnt they would mention something like ‘You need to put on sunscreen. You are burning a lot.’ And I knew it wasn’t because they cared about if I got skin cancer or not.”

In comparison to Daphne and Ivan, Stephanie admitted that she used skin bleaching products, because her parents emphasized wanting her to have a lighter skin tone. Additionally, she was also influenced by her trip to India. Her mother continuously stressed that she should use skin lightening products, mud masks, or wash her face more frequently in order to maintain a lighter skin tone as well. Also, institutions such as Indian stores in the United States only furthered her desire to use skin bleaching products. Here, the Indian store reinforced South Asian concepts of colorism by selling skin bleaching products. Overall, her contact with India, the Indian store, and her parents all reinforced her desire for lighter skin. Despite this, Stephanie felt conflicted and tried to only purchase skin bleaching products that were not as obvious as the Fair and Lovely brand. Stephanie seemed to have been battling with herself on this issue of skin color and

continued to speak about it later in the interview. When I asked her if she spoke to her South Asian American friends about skin color, she said this:

“I remember talking about it during the summer and how it was such a problem. I get annoyed with my skin when it tans... There is a thing [about my skin color] where it looks a little dirtier when I tan because it is a little uneven and so like the pigment my skin turns into. But like I get annoyed for a second and then I am like it is my skin, and I am going to like have to live in it and deal with it and be in the sun. It’s not going to stop me from going outdoors. And sure I will wear sunscreen to protect myself from the sun’s harmful rays (says sarcastically). I am not really that obsessive about reapplying and doing it to prevent myself from tanning.”

Here, Stephanie talked about how she was not going to sacrifice spending time outdoors to maintain a lighter skin tone, but she was still unhappy with her skin tone when it became tanner and said that it got “dirtier.” Tanning was seen as a problem and her friends reinforced these ideas as well. This characterization of her skin color highlighted that Stephanie had internalized skin color prejudice and was still going through the process of unlearning South Asian beauty ideals. Also, she spoke about how using sunscreen would not stop her from tanning and said that she used it instead to protect her skin. In this moment, she seemed to be combatting the beauty ideal. This example shows how South Asian Americans struggle to challenge colorism. At one moment, they seem to challenge it while at another moment they succumb to using skin lightening methods. Increasingly, other South Asian American women also mentioned that social ties encouraged using sunscreen or not going out in the sun to prevent skin color darkening. For example, Daphne’s parents told her that she should wear sunscreen in order to prevent getting “darker,” and Nicole’s family friends told her to not go out in the sun unless she used an umbrella when she was on vacation with them. Zada is 27 years old and a 1.5 generation Pakistani American woman, and I conducted her interview over video chat. She spoke about this as well:

“My aunt might have mentioned it. I had a pretty light skin color. I was lighter than my sister but now she seems to be lighter than me so anyways they mention that. And when I was younger I think that my mom might have said that ‘don’t go out in the sun. you are going to get dark.’ She was really upset about that summer where I was outside all the time. I knew that people in Pakistan and India seem to care that you are lighter. They think you are more pretty. I like knew that. I don’t know how I knew that. I guess someone must have told me, you know in the way that they talk and stuff.”

In this instance, Zada talked about her aunt and mother were the ones that emphasized a lighter skin tone indirectly. Her mother became upset with her darker skin tone and her aunt continuously pointed out her skin tone change, and these moments reinforced that lighter was better. She spoke to how ingrained the beauty ideal was and even mentioned that she wasn’t sure how she knew about it. It was so ingrained that preferring a lighter skin tone became normalized and acceptable within her family. Zada also mentioned how colorism was an issue within both India and Pakistan and not only an issue isolated to India. By continuously referring to methods to prevent tanning, Daphne’s parents, Nicole’s family friends, and Zada’s family indirectly suggested that it was important to stay lighter and strengthened the South Asian beauty ideal.

To continue, Patricia is 55 years old 1<sup>st</sup> generation Indian American working in the West Coast and spoke out against skin lightening creams in her circles. I conducted her interview via video chat and she was very passionate and angered by the topic of skin color. She said:

“I am not going to use any skin lighteners. I give my friends a lot of grief. My friends try to use those skin lightener creams but I say ‘Come on. We are well educated. Don’t ever do that.’ People love using those skin lighteners. In India, they think [light skin is more beautiful], and I am so ashamed that they think like that. I literally yell at them, ‘No you are looking beautiful.’ [They say] ‘No maybe more guys will like me.’ And how do you know that? How do you know more guys like you because you are lighter skinned? You are going to put yourself through all those chemicals just because you want four more guys to like you. So I am very combative about that topic. Because I don’t like that at all.”

During this part of the interview, Patricia spoke about the common practice of using skin lightening creams among her Indian American friends, although she did not approve of the

practice. She also pointed out the consequences of using such creams and the damage that they could do to your skin. Skin lightening products are designed to make your skin appear lighter, despite the damage they can do to your skin and health. Fair and Lovely product users can get mercury poisoning, have a higher risk of getting cancer due to the bleaching agents, and experience other harmful issues (Al-Saleh et al. 2008).

Additionally, she talked about how skin lightening is often used by people because they assume they will look more attractive (Hunter 2007). In accordance with this, Harry, a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Pakistani American man, admitted that he used to think that being fairer meant that you were better looking. I conducted this interview via phone, and when I asked Harry if he had ever wanted a different skin color, he said:

“Yeah (laughs) I wanted to be a fairer complexioned guy. Not as fair as the White American... But I thought being on the same skin tone same brownish tone, but I wanted it to be a little fair. I thought maybe if I am a little fair I would have been more attractive than I am right now. But not the whitest stuff. I don't want to be a White American. Maybe one reason is because for me if you have a fair complexion and if you grow a beard, a man looks more handsome.”

Harry was cautious about how he described his skin color and mentioned that he did not want to look like a White American. His lack of desire to be a White American reflected his recent arrival in the United States. He had not been in the United States for many years in comparison to the rest of my interviewee participants. Instead, following along with South Asian beauty ideals, he wanted to be somewhat lighter in order to be considered more “handsome” according to South Asian beauty standards. He also considered himself less good looking solely on the basis of his skin tone. Examples such as these continue to show how harmful colorism is when it comes to accepting yourself. Later, when I asked him if he had any skin color preferences in terms of marriage he said, “Obviously I would never prefer to marry a dark skin colored girl if she identifies as a Pakistani and Muslim.” Later on, Harry continued to talk about how he would

only want to marry a “dark skin colored girl” if she had all the other characteristics he desired in a woman. He clarified that he did not apply this beauty standard to Black women in the United States and only thought about this beauty standard for South Asian women. For Harry, it was evident that darkness was not desirable and someone who had a darker skin color must be perfect in every other way to make up for their supposed lack of beauty. This skin color prejudice was deeply-rooted in Harry’s own perceptions of skin color and caused him to dislike darker skin toned women and question his own self-worth. This highlights how skin color discrimination can be gendered, meaning women are more susceptible to colorism, specifically when it comes to marriage. This supports Grewal’s (2009) observations as well, although Harry’s view on his own skin color shows that even men are negatively impacted by colorism in the United States.

Zada also mentioned her discontent with her skin color, specifically in terms of when she tanned, and when I asked her how she felt about her skin color, she said this:

“I guess I don’t want to tan anymore. One summer I tanned, I was out swimming all the time and I turned pretty dark brown. I guess I looked a little different than I usually did. So I did not like it. But I am fine with my skin color.”

At the time of the interview, Zada was pretty light skin toned for a South Asian American and said that she preferred to maintain her current lighter skin tone. It wasn’t a coincidence that she wanted to maintain a lighter skin tone and that her mother had previously become angry with her about her tanning that summer. Her desire to remain lighter discouraged her from wanting to tan, thus meaning that she didn’t want to go outside often. Again, here is an example of how colorism impedes on one’s enjoyment of daily life and the negative impacts it has on South Asian Americans.

