2016

Brown: The Asianization of the U.S. Racial Divide

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Brown: The Asianization of the U.S. Racial Divide

Abstract
What role does skin color play in the racial experiences of new immigrant groups as they settle in the U.S.? To answer this question, I systematically examine the role of skin color in structuring experiences of race and ethnicity for second generation South Asians, a group characterized as doing well economically and thus seen as a model for contemporary assimilation. Through 120 in-depth interviews and supplemental ethnographic observations, I find that skin color is central to the routine racial experiences of the second generation. South Asian racial formation is dually impacted by both the U.S. racial classification system and transnational colorism based on class and caste stratification from South Asia. Previous research on Latino/as demonstrates that transnational systems of stratification have impact on the lives of first generation immigrants. This study reveals the enduring impact of such systems in the racial formation even for the second generation. Early on South Asian women hear comments about their skin color from first generation family members. These comments are deployed as policing strategies influenced by the transnational South Asian colorism system. South Asian men are less policed about their bodies with the exception of men on the darker end of the spectrum. The skin color of South Asians also has significance under the regime of a U.S. racial system in the post-9/11 era. The racialization extremes they experience from “model minority” to “terrorist” due to their skin color can occur daily with a shift in social settings. As such, South Asians are routinely mistaken for a wide variety of other racial groups such as Latino or Middle Eastern due to their skin color. The outcomes indicate the formation of a racial middle and a tri-racial system. Racial ambiguity may be a characteristic feature of the racial middle. The formation of the racial middle is not just an outcome of Black and White relations in the U.S. but also due to the impact of transnational colorism. The United States is not only going through Latin Americanization but also Asianization of its racial system.

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group
Sociology

First Advisor
Emilio Parrado

Keywords
Discrimination, Immigrant Adaptation, Race Relations, Racial Identity, Skin Color, South Asians

Subject Categories
American Studies | Asian Studies | Sociology | South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies

This dissertation is available at ScholarlyCommons: https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1903
BROWN:

THE ASIANIZATION OF THE U.S. RACIAL DIVIDE

Radha Modi

A DISSERTATION

in

Sociology

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2016

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I could not have done this project without the incredible and sincere involvement of my participants. They met me in-between work meetings and classes, during incremental weather of rain and snow, and on top of personal and professional life demands. They shared their life stories with me in parks, coffee shops, train stations, and in their cars. At times, my participants invited me into their homes, places of worship, and group meetings. For all of this, I am truly grateful.

I have endless gratitude for my advisors, Dr. Emilio Parrado, Dr. Chenoa Flippen, and Dr. Prema Kurien. Their critical feedback, meetings with me, and continued mentorship pushed me to be a better scholar.

Thanks to Aline Rowen, Marcus Wright, Katee Paone-Mankins, and especially Audra Rodgers for answering all my questions and providing words of encouragement along the way.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my friends, family, and my partner for their emotional support and unwavering belief in me.
ABSTRACT

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Radha Modi

Emilio Parrado

What role does skin color play in the racial experiences of new immigrant groups as they settle in the U.S.? To answer this question, I systematically examine the role of skin color in structuring experiences of race and ethnicity for second generation South Asians, a group characterized as doing well economically and thus seen as a model for contemporary assimilation. Through 120 in-depth interviews and supplemental ethnographic observations, I find that skin color is central to the routine racial experiences of the second generation. South Asian racial formation is dually impacted by both the U.S. racial classification system and transnational colorism based on class and caste stratification from South Asia. Previous research on Latino/as demonstrates that transnational systems of stratification have impact on the lives of first generation immigrants. This study reveals the enduring impact of such systems in the racial formation even for the second generation. Early on South Asian women hear comments about their skin color from first generation family members. These comments are deployed as policing strategies influenced by the transnational South Asian colorism system. South Asian men are less policed about their bodies with the exception of men on the darker end of the spectrum. The skin color of South Asians also has significance
under the regime of a U.S. racial system in the post-9/11 era. The racialization extremes they experience from “model minority” to “terrorist” due to their skin color can occur daily with a shift in social settings. As such, South Asians are routinely mistaken for a wide variety of other racial groups such as Latino or Middle Eastern due to their skin color. The outcomes indicate the formation of a racial middle and a tri-racial system.

Racial ambiguity may be a characteristic feature of the racial middle. The formation of the racial middle is not just an outcome of Black and White relations in the U.S. but also due to the impact of transnational colorism. The United States is not only going through Latin Americanization but also Asianization of its racial system.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

"More like Miss Terrorist #MissAmerica"

"Miss New York is an Indian.. With all do [sic] respect, this is America"

"Miss America right now or miss Al Qaeda?"

"9/11 [anniversary] was 4 days ago and she gets miss America?"

- Twitter posts September 15, 2013

In 2013, Nina Davuluri, a second generation South Asian and daughter of immigrants, won the Miss America contest. The quotes above are real-time tweets on Twitter during her crowning as Miss America. The posts reveal both xenophobic and Islamophobic anxieties attached to brown skin color and racial ambiguity in the United States post-9/11. They suggest that Nina Davuluri has no rightful claim to the "American" identity despite being born in the United States. Her brown skin naturally aligns her with terrorist groups and, thus, makes her an enemy of the state. Nina Davuluri's experience is consistent with the experiences of many second generation South Asians growing up in the United States. As my participants explain in their interviews, these racist sentiments are now part of a new reality of living in the United States with brown skin color.
The realities of living with brown skin color complicates the common understanding of South Asian American positionality in the United States. Due to their on average high levels of educational achievement on the heels of similar attainment by their immigrant parents, second generation South Asians are also characterized as a model minority. This model minority is hard working, high achieving, and potentially free from the burdens of racialization that cripple other communities of color. However, alongside the narrative of upward mobility and immigrant success is also the neglected story of skin color, as demonstrated by Nina Davuluri's experience.

W.E.B. Dubois declared more than a hundred years ago the importance of the colorline (race relations) in world affairs in the twentieth century (1903). Now in the twenty-first century, the debate on the placement of the colorline thrives, as non-European immigrant groups grow in size in the United States, and as racial classification continues to be relevant in national discourse. For example, here are sample headlines from major news sources in 2014: More Hispanics Declaring Themselves White\(^1\), U.S. Census Show Asians Are Fastest Growing Racial Group\(^2\), Minority Births Are New Majority\(^3\), and White Students No Longer To Be Majority In School\(^4\). This national discourse underlines not only changing U.S. demographics, but also questions of who is white and who is not white and what this means for race relations.

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\(^1\) The New York Times: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/22/upshot/more-hispanics-declaring-themselves-white.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/22/upshot/more-hispanics-declaring-themselves-white.html);
\(^3\) The Wall Street Journal: [http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303879604577408363003351818](http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303879604577408363003351818)
This study aims to illuminate the possible direction of the placement of the colorline by examining the relationship that racial identification and racial experience has with skin color for the children of newer immigrant groups, such as Nina Davuluri. The question of location has taken on prominence in the literature. Location on the hierarchy is critical because it signifies greater or lesser access to social goods and advantages (Song 2004). Immigration and race scholars posit the placement of new groups based on indicators of class, culture, and discrimination (Waters 1990; Portes and Zhou 1993; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Frank, Akresh, and Lu 2010; Dowling 2015). Will new immigrant groups become white (top of the social hierarchy), black (bottom of the social hierarchy), or a racialized ethnic group (the racial middle of the social hierarchy) (Tuan 1998; Bonilla-Silva 2003; O'Brien 2005)? Assimilation theories suggest that identificational assimilation goes hand-in-hand with class mobility (Gordon 1964) or lack of class mobility (Portes and Zhou 1993), and thus recreate the white/non-white divide. Newer race relations literature argues instead that the future of race relations will likely be tri-racial, with a growing “racial middle” (Tuan 1998; Lee and Bean 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Telles and Ortiz 2008; O'Brien 2008).

While class and cultural measures are important, they do not tell the whole story on racial classification in the United States. Missing from much of the research on racial location is the inclusion of systematic analyses of skin color. Skin color and other phenotypic features are essential to understanding the Black racialization in the United States (Fanon 2008 (1952); Davis 1991; Keith and Herring 1991). For newer immigrant groups such as Latinos and Asians, the role of skin color is still unclear. There is a
growing body of literature that suggests skin color can impact the racial self-identification of these groups (Gomez 2000; Brown, Hitlin and Elder 2006; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). Golash-Boza and Darity (2008) reveal the importance of understanding skin color and experiences of discrimination on the impact of racial self-identification of Latinos/as as these variables influence identification as black, white or other. They argue that in order to make sense of future racial demographics, scholars need to collect more consistent data on skin color. They suggest that these data can be collected from “face-to-face interviews where interviewers record skin [colour] in addition to the respondents’ racial self-identification, the respondents’ opinion of how others would classify him or her and the interviewer’s racial classification of the respondent” (2008: 930). Indeed, the goal of my study is to bring a nuanced understanding of skin color in the process of racialization of newer immigrant groups.

Racialization of new immigrant groups is a process where certain meaningful attributes are attached to a group over time as a consequence of numerous multilevel factors (Omi and Winant 1994; Garner and Selod 2015). The process of racialization leads to a collective racial identification of the group that is, in part, imposed. Group members find it difficult to escape imposed racialization (Bonilla-Silva 2004). As suggested by previous scholars, skin color is intimately tied to the racialization process and group position. This scholarship, however, predominantly focuses on Latinos. Bonilla-Silva (2004), for instance, argues that with the growth of Latinos in the United States, the United States is moving towards a tri-racial society that is similar to the systems in Latin America. In this tri-racial model, there is a collective Black at the
bottom, Whites at the top, and a middle group of “honorary Whites.” Bonilla-Silva places lighter skinned Latinos in the middle and darker skinned Latinos at the collective bottom. While his tri-racial system provides a framework for understanding the impact of phenotype on the Latino position in the U.S racial hierarchy, it does not do the same for Asians and other groups. Does phenotype matter for Asian American placement? Lower class and lower skilled Asians fall in the “collective” Black, while upper class and highly skilled Asians fall in the “honorary White”. The tri-racialization model is inaccurate because it simultaneously strips the importance of phenotype for Asians and Native Americans and the importance of class for Blacks and Latinos.

The on-going emphasis of culture on Asian identity formation comes at the risk of minimizing the significance of phenotype. Asian ethnic identity, like White ethnic identity, becomes symbolic with each passing generation in the United States (Tuan 1998). Cultural attachments wean as ties to origin countries fade. Phenotype significance, however, may endure for longer. Tuan (1998) argues the potential racialized ethnic space that Asian Americans hold in the United States due to on-going discrimination, even into the third and fourth generation. Fox and Gugliomo (2012) suggest that historically Mexicans and potentially other minority groups such as Asians have had an inconsistent association with whiteness. Mexicans and Asians could not count on the White label to win rights such as citizenship.

Yet, phenotype continues to be an understudied aspect of Asian American racial formation. The South Asian community, in particular, encompasses a diversity of skin tones, from very light to very dark. As observed similarly with other groups, South
Asians with darker skin color may invoke stereotypes of “criminality,” “aggression,” or “suspicion.” To address this gap in the literature, through in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations, I study second generation South Asians who, as a darker-skinned but on average highly skilled group, complicate the conventional understanding of racialization in the United States. As such, the study of their experiences holds the potential to further illuminate the role of skin color in structuring experiences of race for the children of new immigrants.

South Asians are a critical group to study as over the past decade the number of South Asians in the United States has doubled in size, making them one of the fastest growing Asian communities (Hoeffel et al 2012). In addition, on average second generation South Asians have some of the highest levels of educational and occupational attainment in the United States (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). This high level of human capital then suggests that this group should be on their way to full integration with subsequent generations in the United States. At the same time, however, a breakdown of sub-ethnic South Asian groups reveals there is considerable variation among South Asians groups with respect to these human capital characteristics. In particular, Bangladeshis are among the poorest immigrant groups in New York City (Asian American Federation 2013).

In addition, the attacks on September 11, 2001 have transformed the South Asian American identity. In the post-9/11 era, Muslim bodies are marked as “terrorist” and suspect of anti-American behavior. The racial profiling and targeting directed towards

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5 Second generation South Asian in this study represents those born in the United States with Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi background.
Muslim populations has consequently impacted all South Asian groups due to skin color and religious presentation markers. Hate crimes against Muslims and those perceived as Muslim increased after the 9/11 attacks and have not returned back to pre-attack numbers (FBI Hate Crime Statistics 2013).

**Contribution: The Asianization of the U.S. Racial Hierarchy**

As described above, the relevance of skin color in the lives of children of immigrants is an on-going debate. The contributions of this study shed light on the ways skin color plays a part in the racialization process of the second generation. There are four clear theoretical outcomes of this study that complicate current literature.

First, previous literature largely focuses on the ways Latinos are potentially changing the U.S. racial hierarchy due to the influence of Latin American racial systems (Bonilla-Silva 2004). Bonilla-Silva's (2004) Latin-Americanization lens of U.S. race relations, however, eclipses the influence of other transnational processes such as racial systems from Asia. My study demonstrates that indeed South Asian colorism ideology rooted in caste and class stratification impacts the racialization process of second generation (Chapter 3). Second generation South Asians are socialized in this ideology through interaction with their first generation parents, the larger South Asian diaspora, and transnational influences from South Asia.

Second, the consensus from recent research indicates the formation of a racial middle (Tuan 1998; Bonilla-Silva 2004; O'Brien 2005). Those in the racial middle do not
experience the full advantages of whiteness and also do not face the same structural
disadvantages associated with blackness. They are in-between the top and the bottom of
the social hierarchy. With the focus being so much on the ends of the hierarchy, little
attention is paid to the features of the racial middle. This study begins to illuminate the
ways that the racialization of non-white and non-black groups are characteristic of the
racial middle. Due to their skin color, second generation South Asians have an
ambiguous racialization that endures across space and their life course (Chapter 4). I
argue that ambiguous racialization is not an inconsequential feature of the racial
landscape but potentially an inherent attribute of the racial middle.

Third, the ambiguous racialization features of the racial middle reveal the
continuing significance of the Black-White divide. Those who do not present as White or
Black experience race and racism as fluctuating, shifting, and unpredictable (Chapter 5).
This experience is in sharp contrast to the clear and consistent racial experience of those
on the polar ends of the hierarchy. In addition, second generation South Asians manage
their racial experience by manipulating aspects of their presentation such as skin color,
attire, and facial hair (Chapter 6). The management of the racial middle is an effort to
create distance from blackness. The larger imposed racialization prevents full inclusion
into whiteness. The jockeying of racial middle between the two ends consequently
reinforces the significance of the Black-White divide.

Ultimately, the study of second generation South Asians reveals that skin color is
central to the racialization of new immigrant groups. By the second generation, the
significance of race grows alongside the continued presence of ethnicity for these groups
(Chapter 7). As a result, immigration scholarship, I argue, should move towards the study of race with phenotype as the primary indicator for the children of newer immigrant groups.

**Getting to Know South Asians**

In the following chapters, I explore the significance of skin color in the daily life of second generation South Asians. Second generation South Asians are the children of immigrants who immigrated from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives. In this section, I provide background on three of the largest South Asian groups in the United States, Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis, who comprise my study sample.

According to the 2010 Census, there are approximately 3.4 million South Asians in the United States, with Indians making up 80% of this population followed by Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (Hoeffel et al 2012). All three groups have more than doubled in size over the past decade. When considering all those who identified as Asian, Indians make up the third largest Asian group (after Chinese and Filipinos), while Pakistanis make up the seventh largest.

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6 The data in this section does not disaggregate South Asians by generation. As a result, the section does not offer specifics on second generation South Asians.

7 This includes those who may have also identified as “Asian alone” and “Asian plus other race(s)”
Immigration and Naturalization Status

Immigration literature references three main waves of South Asian migration to the United States (Kibria 2007). The first wave occurred in the 1920s with the arrival of Punjabi Sikh migrant workers. However, due to the enactment of a series of restrictive U.S. immigration laws, immigration from Asia largely ceased soon after for several decades. Then in 1965 with the passing of the Hart-Cellar Act, the second wave of South Asian immigrants arrived in the United States. Initially, this wave was characteristically Indian-born (but also Pakistani), male, highly educated, and with a professional background. Under the family unification policy, second wave South Asian immigrants were able to sponsor their spouses, children, and siblings. The third wave began in the 1980s with the arrival of immigrants from other South Asian countries such as Bangladesh. This wave tended to have lower educational attainment than the earlier wave.

As a result of the recent migration to the United States, a majority of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis are foreign-born. Nonetheless, there is a growing second generation (parent(s) is foreign-born but child is native-born) and the nascency of a third generation (both parent(s) and child are native-born) particularly for Indians and Pakistanis, who came in the 1960s and 1970s. Bangladeshis, on the other hand, are more likely to be foreign-born since most arrived after 1980 (Kibria 2007). As of 2000, one third of foreign-born Indians and Pakistanis were naturalized citizens, while one fourth of Bangladeshis were naturalized citizens (SAALT.org 2000). As for U.S. born South Asians, there is considerably less research due to their relatively smaller size (compared to second generation Chinese and Filipino). More recent qualitative work on race,
ethnicity, and immigration has begun to include them but their presence even within this literature is limited (with a few exceptions such as Purkayastha 2005; Kurien 2005; 2007). However, with the second generation coming of age and beginning adulthood, their lives and perspectives will offer insight for racial/ethnic and assimilation theories. This study will include the second generation of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis.

**Geographic Concentration**

With respect to geographic concentration, newer immigrant gateway cities had the most growth in South Asian populations over the past decade. Nonetheless, “traditional” immigrant cities such as New York continue to have larger numbers. In fact, New York City and northern New Jersey have the largest population of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis (the three groups I focus on in my research) (SAALT.org 2012).

**Income, Education, Occupations, and Language Skills**

Using the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample from the 2000 Census, studies demonstrate the variation that exists across South Asian sub-ethnic groups in terms of economic and human capital (SAALT.org 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Kibria 2007).

To begin with, Bangladeshis are more likely to live below the poverty line than Indians and Pakistanis (SAALT.org 2000; Kibria 2007). Foreign-born Bangladeshis also earn less on average than their South Asian counterparts. The median income of foreign-born Bangladeshis is $40,000, while the median Pakistani foreign-born income is $47,400. The difference is even more striking when compared to the Indian immigrant median income of $70,000 (Kibria 2007).

Similar to income, types of occupations also vary across the South Asian sub-ethnic groups (SAALT.org 2000). The three most prevalent occupations for Indians are
computer specialists, managers, and physicians and surgeons. For Pakistanis, the top three most common occupations are cashiers, retail workers, and computer specialists. Bangladeshis are also more likely to have occupations as cashiers and retail workers but also as vehicle operators. In terms of education, 69% of foreign-born Indians above the age of 25 have a college graduate degree or more, while Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants are closer to 50% (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). In fact, Indian immigrants had the highest proportion of college-educated persons in 2000 than any other immigrant group.

While South Asians overall are more likely to come to the United States with a working knowledge of English, there is still variation across sub-ethnic groups. In comparison to Indians and Pakistanis, Bangladeshis are more likely to have a higher LEP (Limited English Proficiency) rate and LIH (Linguistically Isolated Household) rate (SAALT.org 2000). Indians, overall, are more likely to be highly fluent in both English and their native-tongue at the time of arrival in the United States than most immigrant groups, while only Nigerian and German immigrants have higher percentages (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

In this section, I show there is considerable variation across the three sub-groups of South Asians with respect to immigrant and human capital indicators. While on average, South Asians immigrants (especially with the heavy proportion of Indians) have higher incomes, higher educational attainment, and higher labor force participation than other immigrant groups, a break down by sub-South Asian ethnic group reveals that Bangladeshis, in particular, are exposed to high rates of poverty. In fact, according to the 2008-2010 American Community Survey (2010), 20% of Bangladeshis live in poverty in
the United States. This percentage increases when looking specifically at the New York area with 30% of Bangladeshis living poverty (making them one of the poorest groups in the city) (Asian American Federation 2013). Keeping these two points in mind, I hope to investigate whether different South Asian groups have divergent trajectories in terms of racial and ethnic identification and assimilation across generations and class status.

**Dissertation Outline**

Chapters Three, Four, Five, Six, and Seven comprise the analytical chapters of my study. In each chapter, I investigate the impact skin color in daily life of second generation South Asians using data from 120 in-depth interviews and supplemental ethnographic observations. Chapter Two details the research design and methods of this study. I conclude with a discussion of the larger significance of this research. Appendix A and B include the NIS Skin Color Scale (Massey and Martin 2003) and the questionnaire my participants filled out at the end of the interview.
Chapter 2: Research Methods and Design

This study employed both an in-depth interview method and ethnographic observations to address the above research questions. The primary method in this study was in-depth interviews. Interviews are the most optimal method because they allowed the participants to discuss how they make sense of their identity and how others perceive their identity in relation to their skin color. Interviews also covered topics that intersected with skin color such as gender, religion, and class. I asked participants questions about their experiences during and after 9/11.

In addition to interviews, I also conducted supplemental ethnographic observations. The purpose of observations in my study was to gain access to these communities and learn the context of their daily lives. Ethnographic observations revealed how racial and ethnic identity plays out in the real world through participants’ interaction with others.

Research Site

I conducted the study in New York City, Long Island, and Northern New Jersey. This location is the most ideal since the New York/Long Island/New Jersey area has large number of second generation/ 1.75 generation Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. This is because since New York City has been an immigrant gateway city throughout much of U.S. history, many first generation South Asians settled in the area. While the backdrop was helpful in acquiring a diverse sample, the New York City, Long Island, and New
Jersey context had an impact on my sample. For instance, many well-off second generation South Asians work in New York City but live in suburban neighborhoods outside of the city, and the children of poorer immigrants live in South Asian enclaves in the city. As a result, by selecting participants from the entire area of New York City metro area including Long Island and Northern New Jersey, I was able to interview participants from various socio-economic status backgrounds.

**Ethnographic Sample**

I conducted observations of South Asian relevant spaces wherever I was able to gain access in Northern New Jersey, Long Island, and New York City. These spaces ranged from college campuses, public spaces (restaurants/neighborhoods/stores/clubs/etc.), places of worship, community organizations, and familial/community events. I conducted 50 hours of ethnographic observations.

**Interview Sample**

For the interview sample, I interviewed a total of 120 second generation South Asians from New York City, Long Island, and Northern New Jersey. My overall sample (in Table 1 end of Chapter 2) varies by gender, religion, and class (all relevant in studying skin color). I define working class as having parents who work blue-collar jobs and rent their current place of residence. Those who do not meet these criteria fall into the middle/upper class category. Class is an important factor to consider since previous research demonstrates its relevance in racial assimilation (Roth 2012). The religion category is representative of religious identities common in the South Asian community: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh. All of the participants have second generation
immigrant status (meaning that they are born in U.S. and are the children of foreign-born parents).

**Interview Format and Topics**

The format of the interviews was semi-structured. While I used an interview guide with a range of questions that I asked each of the participants, I allowed participants to steer the interview to experiences that they deemed important as well. I used the interview guide questions to help the participants focus on the topics relevant to this study and bring the participants back on track if they veered off to non-related topics. The semi-structured interviews focused on key topics of racial and ethnic identification, role of skin color, racial discrimination, interracial relations, and experiences related to 9/11. In addition, I discussed experiences of educational and occupational mobility or lack of mobility with my participants. I focused on these topics because they are related to theories of assimilation, status attainment, and racial/ethnic identity.

**Skin Color Scale and Description**

As part of the interview, I asked participants to discuss the role of skin color in their life in relation to their identity. In addition, I incorporated the Massey and Martin (2003) NIS Skin Color Scale\(^8\) (located in Appendix A) during interviews to gauge self-perception of skin color and capture the role of skin color in key themes.

After initial questions, I asked each participant to select their skin color from skin color scale and make a mental note myself for comparison during data analysis. Massey and Martin (2003) describe the scale as “(a) n 11-point scale, ranging from zero to 10, 8 The Massey and Martin (2003) scale has been used on multiple surveys (most notably New Immigrant Survey and The National Longitudinal Study of Freshmen).
with zero representing albinism, or the total absence of color, and 10 representing the
darkest possible skin. The ten shades of skin color corresponding to the points 1 to 10 on
the Massey and Martin Skin Color Scale are depicted in a chart, with each point
represented by a hand, of identical form, but differing in color. The Scale was constructed
with assistance from a graphic designer” (1).

To maintain consistent exposure to skin color scale for all participants across
interviews, I displayed the scale in PDF format on an Apple iPad with brightness settings
set at high. In addition, I asked participants not to look at their own hands when making
their selection since the purpose of the exercise is to discuss perceived skin-tone. Before
the participant made their choice, I made a mental note of my selection for their skin
color. I noted my selection during the interview in a notebook as part of my observational
jottings.

*End of the Interview Questionnaire*

At the end of the interview, I asked my participants to fill out a survey, formatted
into a 3-part questionnaire. In the first part, the first question initially instructed
participants to select all labels (ethnic, religious, phenotypic or national) they identified
with. The second question asked them to select all the labels that others identify them
with. For both questions, participants were allowed to write additional identities or labels
not already listed. Some of the identities on my list were White, Black, Asian, South
Asian, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Muslim, Brown, Middle Eastern, European,
African American, Italian, Latino, etc. In the second part, I asked participants to answer
demographic questions about their background such as age, place of birth (native born or
outside of the United States), relationship or marital status, number of siblings, highest level of education personally obtained, personal occupation, highest level of education of parents (mother and father), and occupation of parents (mother and father). In the last part of the survey, I requested participants to fill out identifying questions on race as asked by the 2010 U.S. Census. After participants filled out the 3-part survey, I discussed their answers with them and their reasons for selecting the answers they did. This survey offered another level of analysis that supported the interview and ethnographic data.

**Data Analysis**

I analyzed both interview data and observational data using Atlas TI and Microsoft Excel. Both programs allowed me to use codes and categories to organize and make connections within my data. For the analysis, I coded my data in multiple phases. For the first phase, I created codes based on the three themes related to skin color in my research such as race/ethnic identity, discrimination, and misclassification. I then combed through my data for quotes and observations on those three themes. I sorted the data along the three themes. If quotes discussed multiple themes, I attached the quote to the theme that was the best fit.

For the second phase of analysis, within each theme, I coded the data into relevant categories. For racial/ethnic identity themed data, I sorted the quotes into two categories: *discusses skin color in connection to identity* or *does not discuss skin color in connection to identity*. I then conducted further analysis of within the new created categories. Those that did not discuss skin color, I identified the references do they make in relation to
racial and ethnic identity. I found the majority of references fell into cultural and geographical understanding of identity. Quotes that did include skin color revealed a delayed response, hesitation, or casual last minute reference (I use observational data to supplement my understanding of their reaction). I followed a similar format for other themes.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I was able to hypothesize and make predictions due to emergent findings characteristic of qualitative research. For instance, according to the literature, skin color is relevant to how Blacks and Latinos make sense of their identities and use racial categories. I hypothesized that this would also be the case for the children of newer immigrants such as South Asians. However, I was struck by the disconfirming evidence. For South Asians, skin color is not a central aspect of their racial/ethnic identity understanding or their use in selecting racial categories. I only came to this realization by transcribing interviews and coding the ways participants discuss experiences related to their identity. The descriptions very quickly revealed that South Asians understand their identity in cultural and geographical terms. The reference to phenotype was lacking or secondary in majority of the interviews.

Since the data is qualitative (thus non-representative and non-random), I was not able to make empirical generalizations to larger populations. Instead, I use my analysis to make theoretical contributions. Two of the major issues in qualitative research are issues of validity and knowing when saturation has been reached in data collection. To address both issues, I conducted 120 interviews. By conducting large number of interviews, I was able to reach saturation of information among all sub-samples in my larger sample.
Additionally, I brought up topics discussed by previous participants with newer participants. This allowed me to check if my understanding of the data is correct and consistent across participants. Finally, I wrote reflections after each interview to make sense of responses of my participant in real time. This also helped me to adapt my interview questions moving forward and go back to previous participants for follow-up interviews. I also analyzed interview transcripts routinely, which also allowed me to compare responses across participants and find incongruent patterns. Overall, the research design and methods for this study allow for the systematic analysis of skin color.
## Table 1: Second Generation South Asian Sample Description

<table>
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Chapter 3: Transnational Influences

Preserving the Links to South Asian Color Ideology

Two notable outcomes occurred when Nina Davuluri won the Miss America contest. One, she experienced backlash for not being American enough due to her brown skin and supposed links to Islam, and thus terrorism. At the same time, her win set off a transnational dialogue on what her winning means for skin color, caste, and race in the South Asian community in the United States, as well as in the U.K., Canada, Australia and India. The ultimate conclusion of this dialogue would be that Nina Davuluri would never win a similar contest in India because she is “too dark.” These two simultaneous reactions to Nina’s win illustrate the ongoing impact of multiple racial systems on racial identity and experiences for the children of immigrants.

Previous literature has neglected the impact of non-U.S. racial processes on the children of immigrants. It is largely assumed that the impact of non-U.S. racial processes stops with the first generation due to the limited interaction of native-born second generation with the systems from their parents’ homeland (Smith 2006). However, Nina Davuluri’s experience reveals that these multiple processes do exist alongside each other. Thus, to what degree do transitional systems of stratification impact children of immigrants in the United States? To answer this question, this chapter examines the messages children of post-1965 immigrants, specifically second generation South Asians, receive about their skin color from their parents, relatives, and the larger diasporic community. From analysis of 120 in-depth interviews, I find that through transnational
processes such as interaction with the first generation, influence of relatives from abroad, and local exposure to global economic and cultural markets, native-born South Asians indirectly come to learn about South Asian skin color ideology rooted in caste and class systems.

Background

**Transnationalism and Systems of Skin Color Stratification**

Colorism is a stratification system that "privileges light-skinned people over their dark-skinned people counterparts" (Hunter 2007: 1). This system exists in various forms globally due to its link to systems of immigration, European colonialism, chattel slavery, the South Asian caste system, and media and beauty industries. While colorism is transnational in nature and thus has commonalities across global contexts, specific regional contexts also have unique characteristics due to historical and contemporary origins. In this chapter, I investigate the impact of the South Asian colorism system on the racial and ethnic formation of the second generation.

**South Asian System of Colorism**

South Asians use skin color as a stratifying tool in daily life and for important life decisions. This system has obscure beginnings with little more than speculation in determining its origins. Nonetheless, scholars agree that the South Asian system of
colorism has ties to both colonialism and caste and class relations (Prashad 2000; Hunter 2007).

The caste system, historically rooted in Hinduism, stratifies based on occupational status and duties is passed down from one generation to the next. Hindu religious texts detail the importance and eventual salvation in abiding to ones inherited occupation and status (Ghurye 1969; Jodhka 2014). Brahmans are at the top of the caste hierarchy, while Sudras (manual laborers and untouchables) are at the bottom. Along this hierarchy, various other middle castes exist such as the Kshatriyas (warrior caste) and Vaishyas (merchant caste) (Ghurye 1969; Kurien 2007; Jodhka 2014; Vaid 2014). The opportunity for mobility along the caste hierarchy is a contested issue. Oliver Cox characterized the Indian caste system as a unique “closed system” of stratification that did not allow for any upward mobility for those of the lower caste (1948). Indian scholars argue that a “closed system” characterization of the caste system is an orientalist understanding of the system. They agree that caste mobility was limited due to cultural and potentially legal restrictions against inter-caste relations. However, the caste system is more flexible than previously understood with some movement along the hierarchy (Vaid 2014).

Previous literature is vague on the connection between caste and skin color. Color preferences in South Asia may have been rooted in caste and class differences prior to colonization. Ghurye (1969) identifies that descriptions of caste in religious texts include wordage alluding to differences in color of the differing castes. One word in particular, “varna,” meaning color is used to indicate that “Sudras” were darker than the “Brahmins” (Ghurye 1969; Vaid 2009). Color here may literally refer to skin color but also
metaphorically “varna” may allude to purity. These associations, nonetheless, may have been loose as scholars have pointed out depictions of royalty and gods as being dark skinned (Vaid 2009). With the arrival of the British, came anti-black systems of color preference to the Indian Subcontinent. Indeed, during colonial rule, the British cemented the use of skin color to stratify South Asians with white British at the top (Prashad 2000). The use of caste also became formalized under British rule as part of colonial effort to standardize Indian social order (Dirk 1989). The loose associations of skin color with caste and class that existed prior to colonization now solidified. Darker skin became a signal for those of low status such as lower castes and/or lower class.

In the contemporary moment, skin color is strongly associated with caste and class stratification across post-colonial South Asia (including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and other regions). Castes and class hierarchies not only exist in Hindu communities but also in Muslim and Sikh communities (Ambedkar 1936; Vaid 2014). However, caste relations in Muslim and Sikh communities may not be as strictly followed as in Hindu communities (Ambedkar 1936). Popular culture and media (such as Bollywood) perpetuate this saliency of skin color and its connection to class and caste stratification. Villains (or gundas) in Bollywood are often darker skinned and from marginalized groups such as working class, lower castes, or religious minorities. The persistent and systemic perpetuation of equating dark skin to evil and light skin to good within the South Asian community has resulted in darker skin being the marker of undesirability and inferiority (Prashad 2000).
Gendered Process

While caste and color hierarchies are strongly associated with each other in South Asia, skin color also functions separately from caste as well. Skin color stratification is also a gendered process. Across the South Asian context, women are socialized and pressured to pursue or maintain lighter skin (Glenn 2009a). Part of this is due to the global beauty industry, a multi-billion dollar industry that perpetuates white standards of beauty globally. Popular advertisements promote skin bleaching creams and other remedies (Hunter 2011). These advertisements typically depict a dark skinned woman who cannot access upward mobility either through marriage or career. To rectify the issue, the woman uses skin lightening creams to shed her dark tone. The commercials end with the woman finding occupational success and marrying a light-skinned man. While the brunt of the global beauty market falls on women, South Asian men are also beginning to use skin lightening creams. As of 2010, India's skin lightening market was worth 435 million U.S. dollars and is expected to grow at a rate of 18% every year (Ray 2010). Moreover, India is leading the global market in skin lightening products (Ray 2010).

Skin color stratification is also interlinked with marriageability (Vaid 2009), particularly for South Asians. Matrimonial ads in the United States and in South Asia include descriptive words related to the beauty of the bride as “fair.” The term “fair” in these ads means light skinned, and thus desirable. Shaadi.com, an online matchmaking site for U.S. Indians, asks users to describe their own skin tone and their skin tone preference in a potential partner. The site uses this information as part of their matching
algorithm. The link of light skin to marriage is seen as a mechanism of status attainment. Through marriage and procreation, light skin color privilege is passed on to the next generation (Hunter 2002; Glenn 2009b; Harris 2009). The intersectional framework, then, is a useful frame for studying how the intersections of gender and skin color play out in the everyday lives of South Asians.

**Transnational Systems**

Racial formation as a relational site for the collusion of transnational processes is often overlooked. The focus largely has been on the first generation or migrants who have direct transnational connections. Transnational research that incorporates the second generation finds that the second generation struggles to maintain ties with the home country across the life course (Smith 2006). In addition, the emphasis in research has been to look at immigrant cultural preservation and ethnic identity through transnational activities. What remains unclear is the impact of transnational systems on racial identity beyond the first generation and the relational mechanisms that reproduce those ties.

Scholars define transnationalism as an immigrant experience where the immigrant does not cut off ties with his or her country of origin due to globalization of capital markets, increase in migration, and technological advancements. Without having to sever connections, newer immigrant groups can continue to have a robust relationship with their home country. According to Glick Schiller and colleagues (1992), “[t]ransmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns within a field of social relations that links together their country of origin and their country or countries of settlement (ix).” The “field of social relations” can encompass various economic, political, or identificational
sites. Prior research indicates that first generation immigrants have economic and political influence in their home countries through remittances, investments, and the financial support of politicians (Glick et al 1992; Smith 2006). The direction of influence can also work the other way with countries of origin impacting the lives of immigrants particularly in the relational site of identity.