Furthermore, interview participants talked about skin color differences across South Asian regions. Iris is 19 years old and is a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Indian American whose family



originated from the region of Kashmir, and I conducted her interview in person. Kashmir is a part of Northern India and Pakistan and often people from these regions tend to have a lighter skin tone (Ayyar and Khandare 2012). Iris mentioned how she had roots in Kashmir, and thus had a lighter skin tone than many of the Indians that she knew. Ivan told me that his family originated from South India and later moved to Pakistan, and thus his family had a darker skin complexion because of this. He also told me that his Pakistani American friends whose families originated from the region of Punjab, central Pakistan, tended to have a lighter skin tone. In addition, Ivan told me that he had this experience with a friend commenting on his skin tone:

“I was at a cultural Pakistani organization’s event and my Indian friend was walking past... He stopped and asked, ‘Ivan, are you Pakistani? Oh really I thought you were Bengali.’ I was like ‘What? Why?’ ‘Because you are so much darker than everyone else.’ ... He thought I wasn’t Pakistani.”

Ivan’s friend was referring to how often those that have roots in Bengal, a region that spans India and Bangladesh, are perceived as having darker skin tones. Due to this, one of his Indian friends thought he was not Pakistani, because he did not have the light skin tone most Pakistani Americans within his University had. Furthermore, Anthony is 20 years old and a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Indian American, and I conducted his interview in person. He had a lighter skin tone and roots in the region of Punjab. He said this in relation to when his South Asian American friends talk about skin color:

“South Indians... ‘are dark.’ [While North Indians] are fairer skinned for South Asians. I have heard [my friends talk about skin color] in that capacity but I don’t think otherwise.”

Here, Anthony further discussed how there were different skin tones based on region.

Additionally, Harry said, “Indians have a darker color than Pakistanis do. I am not being racist. I am really sorry but that is something that is true” when he spoke about his international Indian friends in his engineering program. Harry thought that speaking about skin color could be

considered racist and apologized for his comment. He might have said this, because often times within the United States topics such as race and skin color are considered taboo. Additionally, this showed that Harry was still learning how to navigate discussions on race and skin color within the United States. During our conversation, he often said one idea and then later admitted what he really thought. Harry seemed to have learned how in the United States people don't talk about race even if they themselves still have biases. These South Asian regional differences in skin color are ideas that were well known and accepted by many of my participants. Additionally, these regional differences are conflated with ideas of who is worthy and privileged in society as well.

To conclude, language, social ties, and skin bleaching products all factored into people's understandings of skin color specifically when it came to South Asia. Language surrounding skin color often related to fairness/darkness. For Ivan, Stephanie, Daphne, Maddie, Zada, and 2 other research participants, family reinforced the idea that a fair skin tone is more beautiful and desirable in South Asian culture. For Stephanie, Patricia, and Nicole, friends, family, and other South Asian American community members such as aunties additionally informed them about these beauty ideals. For most participants, social ties taught them about the South Asian beauty ideals. Skin bleaching products, such as Fair and Lovely, influenced Stephanie's, Ivan's, Daphne's, Randy's, and Patricia's views on skin color. For these individuals, all these institutions furthered skin color discrimination and degraded those who had a darker skin tone. Stereotypic regional skin color differences within South Asia were well known to my research participants, and some participants such as Ivan had instances where they were misidentified due to this. Experiences being misidentified or stigmatized due to skin color further isolated individuals with darker skin tones and made them want to change their skin color. Ultimately,

this research study showed that the idea that a fair complexion is more beautiful continues to be an issue for even those who grew up within the United States, supporting and expanding Sahay and Piran's (1997) work on South Asian Canadian females. Within the United States, though, it is further exemplified by the racial hierarchy.

### Skin Color Prejudice within the United States

In the United States, South Asian Americans understandings of race are multi-layered. They learn the South Asian beauty ideals, but they also come to understand the racial hierarchies within the United States, where whites have the most power in society (Prashad 2000). Thus, some South Asian Americans I interviewed desired not only to be lighter skinned, but more importantly to be considered and treated as if they were white. However, their own personal experiences and the media taught them they could never really be white.

For the purposes of this study, I solely focus on skin color, rather than race, because skin color is something distinct from race. I think that one's race and skin color do tie into other factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, generation and do influence individuals' experiences of the racial hierarchy. Despite this, I propose skin color is just one of the many important factors that comes into play in one's experience, and thus I focus solely on skin color in this study. To note, I write about the intersection of gender and generation with skin color in a later section called "Comparisons Along Lines of Gender and Generation."

Anthony spoke about how he noticed the racial hierarchy when he was in younger:

"When I first realized that I was different, I saw that people treated me differently. You know people wanted to be friends ... there were people that wanted to be friends with the white kids more so than me and other people of color in my grade. Just for a while there was an obvious favor given to people who were white. At least in my environment growing up. For that reason, I was kind of sad and disappointed about the skin color I had."

When he was younger, Anthony began to conceptualize the racial hierarchy in his predominantly white school. He saw how racial hierarchies played out in friendships and in how people treated him. Due to this, he temporarily desired to be white. His white and nonwhite peers told him that he was not at the top of hierarchy and thus did not have the same privileges as those groups of people. Also, he recognized how he and other people of color were treated similarly due to their physical appearance. Additionally, Iris spoke about her Indian American classmates wished they could be white also:

“The funny thing about these girls was that they called themselves ‘a white girl trapped in an Indian girl’s body.’ They specifically thought that.”

Her Indian classmates had internalized the racial hierarchy and their desire to be white to the point where they believed that their outward appearance as Indian women was the only thing inhibiting them from being white. Her classmate’s understandings of their identities were a representation of the fact if you don’t look white, you will never fully be considered white and thus not able to get the privileges of being white. This example represents how important skin color is as physical factor for determining privilege within the United States. Further, Iris’s Indian American classmates treated her differently because she was more fair skin toned:

“I do remember one instance when I was seven [and they said], “Is she actually Indian because she is that light or does she think she is better than us, because she is fair skinned for an Indian?” That is something that I heard them say. That was the only time I took [the bullying]. Because I think... this bad treatment of me did stem from that insecurity that I was fairer than them therefore considered more white by my skin color than they were.”

Iris, due to her fair skin tone complexion as a South Asian American, was considered closer to whiteness and thus more white according to her peers. Furthermore, her classmates felt threatened by how light she was and even questioned whether she was really Indian, not considering her authentically Indian due to her light skin tone. This doubt surrounding cultural

authenticity was also reflected in Hunter's (2007) study. Her Indian American classmates distanced themselves from her because of this and also bullied her throughout all her years of schooling with them. This instance begins to highlight how understandings of skin color in both South Asia and the United States overlap and how colorism becomes reinforced within the United States even at a very young age.

A few of my research participants experienced discrimination and were treated differently by non-South Asian Americans due to their skin color. Nicole had this experience after someone saw her skin color:

“My patients treat me differently because I look like a young Indian girl. They can't believe that I am their doctor. One time I had a delirious patient, and I had to go, since I was on call. When I walked into the room, she said ‘Get that [n-word] out of my room. I don't want her here!’ So I mean it is stuff like that.”