There is growing literature on the ways transnationalism impacts the construction of race and race relations in the United States. Smith (2006) finds that the formulation of second generation Mexican ethnic identity in New York is directly influenced by Mexican derived familial religious practices and travel to Mexico. Nonetheless, he finds that the second generation do not maintain these ties to Mexico as they get older with demands of U.S. life (2006). The influence of transnational ties has the potential to impact racial identity as well (Roth 2012; Joseph 2015). However, this line of research is limited to the study of the first generation. Roth (2012) finds that Latinos are resisting traditional U.S. racial categorization of black or white and prefer to identify with the larger category of Latino. This is because Latinos commonly use skin color to categorize themselves in Latin America and the Caribbean beyond categories of black and white (Roth 2012; Golash-Boza & Darity 2008; Telles and Murguia 1990). As Latino migrants spend time in the United States, with adaptation in culture and changes in cognitive schemas, they use a hybrid of both the Latin American system as well as the U.S. system (Roth 2012). This conclusion is supported by recent work on Latino migrant/transnational immigrants by Joseph (2015). In her work, Joseph finds that migrants use the U.S. understandings of race as part of their racial repertoire when they return to Brazil after a period of time in Boston. She calls this process the “transnational racial optic.” As
migrants move back and forth across borders, their racial self-identification expands to include concepts from multiple contexts. Her migrant participants not only understand their positionality through the Latin American lens but also the U.S. racial lens.

While there has been considerable discussion of the impact of transnational systems on Latino immigrant identity, little is known about the impact on other immigrant populations such as Asians. Previous literature points to the conclusion that the South Asian system of colorism is also transnational. The first generation diaspora may bring South Asian understandings of color with them to the United States and other parts of the world. Khan (2009) finds that the South Asian diaspora in the Trinidad uses the neutral skin color of pink in the depiction of the Hindu god, Shiva, as a way to indicate their unique placement outside of the Afro-Euro color politics and with the potential continued relevance of the South Asian context in their lives. In the United States, the South Asian diaspora uses skin color preference for lightness and fairness in their matrimonial ads (Vaid 2009). Prashad (2000) suggests the use of skin color by South Asians diaspora in the United States is different from skin color attachments in the U.S. racial system. The exact difference is not yet fully clear. The answer may lie in the use of caste by the Indian diaspora. According to Kurien (2007), first generation Hindus in the United States maintain their caste identities outside of India. The maintenance of caste identities may also carry with it related skin color ideologies.

From the transnational immigrant literature, we see that transnational systems are central to first generation immigrant racial formation in the United States. However, little is known about the impact of transnational racial systems on those who have grown up in the context of the United States, with little direct experience with the country of their
parents. Can transnational racial systems persist in influence even with limited ties? If so, what are the mechanisms for that influence?

**Results**

Interviews with second generation South Asians revealed that they have limited direct contact with the South Asian system of skin color stratification in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. However, South Asians are still impacted by this system through indirect transnational processes such as socialization by first generation family members, interaction with relatives from abroad, access to skin lightening consumer products at local South Asian stores, and consumption of Bollywood. These transnational processes are gendered with men and women having differing experiences. Even with differing experiences, both genders internalize the system from South Asia that stratifies based on skin color.

*Socialization from First Generation Family Members*

It is primarily through the interaction with first generation family members and relatives from South Asia that second generation South Asians learn about the transnational colorism system from South Asia. Parents and other first generation family members use comments about skin color to transfer ideology around skin color from South Asia to next generation. Girls and women are the primary target of this transnational transfer through policing of their skin color presentation and as a result their daily habits. Boys and men, on the other hand, have a limited exposure to this skin color
ideology from South Asia with the exception of dark skinned men and Sikh men.

**South Asian Women**

Gender matters for the intergenerational transmission of South Asian ideology around skin color. The women in my sample shared stories of growing up in households where indirect and direct comments were made about skin color. These comments became commonplace and normalized in interactions between my participants and with the adults in their lives. Devi, a college student from a well to do Jain family, relates her story.

*Devi*: “Well, I’m light skinned... and both my parents are light skinned. And they take pride in that...”

*Me*: “I see. How do you feel about your skin color?”

*Devi*: “When I was younger, I didn’t care. I played tennis a lot and went swimming... And everyone would say you’re getting too karō” (meaning black).

*Me*: “Everyone?”

*Devi*: “My mom... My grandmother...”

Devi explains that her mom and her grandmother worried about her getting darker or “karō.” Karō here means the color black and may also refer to Black people. This interaction with the first generation is on going with routine policing around skin color presentation. The second generation often internalizes these messages. Devi without hesitation states that even now she worries about her skin color whenever she goes out in the sun during the summer.
Overwhelmingly, this is the common thread among all my female participants. The policing of their bodies was entrenched in their daily life growing up. South Asian women across class and religious background were encouraged to stay indoors and avoid athletics or other activities outside. Even across skin color, the recommendations were the same. Lighter skin women were told to protect their light skin and darker skinned women were encouraged to prevent more darkening of their skin. The use of “karō” (black) as described by her family of her darkening skin color indicates an understanding among first generation South Asians that appearing dark or black is something to avoid. Similar to Devi, many participants declared to me that at first they did not take the statements made by adults in the home seriously. Some even rebelled by going out more and enjoying the sun especially when their brothers did not receive the same messages.

The preference for light skin color became normalized in the experiences of the second generation, particularly for women. Salima, an upper class Bangladeshi young professional, recounted that when she was born, her dad's first words were, “she is so dark.” This story was narrated to Salima and to others about Salima as a comical anecdote. During our interview, Salima even chuckled at her father's response to first meeting her. While these anecdotes may seem light hearted and commonplace, they did have ongoing impact on the second generation. Another participant, Fariha, working class, Bangladeshi college student, tried to lighten her skin color by “scrubbing her skin with soap in the shower” when she was younger.

The skin color feedback towards women persisted even into adulthood. Mina, a Sikh upper-class woman in her 30’s, became frustrated when relatives and loved ones
insinuated that her role as a good mother hinged on her daughter maintaining light skin. Her mother-in-law one day asked her: “*Do you not care about your daughter and the hard life she will have for being dark?*” The intergenerational effort in light skin preservation became apparent in many of my interviews. This effort was ongoing across the life course as South Asian women came of age, got married, and had children.

In addition to feedback, first generation mothers also departed knowledge on home-based “therapies” to manage skin color, which were considered both natural and normal. Participants shared with me many of these techniques. The list included chickpea flour paste, turmeric paste, or consuming milk. By drinking milk or spreading chickpea paste on your body, one can lighten his/her skin. As I show in chapter six, South Asian women do indeed use these methods along with other techniques to manage their skin color.

*Too Dark even for a Man*

In contrast, my male participants verbalized a different experience with skin color. They were not told to stay indoors or avoid outdoor activities. Their skin color in most cases hardly was the subject of conversation with elders. When I recounted the experiences of their female counterparts, participants acknowledged hearing comments made in reference to their sisters or female cousins. The lack of skin color related feedback however was not completely missing from the landscape of boyhood. Very dark skinned boys, unlike their lighter counterparts, were subject to comments about their bodies.
Nikhil, Bengali middle class college student, diverted his gaze away from me before casually recounting his mom chiding him for playing outside. He chuckled and shrugged his shoulders while stating that he didn’t listen to her. Nikhil’s skin color was darker than most South Asians in my sample. I could tell he was uncomfortable and slightly embarrassed by the topic. However, later in the interview, Nikhil would bring up skin color again and slip in that he tried a home remedy of chickpea flour paste to lighten his skin color (a “remedy” commonly brought up in my conversations with South Asian women).

Nikhil’s experiences with his skin color revealed that even for men there was a threshold before dark skin color was too dark, even for a man. On the Massey and Martin (2003) skin color scale, Nikhil would register as a 7 or 8 out of 10 (see Appendix A). Similar to his female counterparts, Nikhil's uncomfortableness around the issue of his skin color was palpable. Both dark skinned male and female participants struggled to open up about their skin color and the pressures they received from their parents. Indeed, a working class dark-skinned Bangladeshi man (a 10 on the Massey and Martin 2003 scale), avoided the conversation about his skin color completely despite my efforts.

Other men in my sample who were not as dark as Nikhil only heard about their skin color from their parents when they crossed the line from brown to dark during the summer or after a beach outing. During our interview, Ajay, a middle class Indian professional, points to the 6 on the brightly lit skin color scale placed in front of him. We have been discussing his parents’ reaction to his skin color growing up.

Modi: What does 6 represent?
Ajay: (looking up from the iPad screen) That's how dark I get sometimes. I'll go play basketball or just being out all summer.

Modi: And that's when your mom has said something to you?

Ajay: Yeah. It didn't happen all the time. But there were a few times.

Modi: Do you remember a specific time?

Ajay: Uhh this one time I had just come back from a Miami trip with my friends, and I walked through the front door, and she asked what happened to me.

Modi: What did she mean by what happened to you?

Ajay: She was surprised by my tan. I don't think she was upset or anything.

Modi: Would you say her reaction to you was positive, neutral, or negative?

Ajay: Definitely not positive. Maybe between neutral and negative. More neutral though.

Modi: (Pointing to the iPad with the scale display on the screen) And you had gotten as dark as a 6?

Ajay: Well that time I was more of a 7.

For Ajay, his mother only commented on his skin color when he crossed over to the darker end of the scale. According to Ajay, during most of the year he registered at a 4 or a 5 on the scale depending on the season. Ajay's experience confirms that South Asian men are more likely to hear about their skin color from first generation parents once they
reach a certain darkness in their skin color, unlike South Asian women. Additionally, the reaction from parents is tempered if the darkness is temporary as is the case with Ajay. South Asian men who are dark experience more consistent and routine comments from parents.

While the experience of policing around skin color was usually relegated to the darker end of the skin color scale for most men, this was not the case for some Sikh boys. Sikh boys even of lighter hue had mothers tell them to stay out of the sun. Asking one of my Sikh male participants why this was the case, he retorted:

“Because you already are a target, right? Kids are calling you names in school. Even before 9/11... To have dark skin color plus a turban would just make things worse.”

“Make things worse” seems to be the common understanding around darker skin color that first generation Sikh parents pass on to the next generation. Sikh mothers’ transfer of skin color ideology from South Asia was intermixed with stories of violent discrimination and trauma the Sikh community experienced in India⁹. Second generation Sikh participants readily linked their experiences in the United States to that of their community in India and elsewhere. Their parents’ expression of South Asian colorism made sense for their lives in the United States.

Finally, South Asian men as a whole heard less about their skin color than their female counterparts. The policing of their bodies was less frequent even for those who

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⁹ In 1984, the Indian government attacked Sikhs in the Golden Temple. In the aftermath of this attack, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. Retribution for this assassination was carried out on the Sikh community in 1984.
were darker. As darker skinned men got older the comments about skin color subsided. This was in stark comparison to the persistence of skin color policing into adulthood for South Asian women.

The differing frequencies of policing of South Asian men and women highlights the ways gender is tethered not only to the actual South Asian colorism ideology but also to the mechanism of transfer for that ideology.

**Interactions with Relatives from Abroad**

The messages around skin color not only came through their first generation parents living in the United States, but also from transnational relationships with relatives from abroad. Relatives traveled to the United States to visit and brought with them South Asian ideologies about skin color and stratification. As one participant, Saba (Muslim, middle class) recalls:

“I remember my aunt from India brought Fair and Lovely for me and my mom. I didn’t even know that my mom worried about her skin color... but then she used it all the time after that.”

Relatives often came to visit from South Asia and played a part in pushing skin color lightening techniques on to second generation South Asians. Watching mothers, aunts, and cousins fret over skin color and make efforts to preserve or lighten skin tone proved to be impactful. Saba would later confess in our interview that she began to use the cream as well. Female participants who interacted with relatives that came from abroad were more likely to use skin lightening creams than their other native born counterparts. This
is because relatives brought over creams that were not yet available in the United States. The creams would become part of a ritualistic gift giving that also included other items from South Asia such as spices and clothes. Moreover, the creams became common household products that mothers, sisters, and cousins shared as part of a beauty regimen in the United States.

The transnational travel by relatives, accompanied with gift giving of creams, routinely surfaced in many of my interviews. In addition, about a third of my female participants traveled to South Asia at least once as part of a family trip for the holidays or for summer vacation. During these visits, participants describe their exposure to skin lightening commercials on TV, ads in newspapers and magazines, and billboards on roadsides. Participants found it shocking how blatant the advertisements showcased a preference for lighter skin. Unlike advertisements in the United States, skin lightening advertisements in South Asia explicitly state that the creams will make you look whiter.

**Ethnic Enclaves and Larger Community**

For one participant, Meghna, a working class Indian American in her late 20's, access to skin lightening creams was limited due to the fact that her family did not have the funds to travel to India or help relatives come to the United States. Nonetheless, the push to maintain light skin color or lighten dark skin color was constant as she traversed her working class South Asian neighborhood in Queens. Cousins, aunts and uncles, and neighbors openly discussed skin color in relations to beauty, worth, status, and happiness.

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10 Uncles and aunts here represents any close family friend of South Asian background. Second generation South Asian children grow up calling many of their family friends aunts and uncles.
The reference to skin color was so pervasive that Meghna could not single out a specific memory. According to her, it was a normalized part of growing up South Asian in the United States. She explains that over time, South Asian stores in her neighborhood began carrying products such as *Fair and Lovely* from India. Now having access to a steady supply, she occasionally uses the creams to lighten her skin color.

The larger South Asian specific ethnic/religious communities that participants belonged to echoed similar sentiments about skin color. Muslim, Sikh, Christian, and Hindu participants routinely attended Friday prayers, Sunday morning school, or youth programs. There, their co-ethnic/religious peers reinforced South Asian ideologies around skin color and with it links to gender norms. Younger girls and teenagers would tell friends not to play in the sun with their male counterparts. The policing around skin color would then become routine ways to fortify gender boundaries, “boys played outside and girls stayed inside.”

Moreover, skin color became part of a larger repertoire on controlling images of femininity and masculinity and desirability. Both genders came to understand what was seen as desirable in a South Asian woman. Aliya, a Pakistani middle class woman in her late 20’s, remembers with exactness the first time a South Asian friend confronted her about her light skin color. Aliya is one of the lightest participants in my sample. The friend, upset and frustrated by her own darker skin color, exclaimed to Aliya, “guys like you more because of your skin color.” Aliya remembers feeling taken aback by the bluntness of the comment but sympathizes with the sentiment. Similarly, multiple South
Asian male participants shared stories of co-ethnic friends exhibiting light skin preference as a primary criterion for desiring certain South Asian women over others.

Desirability for South Asian men on the other hand did not follow a similar path. For some South Asian men, indirectly or directly, masculinity was tied to slightly darker skin color. As one participant indicated, “Having darker skin color for me is related to being more masculine. You go outside, play sports, and you get darker. So it's all about strength and athleticism.” Other South Asian men, however, did not voice this sentiment, as clearly or directly. A few South Asian women emphasized the importance of having a husband or boyfriend as the darker partner in the coupling.

**Consumption of Bollywood**

In combination with family members and trips to India or Pakistan, second generation participants are also exposed to the South Asian system of colorism through their consumption of Bollywood. Bollywood, located in Mumbai, India, is the highest producing film industry in South Asia and second largest globally. The films produced by Bollywood often center on characters that are upper caste, Indian, and Hindu. Bollywood's reach is wide with viewership in all continents. The South Asian diaspora is the primary consumer of Bollywood films. Theaters that play these films have propped up in South Asian enclaves all over the New York metro area such as in Jackson Heights and Jamaica in Queens, and Jersey City and Edison in New Jersey to name a few.

Bollywood films often privilege European standards of beauty such as light skin and straight hair. The main characters are usually lighter skinned, upper caste, and upper
class. The link between light skin and high status in Bollywood is not by accident (Prashad 2000; Guha Ray 2010). As noted earlier, Bollywood movies reinforced and justified the norms around caste, class, and color in South Asia.

Bollywood movies are a linking factor for South Asian communities. Second generation Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indians all consumed Bollywood directly or indirectly. Some watched new movies religiously as they came available in the United States, while others mainly came to know the songs attached to the movies. Purvi, middle class young professional, excitedly explained what she called her “teenage obsession:”

“I can name you all the Bollywood actresses and the movies they were in. I was obsessed! I wanted to be like them. Dance, act, model, and become this mega Indian star. I even participated in this cultural dance competitions where a bunch of my friends got together and did renditions of popular Bollywood dances.”

Parents and community members encouraged the “obsession” with Bollywood by placing their children in Bollywood dance classes and investing in community wide Bollywood shows alongside other traditions. For the diaspora, Bollywood acts as a transnational link to India's cultural hub and as a connection to South Asia.

South Asian women expressed more interest in the movies and plot lines than South Asian men. Despite the gender divide, participants indicated Bollywood as one of their sources for understanding the South Asian system of colorism. Jay, a Bangladeshi working class in his mid-20's, breaks down the phenotype depictions in Bollywood:
“You can tell all the actors and actresses are from North India because their skin is very light and their noses look different too. Ashwariya Rai is South Indian but she’s not your typical South Indian you know what I mean. She looks like she has Gujarati facial features and skin color. South Indians and Bengalis are a completely different group. Their noses are shaped different and skin color is dark.”

According to Jay, there is a look you need to have to be a Bollywood star. The look is having light skin color and European facial features. The consistency in the Bollywood look is apparent to my second generation South Asian participants.

**Preserving the Links between Caste and Color**

Like many immigrant communities, first generation South Asian parents want the best life for their children in the United States. This desire for better life and connection to lighter skin color, however, has connections with the colorism system in South Asia where a better life and upward mobility is synonymous with lighter skin color and upper caste.

Wanting the best possible life outcomes was also about maintaining privilege. First generation family members and relatives from abroad expressed worries of mobility to their children through class and color coded language implicitly connected to the South Asian caste system. Preservation of caste and status is strongly linked with preferences surrounding occupation, education, and religion.
The coded language typically came out during conversations about marriage and children. Marriageable aged participants received advice and instructions from their parents and relatives about who to marry. During interviews, participants and I discussed at the length the expectations of their parents. Expectations overwhelming revealed connections to occupation, religion, and color:

“We want you to marry someone from a good background.”

“As long as he is Hindu and vegetarian. Also, he has to have an advanced degree.”

“You can marry anyone as long as he is not black or Muslim.”

“Don't marry a South Indian girl or your kids will be black.”

“My parents want me to marry a Pakistani Muslim doctor. They don't care about anything else.”

“When you get married, you not only get married to the other person, but the families are getting married. So I have to make sure our families have things in common.”

“They don't like that she is dark even though she is Desi.”

“My parents prefer I marry someone who comes from the same region in Bangladesh as us. But they understand that will be hard to find here so they are okay with an educated Bengali girl.”

These types of expectations reveal the anxieties around status maintenance among first generation parents. The second generation absorbed these messages and used them to make sense of their position in the United States. Vicki, a Hindu college student who adamantly declared that she identified with American more than Indian American,
proudly told me that her light skin color was an important feature of her identity and her place in the United States. She claimed:

“I'm from a long line of light-skinned people that originally came from Iran and generations have held high level government positions in India.”