Due to her darker complexion, Nicole was mistaken for a black woman and thus the patient's racial biases against blacks came out when the patient noticed that Nicole was her doctor. Here, a non-South Asian treated Nicole poorly due to her skin tone. Also, Nicole suggested that this was a common experience for her and accepted it as a normal experience for a South Asian American woman. Kane is a 1.5 generation Indian American man. Since I conducted his interview over phone, I asked him to describe his skin color and he said this, “[My skin color is] a step under dark mocha and a step above chocolate.” He meant to suggest that he was quite brown toned for a South Asian American, and he also spoke about being stereotyped and judged for his skin color, specifically in an interaction he had with police. He said this:

“Another thing is racial profiling ... One day me and a couple of my friends were like walking outside a street in [a city] which is like a really nice area. There is no crime whatsoever. And then police officers stopped us and they searched us because there was a public disturbance call. They thought it was us for some reason. And I was with four or five white kids and then me and one of my black friends. We were the only two searched. We got thrown up against the car, searched, patted down, and handcuffed, because they

thought we were actually the people. And they fucked up. They let us go but it is things like that I have encountered before.”

Moments like these taught Kane that he was considered a person of color and could easily be treated differently than his white counterparts due to his physical appearance. Kane and his Black friend were clearly treated wrongfully by police officers while his white friends were privileged and not treated wrongfully. He also noted that this experience was something that happened to him a lot, and Nicole also told me a story about an unfair interaction with a police officer. These experiences show how racial biases of police and law enforcement can teach South Asian Americans that they are not equal in society. In the same way, Kane also told me that he believed that “white people look down on others if they are darker.” Here he was referring to skin color prejudice in the United States. His experiences with discrimination taught him to think that white people would not consider him as equal due to his skin color.

Alex is 20 years old and a 1.5 generation Indian American man, and I coordinated a phone interview with him. He told me about an experience that one of his friends had shortly after a neighbor saw him:

“One of my best friends was playing football in the backyard in high school and the next door neighbor, her younger brother ran out and was like ‘Oh hey it is like a black person!’ It was just funny I guess... I don’t think anything concerning. This is just something like about being Indian [American].”

Alex didn’t see it as an issue, but was clear that the neighbor assumed that his friend was Black upon seeing him and only his skin color. Also, Alex suggested that it was normal for Indian Americans to be mistaken as Black or perceived as a person of color, further showing how common this experience of skin color discrimination is in the United States.

Others interviewees also mentioned how people in the United States tended to point out skin color, and Clark spoke about this:

“Some people would just call me brown. It wasn’t even a joke. Someone was pointing out my skin color. That is what I experienced in middle school and high school. ‘He is my brown friend.’ That doesn’t happen anymore in college. It is reductionist to say the least. I knew it was wrong but I was not offended by it. I knew it was a stupid thing to say. I was angrier that they lacked the awareness that I was hurt. Which definitely is not me speaking for everyone but that was from my experience... It was me noticing how easy it would be for them to say that and no one even thought anything of it.”

For Clark, this instance was dehumanizing, because his classmates solely focused on one characteristic rather than him as a whole individual. A person should be considered beyond their physical appearance, but within the United States skin color is commonly focused on and used in people’s racial biases. Also, the fact that no one ever corrected Clark’s classmates who only referred to him in terms of his skin color further normalized that it was okay to make such comments about skin color. Clark mentioned that he was conflicted with the experience of being characterized by his skin color. He said at first that he was not offended, but later suggested that he was actually hurt that his classmates did not infer that it was wrong to characterize someone solely based on physical appearances. This and other personal experiences trained Clark to recognize that he was different and that it was acceptable for others to continuously point that out. Experiences such as these reinforce the racial hierarchy and also result in South Asian Americans desiring at times to not be seen as a person of color. This becomes layered with their understandings of beauty ideals in South Asia.

Furthermore, Steven is a 20 years old and a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Bengali American man, and I conducted his interview via phone. He spoke about how the racial hierarchy in the United States and South Asian beauty ideals tie together. When I asked him about if his family talked about skin color and if he had ever desired a different skin color, he said this:

“My family and my friends talk a little bit [about skin color]. I am probably one of the darkest ones in my family. Especially since during the summer months I spend a lot of time outside. When I tan, I darken a lot. My family for the most part is very fair. My mother especially is a big proponent of like ‘If you are fair it is like easier’ and my mom

is like ‘You are not really American.’ She bases a lot of that on skin color... There were definitely times I wished I was fairer which is both a product of living in this country and being the other. I know a lot of Indian people place a lot of value on being fair, and so I think it is a combination of the two.”

Here, Steven talked about how his desire to have a fairer skin tone is a combination of his roots in South Asia and the race system within the United States. Furthermore, his mother characterized him as not being American because of his skin color. His mother seemed to have been referring to how he will never be seen as equal to whites in the United States, and she was equating the idea of being American with whiteness. Some of my other interview participants also pointed out how they experienced skin color discrimination within the United States.

Patricia spoke about how skin color became more pronounced when she moved to the United States:

“People asked a lot of questions here. ‘Is your dad white and your mom black?’ I was like “No that is not how it works. That is just how people in my country [look like]. So this is a ridiculous concept. That brown has a mixture of something... Once you leave India, there are a lot of white people here. Then they start using a lot of skin lightening creams. it is low self esteem and focused more on acceptance by others rather than acceptances of themselves.”

She identified how there is a black and white dichotomy within the United States and how people often failed to realize that there is a range of skin colors globally and within races. She also pointed out that many become more conscious about their skin color when they move to the United States, due to the power dynamics and concentration of whites. She tied this into South Asian concepts of beauty and how people felt less worthy in the United States if they had a darker skin color. Maddie, who told me that her skin color is “pretty fair on the spectrum on Indian skin colors,” also talked about how she noticed her skin color more in predominantly white areas and how as she gets older she has started to notice her skin color more. Also since she has a lighter skin tone, she did not experience discrimination or notice her skin color early on



in comparison to other research participants. On the same note, Lacey talked about how she did not really stand out in the region of Kashmir, where her family is from, but that when she was in the United States around people that do not have the same skin color as her she recognized it more. She said that her experience with skin color was relative to her location. She was able to feel normal and accepted in South Asia, but in the United States she could not escape that her skin color was different from others and thus in this way was seen as a person of color. Neither Lacey nor Maddie recognized their privilege relative to other South Asians, but other participants did talk more about skin color privilege or lack of privilege.

Next, Clark and Alex spoke more about how in the United States skin color privilege works. Alex could more easily navigate spaces especially due to his lighter skin tone, and he said this:

“I also think that I am relatively a really light colored Indian. I don’t really stand out in groups of lighter people or all white people. I don’t really stand out in a group of Indians either... If I had darker skin, in some business settings I would feel uncomfortable. Everyone generally wears the same attire white shirt... so the only difference would be my skin color and the different color of my hair. I don’t necessarily think about it. But the white guy across the table is probably thinking about the one Indian guy across the table... Often times I am around people of varied skin colors like the only exception is some business settings but if I am in New York there are lots of people with different skin colors.”

In this example, he talked about the privilege associated with being lighter skin toned in both South Asian American spaces and white spaces. It was important that he recognized that other South Asian Americans may not experience what he did due to his lighter skin tone. Indirectly, Alex referred to how skin color differences are more critical in all white spaces. Despite this, Alex recognized that even though he felt more comfortable in his skin tone it did not guarantee that others he encounters will be rid of their racial biases. In comparison Clark who is somewhat browner skin toned than Alex said this:

“In a lot of senses, I have thought that my skin color will pose some sort of slight disadvantage compared to those that are white or at least lighter skinned.”

These examples show how the challenges that South Asian Americans experience are worse if a South Asian American has a darker skin complexion. They are harmed by both South Asian beauty ideals and the racial hierarchy in the United States arguably more than their lighter skin toned South Asian American community members.

Although Alex and Clark did not identify which institutions taught them about skin color privilege, Steven and Zada found that media also played a role in teaching people about skin color advantages/disadvantages. In relation to this, Steven said this:

“You know even this summer there was even a story about a husband burning his wife because she was too dark. That was the reason that they cited for trying to kill her and nothing really that drastic but the bias is definitely still there in subtle ways as well. Sometimes it is blatant and other times it is subtler. But yeah I think it definitely does make a difference in how other people perceive you.”