Her understanding of her lineage came from her parents as well as her grandparents in India. Embedded in Vicki's statement is an implicit connection to caste. Many who historically have held high level positions in India have been from the upper castes. For Vicki and other second generation participants, the discussion around skin color and lineage directly connected to her positionality in the United States. She also described in detail her occupational goals, which entailed working for the U.S. government.

Not all my participants directly linked their skin color to maintaining their family's status. However, my participants did understand the connection of skin color and mobility in the United States.

Conclusion

The ideology around caste and class and the association with skin color in South Asia is brought over to the United States with the first generation. The first generation then transfers their understanding of the South Asian system to their children, the second generation. The parents worry about social location of their children in the United States. In an effort to control that process, South Asian parents through routine comments teach
their children that light skin color can help them secure higher status in society. This higher status then can be passed down to future generations through marriage and bearing light skinned children. The reproduction and maintenance of status then can be a manageable process. In some families, comments related to skin color incorporated both caste and class references as well as race logics of the United States. In other families, skin color policing was a reactionary defense to the discrimination experienced in the United States. This was especially true for Sikh households where first generation parents still recounted the trauma experienced in India.

Overall, immigrant parents then transfer this perspective to their American-born children through routine matter of fact comments about skin color. These messages are reinforced by other transnational processes such as gifts of skin lightening creams from relatives from South Asia, the ubiquity of colorism language and focus in larger ethnic communities, and the celebrated consumption of Bollywood. Parents impose the South Asian stratification ideologies on their children to help them navigate the U.S. racial hierarchy.
Chapter 4: Racial Ambiguity

A Defining Feature of the Racial Middle

Nina Davuluri's Miss USA win exposed the dual processes at play in the contemporary racial formation of newer immigrant groups. The first process being the transnational influence of South Asian systems of stratification particularly those surrounding skin color in the home and community life of second generation South Asians. The second process is the racialization under the U.S. racial system. One of the more interesting responses to Nina Davuluri's win was the misidentification of her racial and ethnic background. Tweets identified Davuluri as either Muslim, Arab, Latino, Middle Eastern, Asian, Pakistani, or Indian. While Indian and Asian are correct assertions about her identity, the rest were not. The uncertainty around her background highlights South Asian racialization in the United States. This experience of ambiguity is a common occurrence in the daily life of second generation South Asians due to their non-black and non-white phenotypic presentation.

In this chapter, through data analysis of reflected appraisals from 120 participants, I investigate the role of skin color in the racial experience of second generation South Asians as they encounter the U.S. racial system in their daily life. South Asians across my sample had a common thread in their biography. They have and continue to be mistaken for other racial groups. A deeper analysis of this phenomenon reveals that skin color is often one of the main triggers for certain racial and ethnic
ascription from others. Skin color and surrogate markers of gender, class, and religious presentation are central to how others perceive and make sense of the racial identity of South Asians.

The results of this chapter underscore the significance of not only skin color but also the ambiguous racialization of children of new immigrant groups. Immigration and race scholars have theorized the placement of new groups based on indicators of class, culture, and discrimination (Portes and Zhou 1993; Alba and Nee 2009; Kasinitz et al 2009). Will they be White, Black, or somewhere in the middle? With overwhelming focus on location, scholars have overlooked a critical development in the racialization of non-white and non-black groups: ambiguity. Ambiguity is limited to the study of bi-racial and multi-racial individuals who make up 2.9 percent of the population (Jones and Bullock 2012). Thus, ambiguity is seen as an outcome of biological mixing. However, as I show in this chapter, racial ambiguity is central to the experience of a non-mixed group, South Asians. As such, I argue that racial ambiguity is a racialized outcome of the U.S. white-black divide.

**Background**

**U.S. System of Racial Hierarchy**

Unlike the South Asian system of colorism, stratification in the U.S. racial hierarchy is based on skin color (including other phenotypic features) as well as ancestry. The U.S. system combines a racial classification system with a form of colorism rooted in
the enslavement of African Americans and settler colonization of Native Americans (Hunter 2007). White racial identity in the United States is constructed to signify a superiority over Blacks and be the symbolic representation of America (Ngai 2004). As a result, both colorism and racism work together to position groups of people in a hierarchy that systematically positions Whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom.

The most consistent and deadly enforcement of skin color hierarchy and regime has been on Blacks. From the time of slavery, those with dark skin color and even “a drop” of African ancestry could not be white and also could not qualify as full human (Davis 1991). The use of skin color and African ancestry as a marker for less than human was used as a justification for the enslavement of Blacks. While no longer part of U.S. law, this understanding of the “one drop” rule continues to play out in the U.S. racial hierarchy that situates Blacks at the bottom. Consequently, Black biracial and multiracials often identify as only Black because others ignore their non-black background (Khanna 2010). Another consequence of the "one-drop" rule has been perpetuation of colorism. Lighter skin Blacks, while still seen as solely Black, are more likely to find employment and make more money than darker skinned Blacks (Keith and Herring 1991; Hill 2000). The continual separation and oppression of Blacks results in the formation of the Black-White racial divide.

Historically, Whites used skin color to differentiate and segregate themselves from other groups of color as well. The enforcement of the color line for other groups, however, is not as clear cut as it has been for Blacks (Waters 1999). The categorization of white has at times expanded to include Asian, Latino, and Native American groups but
not consistently. For a time, Mexicans were solely identified as white racially before their ethnicity began to appear in the U.S. Census (Ngai 2004). This was also the case for Japanese and other Asians. From the first wave of South Asian immigration, the racial and ethnic identification of South Asians in the United States has been one of ambiguity and contention with skin color playing a central role. Bhagat Singh Thind, a Sikh Indian, in the early 1920s argued in an Oregon court that since he was anthropologically Caucasian, he should have a right to American Citizenship (Ngai 2004). The case was appealed and ultimately reached the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1923, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the United States in the United States v Thind by clarifying the definition of “Caucasian” as “common understanding” of white (United States v Thind 261 U.S. 204, 1923) and thus, denying Bhagat Singh Thind and other subsequent South Asians citizenship. \(^{11}\) The inconsistent enforcement of the color-line for these groups, unlike for Blacks and European white ethnic groups, persists even now. The non-white skin color of South Asians and their perceived ambiguity continues to be significant with the second and third wave of South Asian immigrants.

With the growth of non-European immigrant groups post-1965, scholars have theorized possible placement of these newer groups along the hierarchy. The question of where newer immigrants will fall is important since it offers clues to the future of race relations in the United States and the role of skin color in that process. Recent work by Tuan (1998) and O’Brien (2008), in particular, highlight the dissimilar experiences of Asians and Latinos from that of Whites and Blacks. Indicating the prevalence of discrimination and racialization that prevent full incorporation of Asians and Latinos into  

\(^{11}\) date received citizenship
the larger white society, scholars are calling for a system beyond the dual black-white divide and theorize the creation of a tri-racial system. (Tuan 1998, Telles and Ortiz 2008, O'Brien 2008, and Bonilla-Silva 2004). The tri-racial system would have a middle territory in-between Whites and Blacks, consisting of many upwardly mobile Asians and Latinos.

In addition, scholars have begun to grapple with the new realities of race and racialization after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Garner and Selod (2015) suggest that the racialization of Muslims is a process. The racialization process of Muslims is “not due to them all looking vaguely the same, but is because of the unity of the ‘gaze’ itself. In other words, those who produce, absorb and reproduce representations of asylum-seekers, and Muslims, can transform the clearly culturally and phenotypically dissimilar individuals… into a homogenous bloc (14).” Thus, the racialization of Muslim involves continuous homogenizing and diluting.

In the contemporary moment, the U.S. racial hierarchy may be in a flux of change with the incorporation of newer groups. Additionally, skin color and ancestry continues to play a decisive role in that process (Ngai 2007; Tuan 1998; Hunter 2007).

The Role of Racial Ambiguity

The inconclusive debate on the placement of newer immigrant groups may have to do with their inconsistent racialization. Often groups that have inconsistent formal racialization (ascribed racial categorization by formal institutions such as U.S. Census) also have inconsistent informal racial experiences (ascribed race in informal settings). Inconsistent informal racialization consists of experiences of mistaken identity, perceived
ambiguity, and fluidity in daily life. Prior research has given some attention to this phenomenon especially in relation to multi-racial/bi-racial (Harris and Sim 2002). Moreover, mono-racial and pan-ethnic groups such as Latinos (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008), Native Americans (Campbell and Troyer 2007), and Asians (Purkayastha 2005; Bhatia 2008; Ocampo 2016) also experience inconsistency in lived race\textsuperscript{12}. While ethnic groups within a larger pan-ethnic label are confused for each other, here I am referring to process where groups belonging to one pan-ethnic or racial group is confused for another pan-ethnicity or race. Latinos are at times confused for Middle Eastern. Darker skinned Asians can be perceived as Middle Eastern or Mexican.

Researchers have found that bi-racials and multi-racials have racial fluidity in their racial self-identification across contexts (Harris and Sim 2002; Saperstein and Penner 2014). Part of that process has to do with how they appraise how others perceive their racial identity. Reflected appraisal, a technique based on Cooley's concept of "looking glass self," is a description of a person's perception of how others view him or her (1992). Using reflected appraisals, previous research has found that one’s internal race is partly dependent on the perception of others (Harris and Sim 2002). Many bi-racial Blacks will identify as Black because others singularly perceive and treat them as Black due to the pervasiveness of the "one drop rule" (Davis 1991, Harris and Sim 2002, Khanna 2010). In contrast, others perceive Asian and Native American bi-racials as more racially ambiguous and not essentially part of one race (Harris and Sim 2002; Khanna 2004). The experience of being perceived as ambiguous allows for the ability to be fluid

\textsuperscript{12} Blacks and whites also experience forms of ambiguity to some degree but it may happen less often.
in racial self-identification. Asian bi-racials self-identify as white, Asian, or bi-racial depending on the social setting (Harris and Sim 2002).

**Ambiguity and Phenotype**

When someone presents as racially ambiguous, others make decisions about that person’s race based on multiple cues of phenotype, gender, class, and religious presentation. Skin color is one of the most important ways others make sense of ambiguous racial identity. Scholars show that as a person’s phenotype changes, so do others’ perception of that person (Roth 2012; Burke 2013). Using photographs, Roth (2012) investigates the changing nature of racial perceptions and categorization. Her participants used phenotype in addition to cues such as gender to determine a person's race (Roth 2012). Based on these results, racial ambiguity is attached to those who are not clearly White or Black. The attachment of ambiguity may be the case for South Asians as well. Purkayastha (2005) notes in her research that second generation South Asians subjectively negotiate their ethnicity, as they can be perceived to be Latino, Black, and Muslim.

**Racial Ambiguity as a Defining Feature of the Racial Middle**

Research on racial ambiguity and fluidity has focused on the study of racial identity construction of bi-racial and multi-racial groups (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2004; Rockquemore, Brunsma, Feagin 2008; Saperstein and Penner 2014). This stems from theoretical and empirical interest of the impact of the growing interracial relationships and their racially mixed children (Harris and Sim 2002) after years of racial
segregation and anti-miscegenation laws (Davis 1991). As a result, the conversation centers around the potential for improved race relations due to the growing mixed populations. This conversation is dampened by the continued mono-racial experience of bi-racial Blacks due to the prevalence of the one-drop rule.

In addition, with the focus on mixed groups, scholars apply theories from Latin America where there is a long history of racial mixing and identification with being “mestizaje” (Telles 2004; Sue 2009). “Browning” of America is often cited for understanding the future of race in the United States. With intermixing and also growing Latino populations, the United States is moving towards a Latin American understanding of race that incorporates mixed groups as part of a color gradation from black to white. This literature suggests that there will be eventual decline in racial distinction and more potential for racial movement. However, even in the discourse in Latin America, specifically Brazil, scholars note that black Brazilians continue to be stuck at the bottom of the color hierarchy (Telles 2004; Joseph 2015).

The theorization around the racialization of multi-racial groups in the United States and the use of racial theories from Latin America are an important stepping-stone to understanding the dynamic landscape of the U.S. racial hierarchy. However, the experience of racial ambiguity is not limited to multi-racial groups. As described earlier, mono-racial groups who are not white or black also are perceived as ambiguous. Their ambiguity may be the defining feature that incorporates them into the racial middle. This may be a unique characteristic of the U.S. racial system.
Results

South Asians come to learn about how others perceive their identity when they enter institutions such as schools. By others, I am referring to non-South Asians. South Asians also confuse each other but typically within South Asian-specific categories (i.e. confuse Indian American for Pakistani American). It is through interpersonal interactions in school, as well as with the U.S. school system that the second generation learns about the U.S. racial structure. School is also where South Asians learn where they fit in the U.S. racial structure. A critical aspect of the interaction students have with others in school is that they realize they are not Black or White but fall into another category. Others’ perception of South Asians is more ambiguous, with skin color and religious markers as the primary indicators.

As a result of their perceived racial ambiguity, my participants routinely experience misidentification as I discuss below. One misidentification label for some participants is “Muslim” which gets placed in the same racial category as Arab or Latino/a. I use it loosely here as a racial category because of its infusion as such by my participants but not without acknowledgement of the complexity surrounding the racialization of Muslims and Muslim identity.

When relevant, I include participants’ placement on the Massy and Martin (2003) skin color scale based on my assessment of their skin color. The placement on the scale ranges from very light (1) to very dark (10).\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{13}\) For information on the Massey and Martin (2003), please turn to appendix A.
Early Experiences of Racial Ambiguity

For all participants, perceived racial ambiguity and mistaken identity is routine to their lived experience from as early as grade school to adulthood. For both men and women, skin color was central to how others perceived their racial and ethnic identity. The color of their skin (and other features such as hair color, hair texture, hair length, and eye color) led others to identify South Asians as being from a wide variety of other racial and ethnic identities. The most common mistaken identifications were Latino/Hispanic, Middle Eastern/Arab, and Muslim. These experiences of racial ambiguity started as they entered formal schooling. From participant interviews, it becomes clear they are not prepared for ambiguous racialization. For example, Sita, an Indian woman in her 30's, recalls how confusing it was when she was first mistaken for Latino:

“In my 5th grade classroom, we sat in groups of four. This white kid who sat across from me passes me a book and asks me to read it. I look at the first page and it’s not English. It’s some other language. I start to read it out loud anyway because I want to impress him. After I read a few sentences, he grabs the book out of my hand and says I thought you could read Spanish. In my mind, I think why would you think I could read Spanish. It wasn’t for years before I realized he probably thought I was Mexican. I sat across from him for months and he never knew my background. I mean come on! I knew he was Jewish!”

Sita is initially perplexed why her classmate asks her to read a book written in Spanish. Only after years of others incorrectly identifying her as Puerto Rican or Mexican that she made sense of her interaction with him. Sita speculates that others perceive her as Latino...
because of her skin color and black hair. I placed Sita skin color as a four on the Massey and Martin scale. Her light brown skin color and black hair did present her as ambiguous and she could easily be perceived as Latino. As Sita and I continued our conversation, she describes other instances of mistaken identity. One time a colleague inquired if Sita could make her a mixed CD of her favorite Middle Eastern songs. Being mistaken for various other racial or ethnic groups happened to Sita so often that she is no longer phased by it.

Another participant, Varesh, an Indian American in his late 20’s who I placed as a six on the skin color scale, described his experience at a diverse Brooklyn elementary school:

“Playing basketball during lunch time, there were always two teams – white team and black team. All the white kids would be on the white team and all the black kids would be on black team. And when it came time to choose me, the white kids would say that I was black and I should be on the black team.”

Varesh’s dark skin color signaled his non-White background and possible Black identity. It is unclear if his white classmates actually understood him as Black. The relegation to the Black team frustrated him because he was not Black. At the same time, Varesh confessed that even though he was not White, he would have preferred to be on the White team. He interpreted his feelings back in high school as a reaction to the negative stereotypes attached to Black men. If Varesh had been a three or a four on the skin color scale, would he still have been perceived as Black? He voiced further in the interview that he rarely gets misidentified as Black as an adult. He is more likely to be
mistaken for Latino or Middle Eastern. Segregated friendship circles and sports teams were a common context that revealed to South Asians their ambiguous racial perception. Skin color plays a central role in that perception.

**On-going Ambiguity**

Perceived ambiguity is an on-going part of South Asian racial experience. A clear example of this occurred while I was interviewing Shane (Indian American, Hindu, male, late 20s, and five on the skin color scale) at a local Starbucks:

*An older black man interrupts us and says, “Hey, you look like Tony Parker” to Shane. He jokingly asks, “Are you related?” Shane replies smiling, “Nah.” They proceeded to talk about NBA finals that took place a few weeks back between the Miami Heat and San Antonio Spurs. (Tony Parker, a professional basketball player on San Antonio Spurs, has a racial background of half-white and half-black.) After their conversation, I ask Shane, “Do you look like Tony Parker?” Shane shrugs his shoulders and replies, “No. I don’t think so.” I probe him more on why he was asked that question. Shane is quiet and I can tell he is searching for an answer. “You know this happens to me. Like this summer, I have been out in the sun a lot, so I think because of that people sometimes think I am Hispanic or... something.”*

My interview with Shane, in particular, demonstrates the routine experiences of mistaken identity for South Asians. The fluctuation of skin color across seasons also changed how others perceive South Asians. Shane pointed out that during the winter, he is more of a three on the skin color scale. When his skin color is lighter, Shane is less likely to be
mistaken as bi-racial Black or Hispanic. The frequency of that misidentification goes up as he gets darker. Context also matters for how South Asians are perceived by others. In contexts where there are proportionally greater South Asians, others correctly identified participants as South Asian.

Similar to men, South Asian women also continue to be confused for other racial groups due to their skin color and hair presentation. Harpreet, a Sikh woman in her early 20’s and a two on the skin color scale, describes her experience:

“Just today walking to the office, I was stopped by Hasidic Jews asking if I am Jewish!”

Harpreet has long black curly hair and light skin color. Many Sikh women and men do not cut their hair as part of their religious practice. Harpreet's hair extended all the way to the middle of her back. Her long black hair and light skin color may have contributed to why she was perceived to be Jewish. The presentation of skin color in combination with other factors such as gender, hair length and texture, and religious practice all act as cues that signal a certain racial or ethnic identity over another.

**Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim**

Across skin tones, a common misidentification of second generation South Asians racial identity is Middle Eastern, Arab, and for some, Muslim. While these identities are not official Census racial categories, I include them in my analysis because my participants describe routine perceptions related to those identities. Literature is still growing in understanding changes to the Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim identities.
Garner and Selod (2014) indicate that growing Islamophobia is racializing these identities.

After the 9/11 attacks, South Asian men and women also began to be misidentified as Arab, Middle Eastern, or Muslim in the streets, in schools, and at airports due to their skin color, name, hair, and religious identity. In some cases, participants interpreted others treating them with suspicion particularly on trains and subways as an indicator of being perceived as Arab, Middle Eastern, or Muslim. In other cases, others told them they looked "Arab" or "Middle Eastern." While participants across skin tones had these experience, those with very light skin color expressed less frequency of this misclassification than their darker counterparts.

In addition to skin color, display of non-Christian religious markers or presence of facial hair influenced others’ perception of South Asians. South Asian with beards were more likely to be seen as Middle Eastern or Muslim. Mohammad (Bangladeshi, male, Muslim, middleclass) describes his observation when he does not shave:

“*It's really interesting but when I grow out my beard, people treat me different. They treat me more Muslim and less Asian.*”

Similar to Mohammad, other participants also expressed that their beard impacted others' perception of them. Sikh men, in particular, were overwhelmingly mistaken for Muslim, Middle Eastern, and Arab due to the combination of their skin color, beard, and turban. Unlike other South Asians, they were rarely misidentified as Black, Latino, East Asian, White, or European. This was also the case for Muslim and Sikh women who
wore head scarfs or turbans. Only four of my female participants covered, and all four were consistently treated as Middle Eastern, or Arab.

The Role of Skin Color

Skin color may play the most critical role in others’ perception of South Asians. Davish, a dark-skinned, middle-class, Indian man, was mistaken for Black by his future grandparent-in-laws. Davish and I agreed that he was on the dark end of the skin color scale hovering around a seven or eight. Watching him laugh during his demonstration of the grandparents’ confusion and eventual expression of relief, I inquired about the regularity of him being perceived Black:

Modi: Does this happen to you often?

Davish: Um, not that often. I’ve noticed that when I’m at Indian parties some auntie or uncle will do a double take just to confirm I’m Indian.

Modi: How about outside of the South Asian community?

Davish: No one has ever asked me are you Black. But they do ask about my background. And I’m sure they ask me because of my skin color. I fall outside of the normal skin color parameters of the Indian community.

Me: What do you mean?

Davish: Let me show you. Can you bring up that scale of yours again? (I show him the scale.) Okay. Typical Indians fall between a three and maybe five or six. When an Indian person gets passed a six, people aren't going to think he is Indian.
As Davish's response demonstrates, skin color is defining his racial experience. His dark skin color, according to him, places him outside of typical Indian presentation. Indeed, his experiences do seem to indicate that he is not easily perceived as South Asian by others including other South Asians.

Using groups of skin color ranges and tabulations of frequent misidentifications as indicated by my participants on the questionnaire, I find broad patterns of misidentification of South Asians. Those with dark skin color (ranging from 7 to 10 on the Massey and Martin scale) have been mistaken for Latino/Hispanic, Muslim, Middle Eastern/Arab, South Indian, or Black. Those with medium brown skin color (ranging from 4 to 6 on the skin color scale) have been mistaken for Latino/Hispanic, Muslim, Middle Eastern/Arab, South Indian, or Native American. Finally, those with light brown skin color to white skin color (ranging from 1 to 3 on the scale) were more likely to be perceived as white, Latino/Hispanic, Middle Eastern, Muslim, Persian, Italian, Spanish, Italian, or Jewish. Consistent with interview data, the most common mistaken identifications are Latino/Hispanic, Middle Eastern/Arab, and Muslim.

The three most infrequent perceptions were White, Black, and East Asian. Only three participants (one light-skinned brown-haired Pakistani male, one biracial white/Indian female, and one light-skinned brown-haired Indian/Sikh female) regularly are perceived as white. A handful of participants, including the ones described above, had experiences of being viewed as Black but not consistently. One Sikh male participant with light to medium brown skin color while walking through a Black neighborhood received affirming words from a few of the Black men on the street. However, it is not
clear from the participant interview if they recognized him for Black or someone they could relate to in another way. Another participant, a dark-skinned, Pakistani man, was mistaken for Black by police officers. An Indian female, with dark brown skin color has had others identify her as Guyanese or Trinidadian. This participant was not sure if she was identified as black Guyanese/Trinidadian or South Asian Guyanese/Trinidadian. None of my participants were mistaken for East Asian but they did acknowledge that official institutions such as schools identified them as Asian.

Conclusion

Racial ambiguity and mistaken identity are central to the racial experiences of South Asians. The color of their skin (and other features such hair, gender, and religious markers) leads others to identify South Asian participants across a wide variety of other racial and ethnic identities. The two most common misclassifications are Latino and Middle Eastern. White, Black, and East Asian are the three most infrequent misclassifications. This experience is not only unique to South Asians, but also to brown-skinned people who are routinely mistaken for each other.

Based on these results, I argue that South Asian racialization is part of a growing racial construction of ambiguity. South Asians rarely read as clearly White or Black in their lived racial experiences. This is due to the unique historical and on-going construction of the White and Black racial categorizations. The goal throughout U.S. history has been to maintain White racial purity through anti-miscegenation laws and
segregation (Lee 1998; Ngai 2004). Black racial construction is based on the "one-drop" rule that operates to distinctly demarcate Blacks based on ancestry and color (Davis 2010). Those that break rules of Whiteness and Blackness, such as South Asians, then are relegated to a third space that is constructed around ambiguity.

As the children of new immigrants grow up in the United States, they come to learn the ambiguous nature of their racialization. The experiences of second generation South Asians reveal the routine and on-going presence of that racialization in daily life.
Chapter 5: “Sir, It's Random”

Model Minority or Terrorist?

Sitting across from me at an Au Bon Pain on the western edge of Manhattan, Bilal is scrolling through his phone looking for a picture of an old boarding pass he saved from a recent international trip. We were discussing the impact of the 9/11 attacks on his life. It was lunchtime and the tables around us began to fill up with young professionals from surrounding offices. Bilal, a young professional himself, works in the creative industry. He is dressed fashionably, in all black. His half-sleeve dress shirt is buttoned all the way up to his collar. Bilal comes from a Pakistani, Muslim American family. He and his siblings were born in the United States and his parents are naturalized U.S. citizens. The first thing I noticed about Bilal was his skin color and his neatly trimmed beard. As with all my participants, I mentally noted Bilal's skin color during the first few minutes of our meeting, using the skin color scale on my iPad as a reference. I placed him as a five or six on the scale. Later, Bilal confirms my assessment when he selects a five for himself on the scale.

“Found it!” Bilal turns his phone towards me and shows me the picture of a typical airline boarding pass. “Do you see the S’s?” he asked. As I scan the boarding pass again, I see printed under his name, are four S's in bold capital letters: “SSSS”. I acknowledge to him that I see them. Putting his phone back in his pant pocket, Bilal explains his theory behind the S’s.
Bilal: Every time I go to the airport and print out my boarding pass, I have the four S's printed on my ticket. And that means I am going to be searched by airport security. Without a doubt, it happens every single time.

Modi: Do you know why you get selected?

Bilal: “It’s because I’m Muslim. They say it’s random. They always say it’s random. But it’s not. Look at me. I’m brown and I have a beard. So I’m basically a terrorist.” (Bilal says the last sentence sarcastically. His frustration is palpable.)

Bilal’s experience highlights the changing racialization of South Asians after the 9/11 attacks. The change in racialization for many South Asians was overnight. As one Indian participant put it: “On September 10th, I was invisible, and on September 11th, I was a terrorist.” Part of the terrorist stereotype has to do with skin color. Post-9/11, brown skin color is exceedingly being attached to a stereotypical image of terrorist. Other markers such as beard, turban, head scarf, and name have also been attached to that image. This new racialization exists alongside other longstanding images of South Asians as model minority, foreigner, exotic, and spiritual.

Participant interviews and observations point to shifting racialized treatments of one extreme, model minority, to another extreme, terrorist, across social settings and skin tones. Participants were targeted based on various stereotypic images associated with identities of Muslim, Latino, Black, South Asian, or immigrant in public spaces. Simultaneously, my participants also experienced treatments of “model minority” in the contexts of school and workplace. Due to these shifting and contradictory racialized
treatments, second generation South Asians describe experiences of discrimination and profiling as frustrating, stressful, and unpredictable.

Literature on discrimination finds that racism has become relatively subtle, as overt discrimination is declining or gone in hiding (Bonilla-Silva 2006). The impact of this new “discrimination with a smile” only becomes apparent by examining aggregate level outcomes. Underdeveloped in discrimination literature is the role of context in shaping the type, the frequency, and the experience of every day forms of discrimination. The results of South Asian experiences show that when racialized identity is ambiguous, context matters.

Background

Controlling Images

Minority groups such as Asians, Latinos, or Blacks, face subtle to overt discrimination due to the prevalence of stereotypical images of these groups in larger society. Stereotypical images can play a part in microaggressions at the interpersonal level or, for instance, educational inequality at the group level. Patricia Hill Collins (2008) calls these pervasive and potent stereotypes controlling images for their part in justifying inequality and racism. In the next section, I review three controlling images of Asian Americans: foreigner, model minority, and terrorist. These simultaneous narratives are relevant for understanding the diverging experiences of South Asians.
Controlling Image: Foreigner

For Asians Americans, the most common controlling image is that of the foreigner. Asian Americans, despite generations in the United States, are perpetually perceived and treated as foreigners (Tuan 1998; Kim 1999; Purkayastha 2005; O'Brien 2008; and Chou and Feagin 2008). For instance, Tuan (1998) finds in her work that even third and fourth generation Japanese and Chinese struggle to be seen as American.

The association of Asian with foreignness began over a century ago, with restrictive anti-Asian immigration and naturalization laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, Gentlemen’s Agreement, and the Asiatic Barred Zone Act (Ngai 2004). By 1924, the United States government barred all Asians from entering into the country. This would last for four decades before liberalization of immigration policy. The passing of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 reinstated immigration from Asia but with a preference for highly skilled Asians. To this day, Asians continue to be targets of nativist anxieties. After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government mass deported thousands of South Asians and Middle Easterners even those with permanent resident status (Maira 2005). Furthermore, adult males from countries with Muslim populations such as India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan were required to register upon entering the United States (Chishti and Bergeron 2011). These ongoing tactics of restrictions on immigration and naturalization on Asians artificially keeps their numbers low in the United States and perpetuates their image as foreigners.
The “forever foreigner” image with its strong links to immigration also enables negative character associations such as untrustworthy, unassimilable, and backwards. With these associations, the controlling image of foreigner can have serious implications. The image can result in subtle and overt forms of racism such as offensive comments, hate crimes, and restricted occupational mobility. In fact, Chou and Feagin (2008) document the daily forms of discrimination Asian American youth face at school and in public places due to being perceived as foreign. Bullying in and outside of school is by far the most common.

Phenotype is the obvious signal for foreignness. Those who have non-white phenotypic features are assumed to be immigrants and not American citizens. Even those who are naturalized citizens, lived here for multiple generations, and lost ethnic specific cultural markers cannot escape the treatment of foreigner (Tuan 1998). This is unlike the experience of third and fourth generation Italians or other White ethnics (Alba 1985; Waters 1990). Alba (1985) systematically shows that later generation Italians are no longer treated as foreigners because they are white.

**Controlling Image: Model Minority**

Along with the foreigner image, the controlling image of “model minority” also exists for Asian Americans. Tuan (1998) describes “model minority” stereotype as someone who is “high achieving,” “highly motivated,” “hard working,” and “does not complain.” Both Tuan (1998) and O’Brien (2008) explain how many of their Asian participants and some Latino participants felt that they had to choose between the “model minority” identity or be seen as “lazy.” Wu (2002) and Chou and Feagin (2008), in
particular, discuss the dangers of this model minority label since it stereotypes Asian
American experience, covers up routine stigma experienced by Asians, and becomes a
false standard by which other ethnic and racial groups are judged. For instance, Vijay
Prashad (2000) in *The Karma of Brown Folk* discusses the dangers of Indians embracing
the “model minority” characterization since it perpetuates the image of Blacks as
problems. Moreover, it eclipses the disadvantaged backgrounds of other Asian groups
such as Cambodians or Bangladeshis. The label promotes American idealism of “rugged
individualism,” that is anyone who works hard can make it in the United States. This
idealism can obscure the fact that certain groups experience structural advantages that
help them along the way while other groups experience systematic discrimination that
holds them back.

It is well documented that the “model minority” image solidified with the influx
of highly selected professional Asians, with the passing of the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act
(Ngai 2004; Wu 2002; Chou and Feagin 2008). The high skilled Asians had professional
backgrounds in medicine, engineering, science, and math. Their overwhelming
occupational and economic success over a short period of time in the United States gave
the model minority image prominence. Neglected in this “American Dream” story was
the fact that they brought with them economic, educational, and social capital that eased
their transition in U.S. (Alba and Nee 2009). In addition, they benefitted from many of
the informal and formal successes of the Civil Rights Movement (Alba and Nee 2009).

South Asian groups, in particular Indians, have been situated in the paradigm of
“model minority” due to their high levels of education and income and their noticeable
presence in the tech and medical fields. In part, the first generation has passed on these
advantages to their native-born children in the United States. However, not all South Asians groups come from privileged backgrounds. Currently, Bangladeshis are one of the poorest immigrant groups in New York City (Asian American Federation 2013). The second generation children of more disadvantaged South Asian groups struggle with mobility and on-going discrimination (Maira 2005)

**Controlling Image: Terrorist**

The 9/11 terrorist attacks transformed the identities of Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians in U.S. Muslims and Muslim seeming groups are marked as “terrorist” and suspect of anti-American behavior. Hate crimes against Muslims and those perceived as Muslim increased exponentially soon after the attacks and have not returned back to their pre-attack numbers (FBI Hate Crime Statistics, 2013).

In addition to these assaults, Muslim communities and communities perceived to be Muslim have also experienced an increase in policing and racial profiling in various public spaces such as airports, college campuses, and places of worship. For instance, in February 2012, it was revealed that the New York Police Department had been engaging in the surveillance of Muslims in New York City and New Jersey (and possibly beyond) over the past decade (Fisher 2012). The surveillance included gathering data on and photographing businesses, community centers, and places of worship that Muslims frequented and owned. The NYPD also kept tabs on Muslim students on college campuses all along the Northeast. Moreover, a poll conducted by Quinnipiac University revealed that New Jersey and New York residents approved of the actions by the NYPD (NYDailyNews.com 2011).
Skin color and other physical features play an integral in identifying “terrorists.” Law enforcement and civilians use biological/phenotypic cues such as “brownness” and “darkness” to profile and racialize Muslim communities. As a result, South Asians of various religious and nationality backgrounds have been targeted because they are perceived to be “Muslim” due to their “brown” and “dark” skin color. Kibria (2007) notes that “[i]n the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, South Asians were targeted victims of hate crimes and other hostilities because of the perception of their physical resemblance and thus presumed shared origins and affinity with the terrorists” (Kibria 2007: 620). Over the past decade, there have been numerous accounts of Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, and Muslims with South Asian ancestry who experienced various forms of threats and assaults. The two notable recent cases are of the mass shooting at a Wisconsin-based Sikh temple by a white supremacist in 2012 and the murder of a Hindu Indian in a New York City subway, also in 2012.

While the above accounts come from popular media, recent qualitative research also captures South Asians experiencing covert and overt forms of discrimination associated with the 9/11 attacks (Purkayastha 2005; O’Brien 2008; Chou and Feagin 2008; Maira 2009). These interviews detail South Asian experiences of being called a “terrorist,” dealing with racism, and being treated with suspicion. In particular, Maira (2009) shows realities of South Asian Muslim youth in New York City, who grapple with issues of mobility and discrimination due to the changing nature of their racialization.
Situational Context

While all three controlling images of foreigner, model minority, and terrorist are relevant, social setting is integral to deciphering when those images are attached to certain phenotypic presentations. Social setting, in particular, is crucial for the discrimination and profiling experiences of groups perceived as racially ambiguous.

The previous chapter outlines the many markers of gender, color, and religion others (namely non-South Asians) use to pin down the racial background of those who present as ambiguous. The social setting also offers clues as to how to identify and treat those individuals. Examining data from Wave 1 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Harris and Sim found that context affected the racial identification of three separate multiracial groups (white/black, white/American Indian and white/Asian) (2002). Specifically, they looked at region (to serve as “a proxy of ideology, racial diversity and the history of intergroup relations”), neighborhood racial composition and presence of family members during home interview. These contexts affected self-racial identification for all three groups more than did age, sex and socioeconomic status.

Moreover, Harris and Sim (2002) point out that “racial classification can differ not only among nations and historical periods, but also in the day-to-day lives of individuals”. This perspective elucidates the idea that a person may have “multiple context-specific racial identities”. Space and race, thus, interact and co-construct racialized meanings (Neely and Samura 2011).
Results

Skin color and the types and frequency of discriminatory treatment did not always align for my participants. Context and other markers also play a part in how others treat South Asians. Sikh men with turbans and beards, Hindus, and Christians, all of who were light skinned and upper class, expressed the most consistency in treatment. The latter group recounted a handful of microaggressions over the year while the former group described routine overt discrimination. For groups with other combinations, the experience was more unpredictable. Nonetheless, those on the darker end of the skin color scale expressed more incidents of discrimination than their lighter counterparts across all combinations of religion, gender, and class. Over the next section, I illustrate the varied and shifting racialized treatment of second generation South Asians as they move about in their daily life. From the subway to the streets to work to airports, my participants as a whole experienced the gamut in discrimination and profiling. The variability in experience, I argue, adds to aggregate feelings of uncertainty and frustration.

Treated as Foreigner and Exotic

Because of their brown skin color and racial ambiguity, others do not perceive South Asians as American. Similar to other non-white immigrant European groups in the United States, second generation South Asians are routinely questioned about their ancestry. The experience of foreignness existed across all social setting. Rena (Indian American, early 30’s, Hindu) with a shrug of her shoulders acknowledges:
“Oh yeah. All the time. It’s so annoying. You know I’ll meet someone at a party or at work and they will ask where I am from. And I know they want to know where I’m really really from. But I like to mess with them first so I’ll say New Jersey. Cause I AM from New Jersey. Anyway but most of the time, I just say what they want to know: I’m from New Jersey but my parents are from South Africa and India.”