The article that he read served as an educator of how dangerous skin color bias can become.

Clark learned that skin color issues and biases were still prevalent in society and that the consequences could be deadly. He also echoed Alex’s thoughts in terms of how skin color biases impacted how others perceived you. When I asked Zada if she thought skin color mattered, she spoke more about this:

“I think that it can matter but it shouldn’t matter. It doesn’t matter to me but I know that it matters to people. I know that some people feel like if they are not white that they get treated differently. And umm I know the statistics are not good about discrimination in workplaces. I think it does matter in our society. I think due to old ideas... You know in the way that TV has conditioned us to expect people to behave. But I don’t think it should matter. I think people should all be judged as individuals and not as a part of a group. I think that we often make broad statements that are unfair stereotypes and I think that is wrong. I think that everyone has the ability to be good or bad. But that has nothing to do with their skin color. How they act how they treat me that is what matters.”

Furthermore, Zada talked about how skin color connects to people being stereotyped in ways that create expectations around what is acceptable and what is not. She identified how skin color

difference resulted in some cases of discrimination in the workplace as well. She referred to how stereotypes of minorities painted a negative picture of people of color. Many other participants also mentioned how in society skin color mattered, even though they personally did not think that it should make a difference.

Many institutions informed my participants experiences of the racial hierarchy within the United States. For many, their own personal experiences with discrimination as people of color taught them about the hierarchy. For others, media also played a role in depicting stereotypes and showing who was most powerful and who was less worthy. Understandings of race and skin color were overlapping with ideas from both South Asia and United States. In some instances, once participants moved to the United States they mentioned that it was the first time they recognized their difference in skin color. Despite this, gender and generation differences did play a role in how South Asian Americans experienced colorism and discrimination.

#### Comparisons Along Lines of Gender and Generation

Overall, it seemed that colorism was gendered, meaning that for South Asian American women skin color issues were intensified. Based on what participants reported, the majority of South Asian American women I interviewed experienced or knew more about colorism in South Asia than most men. The majority of the women were either aware of colorism due to how their social ties discussed it or were personally advised to use skin lightening methods. There were a few exceptions in which 3 male participants (quoted previously) suggested that they sometimes wished that they had a lighter skin tone, and 2 other male participants were knowledgeable about the effects of colorism. Despite this, based on what men reported, none of the men had ever been told to use skin lightening methods, contrary to what women experienced. Thus, women seemed to be impacted by colorism the most within the South Asian American community.

Of the 8 female participants, 7 of the women were influenced by colorism through social ties, specifically community members and family. 4 of the women mentioned that they had felt unhappy with their own skin color at one point, and these women were generally medium brown toned. Nicole and Stephanie, who both had a browner skin tone, were concerned about becoming browner, due to pressure from their family and friends. In my study, the rest of the women didn't have any personal issues with their skin color because they were generally lighter skin toned. Despite this, lighter skin toned participants such as Maddie brought up that she recognized that colorism was an issue for her darker skin toned family members. Maddie became aware of colorism due to how others in her family experienced it. This was also something that other participants noted if they were lighter skin toned. Despite their skin tone, the majority of women in this study were knowledgeable that colorism was an issue, whether they had internalized it or not.

Furthermore, 2 South Asian American men mentioned how colorism had negatively impacted women in their families. Kane brought up how his mother was treated poorly by her in-laws due to her browner skin tone. His example showed the consequences of having a browner skin tone. In this instance, colorism created power dynamics within the family, where the darker skin toned women had even less power in the relationship. In contrast, Clark told me how his mother was not liked by many because of her lighter skin tone and that people assumed that she acted on her light skin privilege, although he said that was not true. Interestingly, women seemed to be disliked for their skin color whether they were lighter or darker. Despite this, it was clear that darker skin toned women were more disadvantaged in comparison to lighter skin toned women. They suffered from discrimination more than lighter skin toned South Asian American women.

A few women mentioned how they had not been concerned about their skin color or were only worried about it once they became older. Patricia was not concerned about her skin color, likely because her family never mentioned it although she was browner. The lack of emphasis on skin color in her family seemed to provide Patricia with the support she needed to counter it later when her friends talked about it. Nicole also grew up not knowing about colorism and only learned about it once she arrived to college. Although she wasn't satisfied with her skin color, she reported that she had never used skin lightening methods, because her family had not taught her to do so while growing up. Additionally, Nicole mentioned through out the interview that she was satisfied with her skin color growing up but that when she became surrounded by more South Asian Americans in college she realized that the beauty standard existed. Despite this, when I asked her if she thought that skin color mattered. she told me that, "I don't think you are more beautiful if you are lighter or darker" and actively challenged the beauty norm. For both these women, their families in large part protected them from colorism by not reinforcing it when they were younger. This may explain why they were a bit more confident in terms of challenging the beauty norm or accepting their skin tone than other women in my study, although they were both darker skin toned.

Lastly, Harry's comment about how he did not wish to marry a dark skin toned woman showed how colorism tied into the marriage market and beauty standards, specifically for women. Patricia mentioned how colorism is related to issues of attractiveness and how her friends felt the need to be lighter skinned for men. My study built upon Grewal's (2009) work on South Asian American Muslims and how having a fairer complexion is preferred by at least some men in the South Asian American community.

In comparison, only 3 of the 8 men were influenced by the desire to lighten their skin color, but they did not feel the need to change their skin color to the same degree or extent. All 3 of these men were browner skin toned, but their skin color would have not been considered the darkest shade of brown in South Asia. For Harry, it was unclear who influenced his desire to have a lighter skin tone but it was likely either media or skin lightening products. For Ivan, it was clear that his family, Pakistani friends, and Fair and Lovely products played into his own discomfort for his skin color. Due to Ivan's darker skin tone, he felt like an outsider in his own community. His social ties made him conscious of his skin color causing him to wish he had a lighter skin tone. Although Ivan occasionally felt the desire to change his skin color, his social ties did not tell him to use any skin lightening methods. It had more to do with the fact that his browner skin tone did not seem to fit the perceived light skin tone norm of the Pakistani American community, although in reality those with Pakistani descent have a large range of skin tones. Steven also felt uncomfortable about his skin color. He was influenced by his mother's view on skin color, but also by the way he was treated by American society. His experience being a person of color and not being seen as an American made him wish he was lighter skin toned, but Steven also was never told by any social ties to try using any lightening methods or "stay out of the sun."

Men concerned with their skin color were more concerned about it in terms of discrimination within the United States than with status within the South Asian American community. Anthony's desire to be lighter had to do more with the racial hierarchy than the beauty ideal, and in fact he never spoke about colorism being an issue in South Asia. When he was younger, he wanted to be considered white so that he could more easily navigate school and make friends. Kane was comfortable in his skin tone but expressed that he had encountered

police brutality due to his skin tone and spoke about colorism only being an issue for women in his family. Clark encountered micro-aggressions from his classmates when he was younger. Both Clark and Kane sometimes wished they were not instantly seen as non-Whites, because they wanted to live a life free of discrimination. The South Asian American men were more concerned with their skin color in regards to the racial hierarchy and their own experiences with discrimination rather than the South Asian beauty ideal. Men who encountered discrimination expressed unhappiness with their skin color at one point during their life, but they often seemed to have accepted their skin color as young adults.

In comparison, women experienced both colorism and discrimination within the United States. Nicole had an encounter with police brutality and in many situations, such as her experience with a patient, was considered less adequate due to her skin color. She mentioned that she wished she was lighter in multiple instances during the interview, although she tried to challenge her unease with her skin color by saying that she accepted and liked her brown skin tone. Patricia was continuously questioned for her legitimacy as an American and was often perceived as being undocumented due to her complexion. Stephanie and Maddie also mentioned how there were instances in which they didn't feel entirely comfortable in their skin color. In these ways, colorism and skin color discrimination was seemingly worse for the darker skin toned South Asian American women in my study. Not only could they not escape colorism in the South Asian American community but also dealt with skin color discrimination outside of their communities as well.