Questions about ancestry are by far the most common of the experiences South Asians have, which they share with other minority immigrant communities. As a result, even though my participants identify with being American, they know that others do not see them as American in the United States. Interestingly, when asked how do they know they are American, participants give examples of traveling abroad to South Asia or other parts of the world and being treated as “American.”

Some Sikh men and Muslim women, in particular, faced subtle to overt claims of foreignness due to their religious presentation. Before being able to grow a beard, young Sikh boys stood out with their turbans. Even other young children did not associate the turban with American. As their beards grew in late adolescence, young Sikh men began to be seen even more as foreigners. A participant points out that the beard relates to an image of not modern but traditional, which then further signals foreignness. Similarly, Muslim women who wore headscarves were constantly treated as newcomers.
Related to the image of foreigner, South Asian women had routine experiences of exoticization and sexualization due to assumed foreignness and their skin color. Mindy, a Pakistani upper-class woman in her 30’s, aptly describes the treatment:

“When I get intimate with some men they will point out my skin color and say how much they love it. (pause) And sometimes they do not even have to say anything but you can still tell they don’t just see you as a person but are fixated on part of you... your hair, your culture, your skin color... you know.”

This type of exoticization became tiring for Mindy and impacted her dating life. She stated in her interview that she was taking a break from white men. Overall, the treatment as exotic and foreign for all South Asians is largely due to their non-white skin color.

Model Minority or Terrorist?

Before 9/11, second generation South Asian experience was one of invisibility and othering, similar to other minorities with immigrant family backgrounds. Seen as Asian in official institutional settings such as schools and having upwardly mobile parents, second generation South Asians became swept into the “model minority” stereotype consistent with the experiences of other Asians groups. After 9/11, second generation South Asians also experienced racialization as “terrorist.” The social setting mattered in determining if a South Asian was a “model minority” or a “terrorist.”

A clear example of this shifting in racialization is demonstrated by Karim. Karim, a middle-aged, second generation Pakistani American, is a physician and lives in an
affluent neighborhood in New Jersey with his wife and two children. At work, Karim is well respected, as he shares:

“In the hospital, attendings, nurses, and patients treat me with a lot of respect. They see me as an authority in my specialty. The patients hear my last name and they don’t care. They listen to me and are compliant.”

Karim’s last name is a quintessential Muslim last name, and one that is shared by thousands of Muslims around the world. From his interview, it is clear that Karim’s Muslim background does not impact how others treat him at work. Others view him as smart and knowledgeable. In many ways, this treatment is consistent with that of “model minority.” Karim is one of many South Asian doctors from various backgrounds at his hospital.

In contrast, Karim explains he is treated very differently at the airport. Despite his light complexion (a three on the skin color scale), his Muslim last name triggers suspicion and scrutiny regularly from TSA officials:

"I travel three or four times a year for conferences and vacation with my family. Every single time, TSA gives me trouble. I have to incur extra pat downs and baggage checks. It is very frustrating and also humiliating. Sometimes I am traveling with my colleagues and they see what is happening to me. If this happens once in awhile then it’s no big deal. But when it happens every time, I worry that my colleagues will see me as a liability or lose trust in me. I complain to TSA each time but nothing changes. The experience is also scary for my wife and children. Recently, we
took at trip to Europe for a family vacation. The customs security at Newark interrogated me for two hours in a separate room. They took my passport, wallet, and cellphone. My family could not reach me. My wife did not know where they took me. They just waited outside for me.”

TSA officials profile Karim as a potential terrorist due to his last name. He is subjected to extra scrutiny compared to other travelers. Karim’s treatment at the airport as a “terrorist” is in sharp contrast to his treatment as a “model minority” at the hospital. The shifting racialized treatments are jarring for Karim. He worries the depiction of him as a potential "terrorist" at the airport will influence how his colleagues treat him at work.

**Interactions with Authority**

The shifting of racialization across settings is not unique to Karim. This is a common occurrence in the lives of second generation South Asians. Dolly, an Indian American college student and a four on the skin color scale, demonstrates the significance of context as she describes her interaction with local police:

“I'm driving home late from her boyfriend’s home one night and a cop stops me speeding. He walks up to the car window, takes a look at me, and looks surprised. He starts questioning me, 'Were you just going home from the library? Do your parents know that you are out this late?' I just go along with it and he lets me go without a ticket!”

To make sense of the police officer’s reaction to Dolly, context is relevant. Dolly was driving near her college campus that night. The college that she goes to has a high
percentage of South Asians and Asian students. The officer assumes that Dolly is a student at the local college and treats her accordingly. The treatment is consistent with that of an Asian “model minority” as the officer references the library and the supposed worried Asian parents at home.

As Dolly and I speak further, it is clear that her treatment as “model minority” is not consistently positive across settings. Dolly shares that a year prior to the interview, she checked into the campus health center as a result of a sexual assault. She characterizes the nurse’s reaction to her assault as cold and insensitive. The nurse assumes that Dolly probably will not report the sexual assault because of the shame it will bring her parents. This assumption about Dolly is based on the "model minority" stereotype. In this setting, the treatment of “model minority” is negative.

Throughout my interviews, the significance of context is clear. As South Asians cross diverse social settings, their interaction with authority reveals shifts in racialization. Another participant, Laila (Indian Christian woman, early 20’s, and a five on the skin color scale) recounts moving to a Latino neighborhood. During an outing one day, she remembers the police harassing locals and asking for identification. Like the others around her with brown skin color, she too was stopped, frisked, and asked for identification.

However, skin color also matters in the shifting of treatment. South Asians with darker skin color focused more on policing in their interviews than light skinned South Asians. Usually this policing occurred on the streets, in the subway, and airports.
Hassan, a middle class Bangladeshi man in his 30’s, explained that police in the subway routinely stop him.

“They stop me and ask me questions about life. Where do I live? Where I am going? Then they ask to search my bag. It’s always the same.”

Hassan is on the darker end of the skin color scale. He does not have facial hair or dress in any particular way. The only aspect that would signal his supposed “criminality” is his darker skin color. Nonetheless, the context continues to be relevant as well. The subway stop where Hassan is often policed is located in a mixed Latino and South Asian neighborhood. The police use the location to not only police Latinos but South Asians, as well.

*It's Constant*

In contrast to the shifting and contextual racialized experiences of most South Asians, the racialized treatment of Sikh men with beards and turbans and Muslim women with headscarves is constant. No matters the context, these Sikh men and Muslim women are consistently bullied and harassed for resembling “terrorists.” They routinely face both subtle and overt aggressions in school, at work, and from strangers on the street. Sikh men, due to their beard and turban, expressed the most exposure to violent hate crimes on the streets by strangers such as being called a “terrorist” to being physically assaulted. Ravinder (Sikh/Indian American, 20 years old, working class) relates his experience from high school:
“Once I had my beard, classmates started to bother me. Like one time this kid in the back of the classroom threw a pencil at me. I went to the teacher to tell her and she did nothing. Another time, I was walking down the hall, and my friend... at least I thought we were friends... he like said like terrorist to me as I passed him. I confronted him and was like what was all that about. And he was like quiet at first and but said that I needed to watch my back.”

Being treated as a “terrorist” was so constant that even I witnessed it firsthand, as I interviewed Ravinder at a busy Starbucks in Queens. Most Starbucks locations in New York City have limited seating, and as a result, finding an open seat is rare. Knowing this, I came to the Starbucks thirty minutes early to secure a table and two seats for my interview with Ravinder. While interviewing Ravinder, a seat opened up next to him. For the next forty minutes, the seat would remain open. Many customers stared at Ravinder throughout our interview.

In my participant group, Sikh females and Muslim females who wore headscarves only experienced non-violent forms of discrimination related to 9/11. As can be seen, religious markers play a prominent role in the experience of discrimination of South Asians post-9/11.

**It’s Random, Sir**

As described above, for most South Asians, the type of discriminatory treatment shifted with the social setting. Some participants had dramatic shifts similar to Karim’s. Others experienced subtle shifts consistent with Dolly’s experience. In addition, the constant discrimination against Sikhs and Muslims also existed. These varying
experiences and shifts created feelings of uncertainty and insecurity for South Asians as a whole. Participants expressed worry in anticipation of going to the airport or possibility of interaction with the police. One participant indicated her fear that Indians would lose their “model minority” status due to the association with the “terrorist” stereotype. In sharp contrast, due to the inconsistent and variable nature of the discrimination, other participants denied the patterns entirely and waved off their personal experience as coincidental.

Adding to the general sense of uncertainty is the airport security mantra that South Asians hear repeatedly at airport security checks: “It’s random.” The marketing of airport security searches as random promotes stress and feelings of paranoia for those who are searched often, as illustrated by Bilal's account:

“After being pulled aside and going through one of their ‘random’ searches, I go to the gate and try to relax. The searches always upset me. Then out of nowhere, the airport intercom announces my name and requests that I come to the check-in counter. I’m totally confused by this and go over to the counter. The airline agent explains to me that airport security standing next to him needs to check my bags. I ask the security why she needs to check my bags, and she says that it’s random. I politely explain to her that I already had my bag searched by security. She just states again that it’s random. So now I am getting upset but I let her check my bags in front of everyone. And while she’s pulling out all my clothes and putting them on the counter, I am talking to her and saying, it’s my beard isn’t it.’ ‘I knew I should have shaved this morning.’ And again she says, “Sir, it’s random.” But I’m not buying it. I keep
asking her if it’s my beard. ‘Just tell me it's my beard so I know that I’m not crazy.’ Finally, she finishes and says to me, ‘Next time sir, you should shave your beard.’"

Bilal’s interaction with airport security highlights the stress that profiling and discrimination causes South Asians. Similar to Bilal, other participants also voiced doubts about the randomness of the airport security checks. They shared stories of family members or friends who are routinely pulled aside by airport security. However, some participants did see the searches as random because they have never been treated with suspicion. The disparities in experiences of profiling also intensify the sense of uncertainty for South Asians.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the inconsistency in frequency of racialized treatment, the shifts from “model minority” to “terrorist” across settings, and the variability in random searches at the airport reveal the diverging and complex racialization of second generation South Asians in the United States. Due to this contradictory and changing treatments of “foreigner”, “model minority”, and “terrorist”, South Asians struggle to make sense of discrimination and profiling post-9/11.

Central to the results of this chapter is the role of social setting. With perceived racial ambiguity of South Asians, context in combination with skin color and other racial markers often determine how South Asians are treated. The literature on discrimination
has not systematically investigated how the children of immigrants who are not White or Black experience discrimination.

Previous literature has also demonstrated that skin color plays a part in the discrimination of Blacks and Latinos. This chapter aims to add to significance of skin color by illustrating its role in the discrimination of Asians. Finally, the focus on the macro outcomes of discrimination eclipses the routine forms of discrimination that the children of immigrants face in their life. These routine forms of discrimination are not standard across all minority groups as noted in this chapter.
Chapter 6: Managing the Racial Middle

During the summer of 2015, Bobby Jindal, governor of Louisiana and also a second generation South Asian, officially began his campaign to run for president of the United States. His campaign slogan, prominently displayed on this official website, stated: Tanned, Rested, and Ready to Go. While we cannot know for sure if Governor Jindal is indeed tanned, *tanned* in his slogan nonetheless alludes to his darker skin color and reveals the complicated position of South Asian Americans in the United States. Due to their on average high levels of educational achievement on the heels of similar attainment by their immigrant parents, South Asians are characterized as a model minority. Governor Jindal, a dark skinned South Asian, intentionally uses "tanned" in his campaign slogan to appease Southern White voters with skin color terminology they can relate to while simultaneously distancing himself from communities of color.

W.E.B DuBois (1903) in the "Souls of Black Folk" describes the impact of the U.S. racial hierarchy and the positionality of Blacks outside of the American family on the Black soul. Almost one hundred years later, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) declares in "Between the World and Me" that race and thus racism for Blacks is a corporeal experience. Body and soul are often the sites where the consequences of structural level racism play out. In this chapter, I explore the corporeal and emotional management that South Asians engage in, as a product of the interaction between the U.S. racial hierarchy and the South Asian transnational system of colorism. In response to the racialized
experiences compounded by earlier gendered messages about skin color and upward mobility, South Asians reveal a view on skin color and race as manageable (and in some ways starkly different from the experiences of Blacks in the United States). The management processes among the second generation South Asians reveal the role of agency in managing the racial middle.

In previous chapters, I show that South Asians racial formation is impacted by both U.S. and transnational South Asian systems. They are socialized at home and in the larger South Asian communities to conform to skin color preferences that preserve the homeland linkages of caste and race. Simultaneously, South Asians come to learn that they have an ambiguous perceived identity in the U.S. racial hierarchy. They are routinely confused for other racial groups by others. Skin color becomes an integral way others try to make sense of their ancestry and race. The situational context and location also matter for signaling differing ascriptions to perceived skin color. With racial ambiguity come extreme stereotype association of model minority and terrorist for second generation South Asians. The messages about skin color heard in homes and communities found fertile ground as South Asian men and women participated in mainstream institutions such as schools and work places. The earlier “feedback” about “lighter skin” and “better life” now became important for the context outside of the home. Due to these experiences, South Asians learn to manage their physical and emotional presentation in the United States.


Background

Sociological inquiry generally aims to understand how larger structural processes impact group positioning. Studies that reverse the causal arrow reveal the impact groups can have on structural processes (Waters 1990; Mora 2014). These studies show that minority groups, in particular, are not merely passive recipients, but are actively engaged in efforts to change structural outcomes. The role of agency in immigrant assimilation and race relations literature is, however, largely underemphasized. Scholars that directly address agency do so in theorizing ethnicity (Waters 1990; Purkayastha 2005; Dhingra 2014). Agency is not seen as a major player in the positioning of racialized minority groups such as Blacks. Unlike ethnic identification which incorporates a level of choice, racial identity is an imposed identification (Waters 1990; Tuan 1998). Scholars suggest a third identification exists that is a hybrid of ethnicity and racial identity: racialized ethnics or ethno-racial group (Tuan 1998; O'Brien 2008). Research has not speculated the role of agency in the formation of ethno-racial groups. For ethno-racial groups, non-white phenotype such as darker skin color sets them apart from the quintessential ethnic experience (Fox and Guglielmo 2012). The understanding is that ethno-racial groups may have more agency than racial groups and less agency than ethnic groups.

In an effort to add to the literature on the role of agency for groups in the middle, ethno-racial groups, this chapter explores how second generation South Asians manage their racial experience. By focusing on how, I illuminate the mechanisms that connect South Asian management behavior to the larger processes related to skin color stratification.
Management of Self

Individuals can respond to and interact with larger processes through self-management. The management of self is theorized to occur at three relational levels: individual, interpersonal, and societal. The first is the internalization of persistent and wide-spread discrimination that leads to a double consciousness. In the Souls of Black Folks, W.E.B DuBois (1903) describes the experience of double consciousness as, "[T]his sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (2). The experience of double consciousness is not limited to Blacks. Other racialized groups also exhibit the tendency to internalize the standards of the oppressor. Chou and Feagin (2008) find that Asian Americans exhibited double consciousness as a consequence of the "model minority" myth. Their participants had internalized the "model minority" standards, and expressed stress in aligning with those standards.

The second type of self management is impression management during social interactions. Actors manage their self-presentation as a way to influence how others see them and treat them (Goffman 1959). Impression management is a technique to conform to norms of specific social situations and settings. Part of the management process also involves the management of stigma (1963). Goffman (1963) suggests that those who have visible or invisible stigma need to engage in extra forms of management to mitigate prejudice and social out casting. Some stigma management techniques include: denial, passing, covering, and emotional management.
The third self-management comes from excessive policing and surveillance from the state. Foucault (1995) argues surveillance becomes a central way to control in modern times. The controlling of state subjects and dissemination of punishment has become more invasive, private, and almost invisible. The exertion of power functions even more effectively due to this subtlety and invisibility. Under this constant gaze, state subjects internalize the dominant discourse and learn proper ways of behaving. For Foucault, then, the exertion of power then not only comes from the state but exists among state subjects to self-discipline and regulates others.

**Agency and Assimilation**

Traditional and segmented assimilation theories overlook the role of agency in integrative processes (Gordan 1964; Portes and Zhou 1993). By focusing on social boundaries, Alba and Nee's (2003) modified theory of assimilation allows for immigrant groups to have agency (as well as others (Wimmer 2008a). This new theory is less about a one-way process of losing minority immigrant ethnic culture and more about the process of becoming similar through changes in social boundaries between groups. Alba and Nee (2003) define social boundary as “a categorical distinction that members of a society recognize in their quotidian activities and that affects their mental orientations and actions towards one another” (53). There are three ideal-type boundary processes: boundary crossing (person moves from one group to another without changes in the boundary definition), boundary blurring (the distinction between group becomes less clear), and boundary shifting (boundary shifts to include a group that was once excluded). The degree of assimilation varies among immigrants due to institutional mechanisms
(customs, norms, conventions, and laws), individual actions for better life (which can lead to unintended assimilation), and network ties to ethnic community (Alba and Nee, 2003).

While this theory acknowledges agency at the individual level, the authors limit this agency within a context of larger societal processes. The individual’s actions for a better life are influenced by “proximate” pressures from social networks in the ethnic community and “distal” pressures from economic and political structures.

**Agency and Racial Divide**

Agency is limited in the movement along the racial hierarchy in the United States for racialized groups such as Blacks (Waters 1990). Racialized groups have little control on how they are perceived and treated. Race-based discrimination leads to social inequality that positions groups hierarchically. In the United States racial hierarchy, social dominance puts Whites at the top of the hierarchy above other racial groups.

Those in the racial middle may have more agency in their identity performance since they are higher up on the hierarchy (Tuan 1998). In chapter four, I situate South Asians in the racial middle due to their racial ambiguity. Scholars do show that those who are ambiguous are more fluid in their identity (Harris and Sim 2002) and find their identity to be more malleable (Smith 2014). Fluidity and malleability may be the mechanism that allows the racial middle to have more agency than the racial bottom. Nonetheless, the same factors that limit mobility at the bottom also constrains the agency exhibited and perceived by the racial middle. One of these factors is the imposed
racialization from the top that prevent equal access to goods (economic and social), services, and safety as the dominant group (Treitler 2015).

**Results**

In this chapter, I examine how second generation South Asians manage the racial middle as a display of perceived agency in response to on-going racialization and discrimination. Moreover, I attempt to draw a conclusion that the managing of the racial middle consequently contributes to the continued significance of the Black-White divide.

South Asians management of the racial middle is bifurcated by gender. While the management styles of men and women differ, they are not mutually exclusive of one another. There are male participants in my sample who manage skin color and female participants who manage their class presentation. The intention of the results section is not to indicate that men and women have completely different styles. Instead, the results reveal that women are more likely to manage their skin color and men are more likely to manage other aspects of their physicality.

**Gendered Management**

The management of the racial middle is a gendered process. In response to the racialized extremes of "model minority" and "terrorist" compounded by earlier gendered messages about skin color and upward mobility, South Asian men and women differ in their approaches to the management of the multiple aspects of their physicality such as
skin tone, facial hair, attire, and religious presentation. South Asian women were more likely to manage their skin color while South Asian men managed other aspects of their presentation.

**South Asian Women**

The burden of managing skin color fell disproportionately on women due to the global beauty industry, pressures of marriageability, and community-level desire to pass on light skin color to the next generation. South Asian women managed their skin color by staying out of the sun, wearing SPF, and using skin lightening products. In addition, women straighten their hair to look “more attractive” and “put together.” For example, my participant Devi who initially had ignored these messages from childhood states,

**Devi:** *But now I’m always worried about getting darker. Like a few days ago, I was going with my friends to Six Flags and I was like Ahh I need SPF or I'll get dark. (pause) I don’t know... I’m also worried about cancer so it’s that too. (laughing nervously).*

**Modi:** *Why are you worried about getting darker?*

**Devi:** *Because I just don’t like the way I look when I’m darker. I know I shouldn’t feel that way (nervously laughs). I just like the color I am now (touching her arm). (pause) People also treat me differently when I am darker.*

**Modi:** *Treat you differently how*

**Devi:** *Umm.. I don’t know.. just not as nice I guess.*
The practice of managing skin color related to the messages heard at home about maintaining light skin. Devi’s mother and grandmother routinely expressed their worry about her skin color. Now as an adult, Devi engages in efforts to stay out of the sun and wear sun blocking lotions. The management of skin color is an internalization of the South Asian skin color ideology that is rooted in caste and class hierarchies and also the U.S. racial hierarchy. When first generation parents disliked Devi’s darkening skin in summer, they connected her new darker color to backwards people from villages or to Blacks in the United States. The ideas around skin color and presentation of self extended to other experiences as well. For instance, Devi and I discussed the impact of 9/11 on her life. She describes what her parents told her:

"Coming home from school that day, my parents sat us down and told us to be careful. They said, 'Because of the way we look and our last name, people are going to think we are Muslim.' 'But you tell them you are not Muslim.' 'We are Jain.'"

South Asian anxieties about dark skin color and being treated different also related to new racialization experiences in the United States, such as being perceived as Muslim. Management of skin color, a tactic born out of the unique systems in the South Asia, was now useful in the United States for second generation South Asians as a way to minimize racial stigma and maintain status in the United States.

The higher prevalence of South Asian women managing their skin color than South Asian men relates to the gendered messages around skin color maintenance in the
South Asian community, the beauty industry that markets light skin color predominantly to women, and the global construction of beauty as White.

Not all of my female participants managed their skin color but a clear majority did in some way. Actual skin color did not correlate with those who managed and those who did not. Most managed their skin color by staying out of the sun and wearing SPF. Participants also used methods passed down from their mothers and grandmothers. Finally, a portion of women used skin lightening creams from South Asia. These women interacted with relatives from South Asia more or lived in neighborhoods with majority co-ethnics.

**South Asian Men**

Unlike South Asian women, South Asian men were more likely to discuss management techniques that did not involve their skin color. These techniques included a mix of impression, class, and racial management to appear less “Muslim,” suspicious, foreign, and working class. Men made efforts to have a clean-shaven face, dressing well such as wearing a suit and tie, and having pleasant socialness. For example, Sunil (Indian, Male, upper class) explains how he manages himself:

"There are times that I get on the elevator and I can tell white women seem nervous. To counteract that, I smile and say hello."

Sunil, to ease the discomfort of White women in his presence, over engages in forms of pleasant socialness to appear less threatening. This type of impression management is a tactic that many South Asian men use to mitigate stigma. I observe this type of
impression management first hand during my interview with Navneet, a second
generation Sikh American with a beard and turban:

Navneet and I are outside in his upper, middle class neighborhood in New Jersey. We are taking a stroll around the block with his young daughter, who is riding her bicycle a few feet in front of us. As we are walking through the neighborhood, Navneet makes a conscious effort to be friendly to everyone that passes us. He waves at a runner who zooms by us. He greets one women unloading groceries from her car with a hello, and family taking a stroll across the street with, "Isn’t a beautiful day.” Most respond to his greetings with a quick smile and look away.

Similar to Sunil, Navneet is also engaging in impression management to counteract any fears or anxieties his neighbors have of him. However, despite his American accent, the American flag on his lawn, and his American clothes, his neighbors are distant with him and never acknowledge him first.

Appearing less Muslim, Latino, immigrant, or Black is a way to prevent certain forms of discrimination. One of the most common ways South Asian men look less "Muslim" is by shaving their beard and reducing the presence of facial hair. Imran, a Pakistani man in his 30's, explains in his interview that he always shaves before going to the airport to reduce profiling and scrutiny from airport security.

While shaving is one clear way, others also manage their attire. The goals of attire management differ across settings. To prevent street and subway harassment, South Asian men manage their class presentation. Appearing more upper class can help reduce
attention from police. For instance, Mohammad (Bangladeshi, male, Muslim, lower class) relates,

“\textit{I used to get stopped a lot and sometimes I still do but now I try to dress nicer and I never carry around a book bag.}”

As Mohammad shows, changing one’s attire can influence how the police treat South Asian men. Some men also wear glasses to appear more Asian and less Muslim. Similarly, South Asian men also manage presentation at the airport. While dressing more upper class may help, more than likely it helps to be perceived as American as possible. Imran shares his technique:

"\textit{I wear my college t-shirt with sweats and flip flops. I make sure I shave. When I get up to the TSA security check, I smile to other passengers and try to strike up a conversation.}"

In this particular example, Imran is engaging in all forms of management. While it is clear that he is managing this appearance, he is also self-monitoring as a consequence of over policing of South Asian men who are Muslim or perceived to be Muslim. As Foucault describes, self-monitoring is an outcome of modern surveillance and policing that is constant and ubiquitous. Individuals internalize the surveillance and self-police. Imran self-monitors by behaving properly at the airport and diligently following all of rules of airport security.
Conclusion

These varying techniques used by South Asian men and women are a response to the racialized experiences they deal with in their daily life. In addition, these techniques may be an effort to escape and distance themselves from the ongoing harassment and persistent racism enacted on men of color particularly Black, Latino, and Muslim. Moreover, the management of skin color, facial hair, gender and clothing allows South Asian men and women to feel a sense of control in the otherwise unpredictable landscape of racial profiling and discrimination. Indeed, it allows them to manage the often chaotic and arbitrary nature of experienced discrimination and micro-aggression.

The management of self is also an internalization of the South Asian system related to caste and color. Due to the heavy policing of their skin color and bodies growing up, South Asian women are more likely to engage in efforts to manage skin color. The messages they received from transnational influences and the first generation stay with them as they navigate the U.S. racial hierarchy. While caste may not be relevant in their life in the United States directly, race and race relations are important.

The positionality of South Asians, as part of the racial middle and higher up in the racial hierarchy, allows them advantages to overcome certain barriers of racialization not afforded to Blacks. The results do not indicate if second generation South successfully manage their experience in the racial middle. However, the perceived agency that motivates their management is critical to understanding the racial processes at play in the lives of children of immigrants.
Chapter 7: “Brown Like Us”

The connotation of the use of brown with South Asians has vague beginnings. One of the first uses was in 2000 by Vijay Prashad, who titles his book, *The Karma of Brown Folk*. This book is an analysis of the positionality of South Asians in the U.S. race relations landscape. Prashad likens South Asians as the model minority solution that is used by the U.S. government against Blacks. Since the publication of his book, the South Asian diaspora has largely begun to self-identify as brown. What Prashad could not have foretold was that a year after publishing his book, the September 11, 2001 attacks would occur. Soon after, South Asians would experience a racialization that would shift their identity.

While previous chapters demonstrated the impact of skin color processes on the second generation, this chapter explores the ways skin color does or does not inform second generation South Asian racial and ethnic identity. The first part of the chapter updates earlier literature on South Asian identity with outcomes from data collected for this project. The second part examines how South Asians make sense of their racial identity. The last part attempts to understand how second generation South Asians deploy the identity of "Brown" in their daily life. Is their use of brown in response to the political racialization post-9/11, or the consequence of phenotypical assimilation into the changing U.S. racial classification system, or a continued expression of cultural identity exhibited by the first generation? Previous literature has found that second generation South Asians
express and understand their identity through a mostly cultural lens consistent with other ethnic groups in the United States (Purkayastha 2005; Dhingra 2007). However, this work has not systematically incorporated skin color in their analysis. Skin color does inform the identities of other groups such as Blacks and Latinos (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008) and may also matter for South Asian identity.

**Background**

**Significance of Skin Color**

Does skin color matter for the racial and ethnic identification of new immigrant groups who are not White or Black? Developments in this field of research do find connections between skin color and racial identification (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Quiros and Dawson 2013; Roth 2014; Dowling 2015; Joseph 2015). Darker skin color increases the likelihood of identifying as Black for Latinos (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). Lighter skin color, however, does not consistently align with identifying as White (Dowling 2008). This is because other factors such as discrimination (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Dowling 2015), language background (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Dowling 2015), immigration status (Morning 2001; Roth 2014; Dowling 2015), socio-economic status (Schwartzman 2007; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Roth 2014), and gender (Garcia and Abascal 2015) complicate the relationship between color and identity. Facing discrimination, for instance, may be connected to darker skin color. Golash-Boza and Darity (2008) find that the experience of discrimination alone impacts self-
identification. Latinos/as who reported having faced race based discrimination were less likely to identify as White.

The racial identifications of non-Latino Blacks also complicate the patterns on skin color. Unlike the outcomes of Latinos, the outcomes on skin color and racial identity for non-Latino Blacks is less variable. Due to the longstanding formal and informal use of the "one-drop" rule, Blacks of all hues, including bi-racials, identify as Black. Harris and Sim (2002) do demonstrate, however, that there is some change this pattern as bi-racial Black youth are starting to identify as bi-racial in some contexts.

As for Asians, very little research has been done to illuminate the role of phenotype and skin color for their racial identity. Similar to other groups, skin color does vary among Asians and sub-ethnic groups. South Asians, for instance, exhibit skin tones from very light to very dark. Despite fluctuations in skin color, scholars have neglected Asians in this field of research. This chapter aims to shed light on how skin color informs the identity of Asians who grew up in the United States by focusing on South Asians. How do second generation South Asians understand their racial and ethnic identity in relation to their skin color?

**South Asian Racial and Ethnic Identity**

Morning (2001) finds with the 1990 Census that Asian Indians who have acculturated are more likely to pick “Black” or “White” for racial identification than South Asian. However, with higher socio-economic status, Asian Indians are more likely to describe themselves as South Asian. Purkayastha (2005) suggests that it is this proximity to middle-class whites that may construct a non-white identity for South
Asians. Foreign-born Pakistanis, on the other hand, are more likely to select White than compared to Indians (Morning 2001). Morning (2001) also finds with her analysis that many foreign-born Bangladeshis select “Asian-Indian” in addition to the “other” category on the Census. Morning suggests that this borrowing of the Asian-Indian category may have to do with how Bangladeshis are perceived and the recency of the partition of the Indian sub-continent. If this was the case, however, then Pakistanis also would identify select "Asian-Indian" on the Census. Children of immigrant Indians also had various racial identifications but their identifications were consistent with their first generation parents.

In addition to self-identification, there is also variation in how the second generation is perceived by others. More recent work by Purkayastha (2005) demonstrates that second generation youth with Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Nepali ancestry are more likely to be seen as “black,” “Latino,” or “Muslim” than Asian. In particular, the perception of “Muslim” may be a likely outcome of national discourse after the September 11th attacks. Dhingra (2007) also finds that others view professional Indians in his study as racial minorities.

Religion is critical to the formation of racial/ethnic identity for some South Asians (Joshi 2006; Kurien 2007). Religious organizations for Indian Americans become a “group effort to provide support in an alien and frequently hostile environment” (247). The participation in ethno-religious organizations does not detract from participating in larger American institutions and provides a means for successful status attainment, such as with second generation Indian youth performing at high levels in schools (Kurien
The ethno-religious identity exhibited by South Asian Indians, Kurien (2007) argues is not symbolic but a reaction to a larger hostile white society. Similarly, Joshi (2006) stresses the role of a Christian hegemony in the United States in creating an “othering” experience for non-Christian Indians participants, particularly in the earlier parts of their life.

Finally, context may play an important role in ethnic identities of South Asians. Second generation Indian professionals perform a hybrid ethnicity that is determined by context of home, work, leisure, and civil society (Dhingra 2007). Religious space and family space also impacted the second-generation racial/ethnic/religious identity formation (Joshi 2006).

Overall, research on South Asian identity points to the relevance of socio-economic status, time spent in the United States, generation status, nationality, religion, and context. However, since this earlier work there has been tremendous change. For instance, Ann Morning’s (2001) work focused on the 1990 Census when the South Asian population was much smaller and majority foreign born. Just in the past decade from 2000 to 2010, the South Asian population has doubled (Hoeffel et al 2012). While the work of Purkayastha (2005), Joshi (2006), Kurien (2007), and Dhingra (2007) were able to examine second generation identity during the latter end of that decade, their research does not incorporate and study skin color. Scholars treat skin color presentation in the South Asian community as homogenously non-White. As such, they fail to see that in fact skin color presentation among South Asians is variable and can complicate their racial and ethnic identifications.
Asian and South Asian Pan-ethnic Identity

Skin color may also impact the already precarious pan-ethnic identification of Asians for South Asians. Despite being categorized under the larger Asian racial category on the Census, it is not clear if South Asians readily embrace the pan-ethnic label of Asian (Koshy 1998). For example, Kibria (1998) discusses the lower attendance of South Asian students at Asian American Studies events. At the same time, she notes that there have been instances of coalition building between some South Asian communities and East Asian communities such as with the case of the brutal murder of Vincent Chin in 1982. Okamoto (2003) states that Asian Americans form pan-ethnic organizations to attain these collective goods and create a supportive community within which to strategize about collective issues” (21). One reason for this inconsistency is the more recent categorization of Asian Indians under the larger pan-ethnic identity of Asian in U.S. Census compared to other Asian groups\textsuperscript{14}. The classification of Indians as part of the Asians category consequently excluded groups from other South Asian countries (Kibria 2007). Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and others are not explicitly listed on the Census. These groups must select the "other" category under the Asian category and then write in their country-of-origin ethnicity. The exclusion of non-Indian South Asians may prevent a more meaningful association with the Asian pan-ethnicity for South Asians.

\textsuperscript{14} The Association of Indians in America (AIA) successfully negotiated for re-classification of Indians from the “other” racial category to Asian Indians under the Asian category starting with the 1980 U.S. Census (Espiritu 1993).
Similar to Asian pan-ethnic identity, there has been growing speculation on whether the disparate South Asian groups are embracing the larger “South Asian” identity. For instance, the contentious relationship between India and Pakistan since partition in 1947 adds to the continued distrust between the two communities in the United States Kurien (2003) suggests that differing South Asian religious affiliations\(^{15}\) may also contribute to the ambivalence South Asians have for pan-ethnic connections.

Missing from this discussion is the role of skin color. Varying experiences related to skin color may also complicate pan-ethnic identification for South Asians.

**Larger Socio-political Context**

The larger socio-political context is critical for understanding racial and ethnic identification formation. The meanings attached to identity do not exist in a vacuum but are grounded in a larger context. Three contemporary socio-political events are relevant for second generation South Asian identity: the 9/11 attacks, the rise of multicultural ideology, and the growth of Latinos.

**September 11, 2001**

As described in earlier chapters, the 9/11 attacks may have transformed the South Asian identity and this transformation is likely linked to the rise of Islamophobia. The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported an increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes between 2004 and 2005, as well as processed nearly 2,000 civil rights complaints up 30% from the previous year (Esposito and Kalin 2011). The growing Islamophobia

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\(^{15}\) South Asians not only identify with a nationality but also have strong ethno-religious identities of Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist (Kurien 2007).
post-9/11 contributed to the racialization of differing groups by bringing them under a larger umbrella of Muslim (Garner and Selod 2105). South Asians have been absorbed into that racialization due to their phenotype signaling a perceived "Muslimness." In what ways does the post-9/11 racialization of “darkness” and "brownness" relate to second generation South Asian racial and ethnic identification?

**Multiculturalism**

The rise of multiculturalism post-Civil Rights Movement has become a central framework in incorporating newer minority groups into the United States. The focus has largely been on the celebration of cultural diversity and the importance of diverse representation (Modood 2013). Modood (2013) suggests that multiculturalism can assist in integrating immigrants as they can keep their cultural traditions and still be for instance, American. This framework often goes against the assimilationist framework that encourages minority groups including Blacks to shed their cultural differences and become White (Alba 1999). In addition, multicultural perspective minimizes the stratification and hierarchy of the U.S. racial system by emphasizing ethnicity.

Under the multicultural framework, Asians position themselves in U.S. racial system as a cultural ethno-racial group. South Asians, for instance, utilize the multicultural framework by strategically altering their ethnic identities across contexts of home and work to manage xenophobia and racial discrimination (Dhingra 2007). This framework also enables South Asians to form ethno-religious identities as well (Kurien 2007). Due to its significance, in what ways does multicultural frame work influence
second generation South Asian identity construction and understanding of their skin color?

*Growth of Latinos*

The growth of the Latino community in the U.S may also fuel the changing identity of South Asians. Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States. Their presence may have shifted the traditional Black-White divide into a tri-racial system (Bonilla-Silva 2004). With the "Latin Americanization" of the U.S. racial system, as described by Bonilla-Silva (2004), there is a growing racial middle that acts as a buffer between the Whites and the collective Black. The racial middle will incorporate multiple groups including South Asians and light skinned Latinos. This shared positionality may result in some shared racial experiences between Latinos and South Asians. Thus, the growth of the Latino community and the Latin Americanization of U.S. classification may impact second generation South Asian identity as well.