Next, generation differences were clear through the main way that people were educated about colorism. Understandings of skin color seemed to be passed down by 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans. Also, women seemed to be the teachers of colorism, whether they were

commenting on their own experiences with it or encouraging skin lightening methods. For example, Zada talked about how her aunt continuously pointed out her skin tone and may have influenced her understanding that “people in Pakistan and India seem to care that you are lighter.” Daphne mentioned how it was a generational issue and older concept in South Asia. Stephanie talked about how her parents continuously mentioned it and how her mother always told her to use skin lightening methods. Patricia also mentioned that her 1<sup>st</sup> generation friends wanted to use skin lighteners. Nicole talked about how the parents of her best friends encouraged her to use skin lightening methods. Ivan talked about his grandma and mother talk about the beauty standard. Nicole noted how the aunties, usually 1<sup>st</sup> generation, talked about it. Although I was unable to interview many 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans, the narratives of my 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation interview participants regarding colorism clearly pointed out that 1<sup>st</sup> generation was passing down concepts of colorism onto later generations.

### Conclusion

All this showed that the experience of colorism for my South Asian American research participants is layered with colonialism and understandings of skin color based in both South Asia and the United States. In terms of South Asian beauty ideals, the 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans played a large role in teaching 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation South Asian Americans about colorism practices within South Asia. The South Asian beauty ideal that fair is more beautiful was still prevalent even amongst those that grew up within the United States. Furthermore, it was clear that some South Asian American women had internalized colorism. Within the United States, my participants experienced skin color discrimination and were often categorized as lesser than Whites. For South Asian American women, though, colorism and skin color discrimination were tied together, making them even less comfortable in their skin tone than



men. Preference for whiteness or lighter skin color even within the United States was not something distinct to South Asia, but rather rooted in colonialism. It was no coincidence that participants were aware of their preference for lighter skin tones even within the United States, since the United States also considers whites as most beautiful. Furthermore, 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans were the teachers of colorism practices within the community and in most cases did not help 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation South Asian Americans unlearn colorism. Overall, it seems that for South Asian Americans there really is no escape from colorism. Both South Asian beauty ideals and the United States racial hierarchy reinforce these concepts, and thus South Asian Americans struggle to challenge colorism when there is little guidance on how to challenge it.

One aspect I did not explore was how the white beauty ideal and lack of media representation of darker skin toned people of color within the United States factored into my participants' views. Further research must explore the nuances of the relationship between gender, generation, and more to colorism within the South Asian American community.

## DISCUSSION

My research makes important contributions to understanding larger systems of domination, such as racism and colorism. It means that colorism continues to be an issue for South Asian Americans, and likely many other racial and ethnic communities. It is clear that for immigrant communities the understanding of race and skin color is tied into their understandings of their own culture and concepts of race and skin color within the United States. In the United States due to the racial hierarchy and white beauty ideals, colorism within the South Asian American community is only further pronounced. Additionally, the experience of both colorism and skin color discrimination is gendered. This means that women within these communities are more vulnerable to discrimination and are usually less satisfied with skin color. Generally, though, everyone is negatively impacted by colorism within this community. This means that especially those with darker skin tones have lower levels of satisfaction and trouble accepting their own skin tone. This trend is found in other racial and ethnic communities as well (Hunter 2007). Ultimately, it seems that the experience of colorism for South Asian Americans is not vastly different than what other racial and ethnic communities experience. The Latino community in the United States is also informed of skin color discrimination by both their culture back home and racial hierarchies and white beauty ideals within the United States (Hunter 2007).

Ultimately, my research shows the negative impact of colonialism and racial hierarchies within the United States. The lasting impact of colonialism and caste within the South Asian American community is very evident as people are still aware of the skin color stratification and the consequences of it. Institutions such as media and social ties further institutionalize skin color discrimination within the United States. For ethnic communities like South Asian

Americans, especially women in these communities, there is little to no escape from the consequences of skin color discrimination and colorism, whether they are directly or indirectly impacted by it.

My research contributes to a large gap in literature on South Asian Americans and immigrants in general. There continues to be limited studies on immigrant communities within the field of sociology and other fields. Although, this may be because South Asian Americans are largely new to the United States, it is crucial for more research to still be conducted. All the studies that I previously referenced in my literature review were not conducted by sociologists. It is important for sociologists to also study this population in order to get a different perspective of the issues that South Asian Americans encounter. Sociology focuses on examining the institutions that reinforce racism and colorism, while other fields of study do not focus on such aspects. There needs to be more sociologists that research racism and colorism within the South Asian American community. Also, more racial studies and skin color studies should be conducted by people that are directly impacted by these issues and have the in group knowledge to properly understand the consequences of what people are talking about. As members of a certain racial and ethnic group, sociologists can better understand the intricacies and underlying assumptions surrounding issues of racism and colorism, in comparison to individuals who are not members of that group. When a sociologist belongs to the community they are studying, they do not face the challenge of deciphering the culture but can more easily understand the deeper issues at hand.

Furthermore, my research shows that the issue of colorism is prevalent in this community. This means that more steps should be taken so that people can unlearn colorism. From my research, it seems that workshops and dialogues between members of this community

may help to unlearn colorism. Now, I detail an example of a workshop focusing on unlearning colorism that could be created based on my findings. First of all, it would be important for this workshop to be led by South Asian Americans, and it would be best for darker skin toned South Asian Americans to lead the conversations and presentation. To start out the workshop leaders should present on the definitions of colorism and the colonial legacy and caste based history of colorism both within South Asia and the United States. For this part of the workshop it would be important for 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5, 2<sup>nd</sup> (and later generations) to all be in the same room together in order to learn the problematic history of colorism. To end the presentation, it should focus off on how colorism is gendered and passed down by 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans. Once the presentation part of the workshop is completed, 1<sup>st</sup> generation and later generation South Asian Americans should split off into separate groups. These groups should consist of smaller groups of 4 to 5 individuals. The workshop leaders should split up among these smaller groups and provide guided questions for each group. These questions should initially focus on unpacking what was discussed in the presentation. Next, it should address how colorism is reinforced both within the United States and South Asia. The guided questions for 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans and 1.5, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and later generation South Asian Americans should be slightly different. For 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans these questions should focus on identifying how language can sometimes reinforce colorism. There should be a section that helps these individuals figure out what is and what is not acceptable to say and do in relation to colorism practices. This will help 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans identify how they play a role in reinforcing colorism. For later generation South Asian Americans, the questions should focus on identifying phrases and words that reinforce colorism, skin lightening practices, and skin color discrimination. Following these guided questions, individuals willing to do so should share

stories of instances where they encountered colorism and skin color discrimination. Furthermore, the questions should focus on helping understand the racial hierarchy within the United States and the white beauty ideal. Additionally, these questions should aid in addressing skin color discrimination within the United States and the lack of American media representation of darker skin toned people of color. Lastly, everyone should regroup and do a healing circle. This healing circle should focus on accepting people of all skin tones. Hopefully through such a workshop people will begin the process of unlearning colorism and challenging the construction in daily life.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Although my research helps fill a large gap in research on South Asian Americans, there were many limitations. To start out, my sample was limited in terms of diversity of income level, ethnicity, age, generation, and more. Generally, my sample was composed of higher income individuals, and thus this may have influenced my findings. It is likely that some South Asian Americans with a lower income level would experience compounding issues such as being more concerned with making ends meet, rather than beauty standards. Additionally, they might have less access to the same spaces as those with a higher income level. According to South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow (SAALT 2007) report on South Asian American demographic data and income level, many South Asian Americans belong to a higher income bracket. Due to this, there is a likelihood that South Asians of the lower income bracket do not interact with as many South Asian Americans in their daily interactions. This may not be true for all South Asian Americans, though, because some South Asian Americans are under the poverty line with ethnic group such as Bangladeshis having the highest rates of poverty amongst older South Asian Americans (SAALT 2007). Also, those of lower income levels might have not been able to

escape the impacts of discrimination, while those with a higher income levels might have much more privilege and be treated better due to their higher status in society.

Next, I largely interviewed South Asian Americans that identified as Pakistani and Indian American. Both these regions have similar colonial histories and have links to the caste system. Although Pakistan does not utilize the caste system in the present day, new hierarchies exist. Although in India, the caste system is abolished, there are many existing challenges associated with overcoming it. South Asian countries have differences in ethnic groups and hierarchies, and thus, there may be differences in colorism between countries. Future research on South Asian Americans should look into if colorism appears differently in other countries within South Asia such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Next, my sample only composed of two individuals within the 50 and older age range. There may also be differences in the experience of colorism and skin color discrimination for South Asian Americans who are older or between the age range of 30 to 50 years old. Lastly, my interview sample only had two 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans. Although it is clear that 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans are the teachers of colorism, it is not clear why 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans find it necessary to pass down this belief and what institutions influence their views. Future research must be dedicated to understanding why colorism is still prevalent among South Asian Americans even if they have lived within the United States for many years. It is likely because colorism is also embedded in the racial hierarchy and beauty ideals in the United States.

Following, it seemed that family played a large role in colorism. Many participants commented on how certain family members were darker than them or how they were the darkest. More studies on colorism should focus on the family dynamics of colorism. The experience of colorism might depend on how family members engage with one on another on the topic of skin

color, and the absence of discussion on skin color. This may impact one's views on skin color. For a study such as this, there should be focus groups with all family members. Additionally, there should be separate in-depth interviews with family members. A study such as this might help to further examine how family members interact with one another and how skin color plays a role.

Next, it seemed that in my study religion was not a factor in one's experience of colorism. South Asian Americans practice a diverse set of religions as was apparent by my sample, and it did not seem that colorism was linked heavily to religious beliefs within the United States. Since I did not properly explore this, it would be important for later studies to show if colorism really is based in cultural values rather than based in religious ideology for South Asian Americans.

Furthermore, colorism is an issue for all racial groups. It is important to further investigate how the experience of colorism may compare to other racial groups, especially racial groups such as Latinos and Blacks, groups that have large variations of skin color tones similar to South Asian Americans. In relation to this, research has been conducted highlighting how Latinos and Blacks are impacted by skin color in terms of housing, careers, marriage, and schools. In comparison, there is limited research on this aspect focusing on South Asian Americans. Although my participants experienced skin color discrimination from their classmates, it was unclear how that influenced their educational attainment. A mix methods study would better be able to explore the intricacies of colorism and quantitatively show how colorism impacts this community in comparison to other racial communities. Continuing research on South Asian Americans and colorism must address how skin color issues tie into life choices.

Lastly, colorism is linked to racism, and this was not properly examined in my study. It may be possible that South Asian Americans who hold strong beliefs surrounding colorism may also be racist towards other people of color or hold more racial biases. Subsequent research on South Asian Americans should investigate how this link appears in the way that South Asian Americans interact with institutions and if those significantly influenced by colorism tend to be more racist.

### **DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research should address my limitations by including a larger sample, and more socioeconomic standing, religious, ethnic, sexual orientation, and generational diversity. For such a study, it would be essential to have a larger sample size of around 100 participants. New studies examining colorism broadly within the South Asian American community, should consider being inclusive of the diverse South Asian American community. Considering that there are various ethnic groups, a sample should be proportional to the size of the population of these ethnic groups within the United States. These proportions can be based in SAALT's (2007) study which included percentages of South Asian ethnic groups within the United States. In terms of country of origin diversity, it would make sense for participants to be largely Indian American but also include members from countries such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh that tend to have smaller populations in the United States (Lee 2015). Having such a study would help to unravel whether skin color discrimination experience vary based on country of origin. In terms of generations, the sample should include 1<sup>st</sup> generation South Asian Americans but also 1.5, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and later generations as well to see how colorism may or may not remain in continuing generations. Such a study should analyze why South Asian Americans feel the need to continue to teach later generation South Asian Americans about colorism practices. Additionally, it would



be important for the study to include participants from all income levels with lower income South Asian Americans making up at least a third of the sample. With a sample such as this, a study would be able to compare generation, country of origin, socioeconomic standing, and etc. more conclusively than I was able to do in my study.

In relation to method, the researcher could use mixed methods. It would be good to start out with a survey that asked questions about colorism and then conduct focus groups and in-depth interviews on themes related skin color. The survey could ask questions such as “how do you feel about your skin color?” as an open ended question. Additionally, there should be quantitative questions that ask participants to rank their responses from 1 to 10. One question could ask participants how satisfied they are with their skin color. Also, there should be a multiple choice and short answer questions asking if participants have ever experienced skin color discrimination within the South Asian American community as a yes or no question and space to elaborate. Interview questions could be similar to what I utilized in my study but also include questions related to how participants define their own and others skin color, beauty standards, skin color discrimination, family dynamics of skin color, caste, colonialism, and more. A mix methods approach that focuses solely on skin color would help tease out aspects I was not able to fully understand in my own study.

Lastly, similar to Sahay and Piran’s (1997) study, this future study should make sure to keep record of participants’ skin tones. Participants could identify what color their skin was based on a grid of 10 various skin tone colors ranging from light to dark. Participants could select the color that they think best fits their skin tone. They could select their skin tones as a multiple choice question in the survey and then again right before the interview. At the time of the interview, researchers could also select what skin color they think best fits each respective

participant. Having a way to keep track of individual's skin colors would be important in order to further understand how individuals with darker and medium brown skin tones experience skin color discrimination.

Through a study such as this, researchers would further be able to understand skin color discrimination within and outside of this community. Also this study would be able to better confirm if colorism is gendered for all South Asian Americans and how generation plays a role in colorism. Additionally, this study might help to understand the implications of colorism in careers, marriage, housing, and other areas of life. Lastly, future studies should explore how colorism shapes attitudes towards other racial groups in the United States as well and how these life chances compare to other racial and ethnic groups.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### General Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Maham Shaikh and I am a senior studying Sociology at the University of Michigan. I am conducting research for my Honors Thesis in Sociology under the supervision of Professor Young in the Department of Sociology. My study will concern South Asian American cultural attitudes about race and ethnicity. I chose this topic, because as a South Asian American, I have noticed that there is very little research about our community and am passionate about learning more.

First I would like you to fill out a short questionnaire and then, if you are willing you can participate in an interview. I have provided the link to this survey (questionnaire) below. Interviews will be conducted via phone, video (Skype), or a chat in person. This interview will be audio recorded and then destroyed after I complete my honors thesis. Your responses will be kept confidential. Please call me at (517) 240-9128 or email me at [mshaikh@umich.edu](mailto:mshaikh@umich.edu) , if you are interested in participating or have any questions. I really appreciate your time. Thanks so much!

Press here if you'd like to begin the survey [[Hyperlinked Qualtrics Survey](#)].

Best,

Maham Shaikh

## South Asian American Based Institution Recruitment Email

Hello [Insert name or organization/institution],

My name is Maham Shaikh and I am a senior studying Sociology at the University of Michigan. I am conducting research for my Honors Thesis in Sociology under the supervision of Professor Young in the Department of Sociology. My study will concern South Asian American cultural attitudes about race and ethnicity. I chose this topic, because as a South Asian American, I have noticed that there is very little research about our community and am passionate about learning more.

I am contacting [insert institution name], because I would like the members of [insert institution name] to participate in my research study. Below is my general recruitment script and the link to the survey. Please pass on the below email (in dark blue) to members of [insert institution name].

Hello,

My name is Maham Shaikh and I am a senior studying Sociology at the University of Michigan. I am conducting research for my Honors Thesis in Sociology under the supervision of Professor Young in the Department of Sociology. My study will concern South Asian American cultural attitudes about race and ethnicity. I chose this topic, because as a South Asian American, I have noticed that there is very little research about our community and am passionate about learning more.

First I would like you to fill out a short questionnaire and then, if you are willing you can participate in an interview. I have provided the link to this survey (questionnaire) below. Interviews will be conducted via phone, video (Skype), or a chat in person. This interview will be audio recorded and then destroyed after I complete my honors thesis. Your responses will be kept confidential. Please call me at (517) 240-9128 or email me at [mshaikh@umich.edu](mailto:mshaikh@umich.edu) , if you are interested in participating or have any questions. I really appreciate your time. Thanks so much!

Press here if you'd like to begin the survey

[https://umich.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_1ZmKcaUqYnxzYLB](https://umich.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1ZmKcaUqYnxzYLB)

Best,

Maham Shaikh

If you have any questions or concerns about my research study, the survey, and/or interview, please feel free to contact me at either (517)-240-9128 or [mshaikh@umich.edu](mailto:mshaikh@umich.edu).

Best Regards,

Maham Shaikh

### Asian American Based Institution Second Recruitment Email

If you are not of South Asian descent or South Asian American, please disregard this email, and I apologize in advance. If you have any questions about this, please email me at [mshaikh@umich.edu](mailto:mshaikh@umich.edu).

My name is Maham Shaikh and I am a senior studying Sociology at the University of Michigan. I am conducting research for my Honors Thesis in Sociology under the supervision of Professor Young in the Department of Sociology. My study will concern South Asian American cultural attitudes about race and ethnicity. I chose this topic, because as a South Asian American, I have noticed that there is very little research and data about the South Asian American community and am passionate about learning more.

If you are part of the immigrant generation meaning that you moved to the United States from a South Asian country, please fill out my 5-minute survey first. Then, if you are willing you can participate in an interview. I have provided the link to this survey below. Interviews will be conducted via phone, video (Skype), or a chat in person. This interview will be audio recorded and then destroyed after I complete my honors thesis. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Please call me at [\(517\) 240-9128](tel:5172409128) or email me at [mshaikh@umich.edu](mailto:mshaikh@umich.edu) , if you are interested in participating or have any questions. I really appreciate your time. Thanks so much!

Please take the survey using this link: [https://umich.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_1ZmKcaUqYnxzYLB](https://umich.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1ZmKcaUqYnxzYLB)

Best,

Maham Shaikh

## Short email Newsletter blurb for General Recruitment

### **South Asian American Research Study**

My study concerns South Asian American cultural attitudes about race and ethnicity. If you are South Asian American and part of the immigrant generation please take [this 5 minute survey](#) and I will then contact you about the next steps. Please contact me, [Maham Shaikh](#), with questions.

## Facebook Social Media Recruitment Blurbs

- Pakistani American Based Institutions
  - Hi everyone! My name is Maham Shaikh, and I am a senior at the University of Michigan. For my Sociology research project (honors thesis), I am studying South Asian Americans and the immigrant generation. Currently, I am struggling to get the immigrant generation who moved to the United States from Pakistan (and other South Asian countries) to take part in my research. My research project consists of a 5-minute survey and then people can participate in an interview if they want. If you are interested in helping out or know someone who may want to take part in my research, please message me with your email or email me at [mshaikh@umich.edu](mailto:mshaikh@umich.edu) so I can send you more info about my research project!
  
- South Asian American Based Institutions
  - Hi everyone! My name is Maham Shaikh, and I am a senior at the University of Michigan. For my Sociology research project (honors thesis), I am studying South Asian Americans and the immigrant generation. Currently, I am struggling to get the immigrant generation who moved to the United States from South Asian countries to take part in my research. My research project consists of a 5-minute survey and then people can participate in an interview if they want. If you are interested in helping out or know someone who may want to take part in my research, please message me with your email or email me at [mshaikh@umich.edu](mailto:mshaikh@umich.edu) so I can send you more info about my research project!

## Appendix B

### Demographic Survey Guide – via Qualtrics

My name is Maham Shaikh, and I am a student studying Sociology at the University of Michigan. I invite you to be part of my research study. As a part of my honors thesis for the University of Michigan, I am studying the cultural attitudes of South Asian Americans. This survey is intended for South Asian Americans who are either first or second generation. If you agree to take part in this survey, your participation will require about five minutes.

While you may not directly benefit from this research, others may benefit because this study aims to fill a gap in existing research on South Asian cultural attitudes.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this survey and taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw from doing so at any time. Also you may decline to respond to any of these questions for any reason by moving on to the next question. This survey software will ensure that all your responses are held confidential by protecting against disclosure of any information. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

If you have any questions about this research study, you can contact Maham Shaikh via text or call at (517)-240-9128 or email her at [mshaikh@umich.edu](mailto:mshaikh@umich.edu). You may also contact the faculty advisor, Alford A. Young, at [ayoun@umich.edu](mailto:ayoun@umich.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 2800 Plymouth Rd. Building 520, Room 1169, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800, [\(734\) 936-0933](tel:(734)936-0933), or toll free, [\(866\) 936-0933](tel:(866)936-0933), [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu).

Completing this survey indicates your consent to participate in the research. Furthermore, completing this survey indicates that you are 18 years of age or older.

1. What is your first name and last name initial(s)?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your gender?
4. What ethnicity do you identify with?
5. What is your country of origin?

6. If you are foreign born, how many years did you live there?<sup>2</sup>
- Less than 1 year
  - 1-5 years
  - 5 years or more
  - Skip/Not Applicable
  - Not sure
- 2) What is the city and state you live in within the United States?
- 3) How long have you been living within the United States?
- 4) Are you a first or second generation South Asian American? You are considered first generation if the country you originated from is within South Asia and you are considered second generation if you were born within the United States but your parents were born in South Asia. [ If “first generation” is selected then skip to “What is your annual...” If “second generation” is selected go to “if you are second generation...” If “Other” is selected skip to end of survey (not part of this study).]
- First Generation
  - Second Generation
  - Other
- 5) If you are second generation what country did your parents originate from?
- 6) What is your annual household income (if you consider yourself independent) or what is the annual household income of the house you grew up in (if you consider yourself dependent on your guardian/parent’s income)?
- less than \$42,000

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<sup>2</sup> Karthick, Ramakrishnan, Jane Junn, Taeku Lee, and Janelle Wong. 2008. *National Asian American Survey*. Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.



- \$42,000- \$125,000
- More than \$125,000
- Not sure

7) Do you identify with a religion? [If selected “No” skip to “What do you think the most important...”]

- Yes
- No [Write in]

8) If you answered yes to the previous question, please write the religion or set of beliefs you most closely identify with in the space below.

9) How many times a month do you attend your religious services?

- 0-3
- 4-7
- 8-11
- 12 or more

10) What do you think is the most important problem facing the United States today?<sup>3</sup>

- Economy in general
- Unemployment / Jobs
- Terrorism
- Ethics / Morality / Family Decline
- Education / Educational system
- Immigration / Illegal Immigration

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<sup>3</sup> Karthick, Ramakrishnan, Jane Junn, Taeku Lee, and Janelle Wong. 2008. *National Asian American Survey*. Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

- More Services for immigrants / Lack of immigrant rights
- Poverty / Homelessness / Hunger
- Health Care
- Fuel / Gas / Oil Prices
- Race/ethnic relations/ethnic groups getting along
- Racial Discrimination
- Language barriers
- Other [Write in]
- Refused

11) Which one of these issues is most important to you personally?<sup>4</sup>

- Economy in general
- Unemployment / Jobs
- Terrorism
- Ethics / Morality / Family Decline
- Education / Educational system
- Immigration / Illegal Immigration
- More Services for immigrants / Lack of immigrant rights
- Poverty / Homelessness / Hunger
- Health Care
- Fuel / Gas / Oil Prices

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<sup>4</sup> Karthick, Ramakrishnan, Jane Junn, Taeku Lee, and Janelle Wong. 2008. *National Asian American Survey*. National Council of Asian Pacific Americans and AAPI Data. Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

- Race/ethnic relations/ethnic groups getting along
- Racial Discrimination
- Language barriers
- Other [Write in]
- Refused

12) Do you approve or disapprove of marriage between South Asians and other non-Whites? <sup>5</sup>

- Approve
- Disapprove

13) Do you approve or disapprove of marriage between South Asians and Whites?

- Approve
- Disapprove

14) Would you like to take part in an interview about South Asian cultural attitudes? [If “no” is selected skip to end of survey.]

- Yes
- No

15) If you answered yes to the previous question, what form of interview would you prefer?

- Phone interview
- Video chat interview
- In Person Interview

16) Please provide your preferred phone number below.

17) Please provide your preferred email below.

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<sup>5</sup> Bobo, Lawrence, Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, and Maria Krysan. 1997. *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

## **Appendix C**

### Interview Guide

#### **Introduction**

I am going to ask you a number of questions concerning South Asian cultural attitudes about race and ethnicity. These may refer to your own personal experiences, but also to your perceptions on the topic. Please remember that there is no right answer, I want to know what you really think.

1) Tell me a little bit about yourself (lead in questions).

- Tell me about your family and parents.
- Tell me about the household you grew up in.
- How did your family end up in America?
- How diverse is the community that you live in?
- How often do you go back to South Asia?
- Who do you spend most of your time with?

2) Do you watch television?

- If so, what was the last show that you watched?
- Did this show make you think about race at all?
  - i) If so can you describe the story line of the show and explain why it made you think about race?

3) Can you tell me about the last time your family had a conversation about race?

- What kind of conversation was it?
- When did it occur?
- What was the conversations about?

4) How important is race to you?

- 5) What is your first memory of race?
- 6) What was the racial make up of your high school?
- 7) Do you recall race being an issue in any way in school (either for you, your teacher, or classmates)?
- 8) Do you work?
  - Where do you work/ what is your work like?
  - If so, what is the racial makeup of your workplace?
  - Who do you interact with most in your workplace?
  - Have you ever discussed race at your workplace?
    - i) If so describe a specific memory.
- 9) Do you ever discuss South Asian culture with your close friends?
  - Do they ever discuss their ethnic culture with you?
  - Do your non-South Asian American friends ask you questions about your culture?
- 10) Do your South Asian American friends in particular discuss race with you?
  - If so describe one time they did discuss anything pertinent to race with you.
- 11) How do you feel about your own skin color?
  - You mentioned something about skin color, just to help me out what is your skin color
  - Do you wish that your skin color was different? Is so why?
  - Have your friends or family said anything to you about your skin color?
  - Do you have conversations about your own skin color or their skin color?
  - Do your friends talk about their skin color?
  - Do you think that skin color matters?
- 12) What are/were your marriage/dating preferences?

- What expectations does/did your family have for you in terms of marriage/dating?
- Would you be willing to marry or partner with someone outside of your ethnic group?  
Why or why not?

13) Do you think race or ethnicity matters in America today?

- If so why?
- If not, why do you feel that way?

14) Have you heard about the death of Keith Lamont Scott in Charlotte and/or about the Black Lives Matter movement?

- (If participant is unaware of the situation) A Black man name Keith Lamont Scott was killed in Charlotte by police officers in late September a few feet away from his car and in his parking lot. Keith was sitting in his car when police officers came. Initially in this incident, Keith did not get out of his car although police officers asked him too. Once he left his car, it is unclear whether he followed commands or not. Not too long after Keith left his car, police shot and killed him. Police say that Keith was holding a gun in his hand at the time of the shooting but it is unclear whether he had a weapon or not. Footage from police officers dash cam and body camera has not been released. Some think that Keith's death was unjustified, while others support the police officers use of force.
- What do you think about this incident?
- What do you think about the Black Lives Matter movement?

15) Do you think other South Asian Americans views are different than yours?

- (If applicable) How do your views compare to other South Asian Americans?
- Why do you think this is the case?

16) Do any groups have it easier in American society because of their race?

- Do any have it harder?
- (If applicable) Why do you think this is the case?

17) Does America need to do any “work” on race?

- (If so) What kinds and how should that work be done?

## **Appendix D**

### **Informed Consent**

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

**Title of the Project:** Cultural Attitudes among South Asian Americans

**Principal Investigator:** Maham Shaikh, Sociology Honors Student, University of Michigan

**Faculty Advisor:** Alford A. Young Jr., Arthur F. Thurnau Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology

#### **Invitation to participate in a study**

Maham Shaikh invites you to participate in a research study concerning South Asian cultural attitudes about race and ethnicity. You have been asked to participate in this research because you are a South Asian American, either first or second generation, and are 18 years or older. This study is being conducted as an academic requirement for the principal investigator in completing an honors thesis.

#### **Description of subject involvement**

If you agree to be part of this research study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. Questions will be asked about South Asian Americans experience in America and influence of cultural attitudes from South Asia. This interview will last about 1-1.5 hours, will be audio recorded, and will take place either through phone, video, or in person (in your preferred location). I will audio record the interview to make sure that our conversation is recorded accurately. Arrangements for interviews will take place through email correspondence with the principal investigator.

#### **Benefits of Participation**

Although you may not directly benefit from being in this study, others may benefit because this study aims to fill a gap in existing research on South Asian cultural attitudes.

#### **Risks and discomforts**

There may be some risk or discomfort from your participation in this research. You face no more than minimal risk, which means that any discomfort that may be experienced during this interview is not greater than the risk ordinarily encountered in daily life. For example, because this interview is conducted face-to-face there may be the risk of embarrassment and unwillingness to answer the interview questions.



I will mitigate this risk by assuring you that your recorded answers, name, address and location will remain confidential. Your recorded answers will be stored in a password-protected computer and no identifying information will be attached to your answers or shared with anyone outside of the researchers conducting this study. Also, if at any point during the study you feel uncomfortable you are free to leave questions unanswered or withdraw from the study.

### **Confidentiality**

I plan to present the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you. There are some reasons why people other than the researchers may need to see information you provided as part of the study. This includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly, including the University of Michigan. To keep your information safe, your name will not be attached to any data that is presented, but a pseudonym will be used instead. All audio files of recorded interviews, transcriptions, and interview notes will be kept on password-protected networks that can only be privately accessed by the researcher.

### **Storage and future use of data**

These interviews will be audio recorded. All recorded interviews and the data you provide will be stored on a private IFS space (protected by the University of Michigan). The researcher will retain the data for the duration of the study. The researcher will dispose of any, personally identifying information by December 2017.

### **Voluntary nature of the study**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer a question you do not want to answer. Just tell me, and I will go to the next question. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, the data you provided me with may still be retained for the duration of the study but will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

### **Contact Information**

If you have questions about this research, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Maham Shaikh, at (517)-240-9128 via text/call or email her at [mshaikh@umich.edu](mailto:mshaikh@umich.edu). You may also contact the faculty advisor, Alford A. Young, at [ayoun@umich.edu](mailto:ayoun@umich.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the:

University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board,  
2800 Plymouth Road, Building 520, Room 1169, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800.

Phone: (734) 936-0933 or toll free, (866) 936-0933 Email: [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu)

### **Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

*I agree to participate in the study.*

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Printed First Name and Last Name Initial

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Signature

Date

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