*Results*

The results of this chapter are separated into three part. The first part describes the racial and ethnic identifications second generation South Asians utilize in their life. The second part explores how they make sense of their ethno-racial identity. The final section investigates the ways South Asians deploy the identity "Brown" in their lives.
Part 1

Racial and Ethnic Identifications

Second generation South Asians use a mix of ethnic/national, religious, pan-ethnic, pan-cultural, regional, racial identifications as part of their repertoire in any given context. A racialized nationality identity in combination with American is by far the most commonly employed by the second generation. Racialized nationality identities are Indian/Indian American, Pakistani/Pakistani American, or Bangladeshi/Bangladeshi American. These are their go to identifications when others ask about their background. While in casual conversation with me most participants employed the racialized nationality identity alone, they were quick to assert that they are also American.

In addition to the racialized nationality identity, some South Asians also regularly use a racialized religious identity. This is mainly the case for Sikhs and Muslims. Second generation Sikhs overwhelmingly identify with the Sikh/Sikh American identity. Many Sikh participants either prioritized their Sikh identity over the Indian/Pakistani American identity or used both identities simultaneously. Similarly, Muslim participants also simultaneously employed both the Muslim/Muslim American and the Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi American identity. Hindus, Jains, Christians, Buddhists on the other hand did not use religious identity as part of their racial and ethnic identity.
toolbox. While their religious identities did play a role in their lives, the participants did not employ their religious identities when discussing their racial or ethnic experience.

South Asia specific regional identity is also relevant for second generation South Asians. Even though second generation South Asians have spent the majority of their life in the United States, many routinely use South Asia specific regional/ethnic/linguistic roots of their parents as part of their identity as well. Examples of South Asian specific regional/ethnic/linguistic identities are: Punjabi (from Pakistan and India); Gujarati (from Pakistan and India), Tamil (South India), Malayali (South India), Bengali (India and Bangladesh); Kashmiri (Pakistan and India); Pashto (Pakistan), etc. These categories, my participants explained to me, are normally only brought up in conversation with other South Asians.

Pan-ethnic identities such as South Asian and Asian are relevant for South Asians in the institutional/political context. Most participants only identify as Asian on official forms such as college applications, the Census, and in some cases, for political organizing. In fact, my participants only came to know they are Asian through participation in schools. For example, a few participants recall filling out forms in school where they had to select their racial/ethnic identity. Similarly, the term “South Asian” also comes up for participants in political organizing or an institutional context. In particular, older participants recalled that the term “South Asian” is newer to the scene and may have became prominent post-9/11. South Asian organizations began to use the umbrella term to build coalitions across diverse South Asian groups. One participant described the term as “PC”. “It’s the PC term to describe all of us – Indians, Pakistanis,
Bangladeshis…” Participants found the term to be useful since it was inclusive of all South Asians. While many did not use the term “South Asian” as part of everyday language, participants found it came up more than “Asian.”

Two inclusive terms that are more prevalent in everyday conversation are Desi and Brown. “Desi” is a colloquial term routinely used by South Asians to identify each other and the common cultural heritage shared by South Asians. Due to its use in Bollywood movies, this pan-cultural term is ubiquitous. South Asians all around the world are familiar with it. However, the term has had pushback in the South Asian community. A few participants convey their reluctance in using the term since it perpetuates a specific cultural image from India over other South Asian cultures. Brown has a more complex origin and a variable use in the South Asian community. I discuss Brown more in-depth in a later section.

**Part 2**

**Cultural Understanding of Identity**

The previous section details the numerous terms and categories South Asians use to indicate their racial and ethnic identity. The hyphenated racialized nationality (i.e. Indian American) and religious categories (i.e. Sikh American) were by far the most popular among South Asians. Through conversations with participants, I came to realize how they made sense of these identities. Participants understood their identity primarily in cultural and geographical terms.

To demonstrate, Mandeep (Sikh American, male, mid-30s) says:
“I’m not Indian. I’m Sikh American. Even though I may not be perceived that way... I can’t be anything but American. I was born here. I only speak English. This is my home.”

Similarly, Laila (Pakistani American, female, early-30’s, Muslim) states:

“American... Pakistani American... American Pakistani... all of them are very important. For a long time culturally I felt all I did was American. I mean that’s all I knew. If more Pakistanis were around then maybe I would have known but yeah American definitely.”

Since South Asians viewed their racial and ethnic identity as cultural, participants believed that identity was malleable. They could for instance pick and choose parts that they value and discard the parts they found undesirable. For example, Surya (Indian American, male, mid-30s, Hindu background) reveals:

“I am both Indian and American. I’m American because I don’t show off with money and material goods like the way Indians do. Who has the biggest house... the most expensive car. (Shaking head) I don’t do that. The ways that I am Indian are I take care of my parents. I know how to save money. Americans don’t do that.”

Others such as Aditya (Indian American, male, early 30’s, Christian background) feel that the combination of cultures was more an inevitable part of being second generation:

“You have a little bit of Indian culture and you have some American stuff and maybe your parents didn’t expect this when they came to this country. My parents probably thought that we
would just pick up the good American culture in terms of education and good jobs. But you get exposed to things they probably wouldn’t have wanted... like staying out late with friends.”

In terms of geography, participants discuss how their birth in the United States or outside the United States signifies their level of American identity. Participants also indicated that they were Pakistani, Indian, or Bangladeshi because they themselves, their parents, or grandparents were born there. The tracking of ancestry to the Indian subcontinent was important for South Asian identity. Even South Asians with parents who came from England, South Africa, or the Middle East identified most strongly with being Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi.

**Skin Color and Self-Perception**

While culture and geography are primary in how South Asians make sense of their racialized ethnic identity, phenotype, in particular skin color, plays a secondary role. For second generation South Asians, the relationship between racial and ethnic identity formation and phenotype (specifically skin color) may be implicit.

All of my participants had difficulty indicating how their skin color impacted their racial and ethnic identification. This is because they saw their identity related to culture and geography more directly. From light skinned to very dark skinned South Asians, skin color was not an obvious lens through which to understand their most common racial and ethnic identity of racialized nationality and/or religious identity such as Bangladeshi American. Moreover, the participants tended to select the same identities
as their own parents (the first generation). For example, Rena (Indian American, female, early-30’s, Hindu) explains:

“Uhhh. I mean I’m Indian because my parents are Indian. But I’m not Indian Indian like them. They are really religious and conservative. I’m more progressive. All their friends are Indian. They eat mostly Indian food. I mean I love Indian food but you know I eat other stuff too. I don’t know. [pause] Also of course if I look in the mirror, I look Indian.”

As can be seen, Rena only mentions phenotype only after discussing cultural and geographical aspects of her racial and ethnic identity. This excerpt highlights how second generation South Asians place skin color as a secondary source of their racial and ethnic identity. Rena's experience is characteristic of all my participants.

Part 3

Use of Brown

Second generation South Asians use the “Brown” category as part of their racial and ethnic identity repertoire amongst each other and other people of color. Participants across the skin color spectrum (from light skinned to dark skinned) use the term “Brown.” While few use it more exclusively, most participants use it in addition to other terms. Except for two participants, the rest of my participants (118 out of 120) use brown in some identifying way in their life. The term is most popularly used among the 1.5 and second generation South Asian Diaspora. The age of my participant also matters for the frequency and ease of use. Majority of my participants who are between ages of eighteen
and thirty-five use the term “Brown” regularly. Those in their late thirties and older have heard it being used in casual settings with other South Asians but do not always feel comfortable using it personally themselves. This may be a cohort effect since the term may have only begun to become popular as the number of South Asian students increased at colleges and universities. Participants explained that their first exposure to the term “Brown” occurred on college campuses. Majority of my participants used the term with other South Asians (as a result, also with me). Rarely did they bring the term up in front of Whites. However, participants did feel comfortable bringing up the term in the presence of Latino and Black friends.

Participants deployed the term "Brown" in many interesting and revealing ways. Three of the most common ways are: phenotypically, culturally, and politically.

**Phenotypically**

One of the most striking ways South Asians indicated their use of brown was to bring up their skin color. For example, Ritu, a Bengali American female, explains why she uses "Brown:"

“I don’t know. Everyone uses it. But I think it makes sense. We are brown (pointing to her arm). You can’t deny that. We’re not white and we’re not black.”

Similarly, other participants also indicated the obvious color of their skin in the reasoning behind using "Brown." The interview with Ritu demonstrates that color matters in U.S. racial identity, and my participants seem to indicate that to find their place in the United
States, they had to identify along color lines. Participants did not identify with the category White that their parents may have identified with in some instances (Morning 2001). Simultaneously, my participants also did not identify with Black. The lack of identification with Black may have to do with a long history of immigrants and the children of immigrants distancing themselves from Blackness and espousing anti-Black attitudes (Prashad 2000). According to my participants, "Brown" seemed like an appropriate identifier that accurately represented their non-white and non-black complexion.

**Culturally**

Cultural use of "Brown" was by far the most common use among South Asians. For instance, Tahir, Pakistani American male, uses the term brown interchangeably with South Asian, Pakistani, and Desi throughout the interview. When I ask him to elaborate on this use, he confirms my conclusions:

"Brown is all of us from the subcontinent whether you are Indian or Pakistani. You know like Desi. We have similar food and cultures. I also use it because I hate it when everyone always just uses Indian as the main group. I’m not Indian. I’m Pakistani but we all look the same."

As can be seen, Tahir is deploying "Brown" to indicate shared culture with other South Asians. At the same time, he is also wanting to use a more inclusive identifying term of "Brown" and not the dominating identity of Indian. Finally, Tahir points out that "Brown" for him is like the term Desi (a cultural term representing all South Asians).
Similar to Tahir, most participants found brown to be an extension of their ethnic identity that was situated in cultural expression. These participants did not identify with "Brown" as a potential official category of the Census or as a political identity as way to connect with non-South Asian groups. When I brought up the option to make "Brown" an official Census category, participants became uncomfortable and thought that move would be too racial and would minimize their unique heritage.

**Politically**

A smaller portion of my participants saw the utilization of "Brown" as a consequence of the current political climate. Particularly, they brought up common experiences of South Asians, Middle Easterners, and Muslims post-9/11. Moreover, these participants also indicated that brown colored groups were often confused for each other and thus the term brown can be unifying. Soniya, a young Indian American female who currently working in New York City explains her use of “Brown” after she uses it to describe her South Asian friends:

*Soniya: “You know brown people. They always gossip about each other. Its so annoying!”*

*Me: Who do you mean by Brown?*

*Soniya: “You know.. Indians.. Desis.”*

*Me: Do you include anyone else when you say Brown?*

*Soniya: “Just Desis.. Indian, Paki, Bangla.. you know”*

*Me: How about Latinos, Asians or Middle Easterners?*

*Soniya: (Shakes head no) “Well... maybe Middle Easterners.. but that’s it.”*
It is clear from Soniya’s interview that the term "Brown" enables boundary making with some groups being included in the “Brown” category and others being excluded. While Soniya is willing to include Middle Easterners, she does not make the same allowance for Latinos and Asians. Other participants did expand the term to include Latinos and sometimes Blacks, but this, as one participant explained, was based on “who else was around.” He clarifies:

“You can’t say brown for only South Asian when you are with a diverse group of people. Its just easier to say us all Brown folks.”

Participants agreed that "Brown" could at times be synonymous with the term “people of color.” The use of “Brown” then may signal a changing understanding of South Asian positionality in the United States and changing relations with other communities of color. The term seems to be a response to the traditional black/white dichotomy in the United States. It may also be in response to the common experiences of brown-skinned people. Many participants felt the term was applicable since brown-skinned people are confused for each other routinely.

Conclusion

Specifically, second generation South Asians understand their racial and ethnic identity primarily through the cultural and geographical lens. Skin color seems to play less of an obvious role as the source of their racial and ethnic identity. However, skin color may matter for their use of the identifying term, Brown.
South Asians have various ways they use "Brown" in their daily life. The most common use is culturally. South Asians often understand their identity as being culturally significant. The term "Brown" then becomes an extension of that understanding of their identity. The term also becomes an all-inclusive concept to represent the cultural similarities across South Asian groups. By limiting the use of "Brown" as a cultural identity, participants may have been distancing themselves from racialization by instead engaging in the multicultural framework.

While cultural understanding of "Brown" was the most common, phenotypic use was also present. Participants linked brown skin color with their use of "Brown" as something logical and obvious. As there are white and black people in the world, there are brown people. This pointing out of phenotype, however, was not linked to racial identity. I argue that this visual understanding of using brown may also be part of the multicultural framework. The idea that there are different hues of people in the world as there are different cultures in the world, and everyone should be celebrated.

Finally, a smaller portion of my participants understood "Brown" as a political identity that allowed them to be in solidarity with other people of color. The responses ranged from including only some non-South Asian groups to all people of color. Participants also saw Brown as a consequence of racial ambiguity and common racialization post-9/11.

Thus, the use of brown by South Asians signals both a shift in understanding racial identity as well as a replication of cultural identity that often creates distance from
racialization. The role of multicultural framework, the growth of the Latino community, and the racialization post-9/11 all are relevant for understanding the deployment of Brown by second generation South Asians.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

The Collusion of Two Systems

The study of second generation South Asians reveals the centrality of skin color in the racialization of new immigrant groups as they navigate the U.S. racial hierarchy. By using a cultural framework to make sense of adaptation and integration of newer immigrant groups such as Latinos and Asians, immigration scholars, policy makers, and advocates neglect the significance of skin color in that process. Nonetheless, the results of this study clearly show that skin color and other salient phenotypic features are meaningful aspects of immigrant life across generations in the United States.

Second generation South Asian racial formation is dually impacted by both the U.S. racial classification system and a transnational colorism ideology rooted in class and caste stratifications from South Asia. While previous research on Latino/as has shown that transnational systems of stratification have impact on the lives of first generation immigrants, my research reveals the enduring impact of such systems on the racial formation even for the second generation. The U.S. system does not work alone in its impact on new immigrant groups but works in concert with many transnational skin color stratification systems from Latin America and Asia.

Second generation South Asians learn early on that skin color matters for important life outcomes. Their parents, through routine matter of fact comments about color presentation, socialize their children based on colorism ideology from South Asia.
The South Asian skin color ideology is connected to class and caste stratification. Other transnational processes such as interaction with family from abroad and with respective co-ethnic communities in the United States, the importing of skin lightening products from South Asia, and the consumption of Bollywood reinforce lessons in the home about skin color. The skin color feedback that first generation parents give to their children is an effort to mitigate the experience of stigma and promote the status of their children in a new landscape.

Simultaneously, the experiences of skin color are complex and contextually situated for second generation South Asians in the United States. South Asians are routinely mistaken for a wide variety of other racial groups due to their phenotype. Darker brown-skinned participants are perceived as Latino, Muslim, and occasionally Black. The lighter skinned participants are at times perceived as Mediterranean, Spanish, or Jewish. Due to this misidentification, participants have varying and contradictory experiences of racial stereotyping and discrimination. South Asians across skin tones are more likely to be perceived as part of the “model minority” in school/work settings. Depending on the context and skin color, South Asians also experience vacillating treatment, seen as either the “model minority” or perceived as a threat or suspicious. South Asian men with facial hair and/or turbans, in particular, are routinely viewed as “terrorists”. Nonetheless, all participants unequivocally could not escape the treatment of “foreigner,” despite native-born status (consistent with previous research (Tuan 1998; Purkayastha 2005)).

In response to these unpredictable racialized treatments, second generation South
Asians heed the lesson from their parents that they can manage their skin color and presentation to gain status and prevent stigma. Men and women differ in their management styles. Due to the gendered transfer of skin color maintenance from both transnational processes and first generation family members, women are more likely to manage their skin color by using lightening creams and staying out of the sun. Men on the other hand manage their attire and facial hair to appear less Muslim, immigrant, and suspicious.

In contrast to how others perceive them, South Asians understand their racial and ethnic identity primarily through cultural and geographical lens. Skin color is not an immediate lens through which they understand their racial and ethnic identity. Second generation South Asians use a mix of ethnic/national, religious, pan-ethnic, pan-cultural, regional, and racial identifications depending on the context. However, skin color does play a role as South Asians come to understand their racial position in the United States, with the predominant use of the term “Brown” by my participants. The use of "Brown" also indicates they actively resist identification with White or Black racial categories and situate their experiences as outside of the Black-White divide.

These findings demonstrate the complex and diverging experiences of skin color. Literature often assumes that the experience of skin color is consistent across groups. Unlike the experiences of Whites and Blacks, experiences of skin color for children of newer immigrant groups reveals the ambiguous nature of their perceived identity, which is contextually situated. In addition, the findings demonstrate that skin color is a lever jointly utilized by both the U.S. racial system and the South Asian system in the
racialization of second generation South Asians. As a result, South Asians use both systems to process and manage their position in the United States.

The outcomes also indicate the formation of a racial middle and a tri-racial system. Due to their non-White and non-Black presentation, South Asians are racialized as ambiguous and take up various presentations based on skin color, other markers, and context. Racial ambiguity may be a characteristic feature of the racial middle. Those in the racial middle fluctuate the middle. They cannot fall to the bottom because they are rarely perceived as Black or similarly rise to the top because they are rarely perceived as White. In addition, the multiple systems are helping to form the racial middle and is not just an outcome of Black and White relations in the United States. Bonilla-Silva (2006) does in fact make these suggestions as part of his argument. However, his work minimizes the influence of color in that process for Asians. The United States is not only going through Latin Americanization but also Asianization of its racial system.

Finally, the results of this study also signal the continuing significance and influence of the Black-White divide. The Black-White divide is not waning but enduring in its influence as new groups are embedded along the racial hierarchy based on their skin color. Newer groups who are not clearly perceived White or Black are then shuffled into the racial middle, which is inherently racially ambiguous. Furthermore, those in the racial middle attempt to manage their ambiguous and shifting racial experience. The actual act of management reinforces the Black-White divide since it differentiates their experience from the consistent racial experience of Blacks and Whites.
Overall, the findings of this study expand current theories on the relationship of race/ethnicity and skin color and contribute to our understanding of the changing placement of the color line in the U.S. racial landscape. Future research studies may benefit then from a more complex operationalization of race and ethnicity as newer immigrant groups grow in size in the United States.
Appendix A: NIS Skin Color Scale and Description

from Massey and Martin (2003)
NIS SKIN COLOR SCALE

The New Immigrant Survey measured respondent skin color using a scale designed by Douglas S. Massey (one of the Principal Investigators) and Jennifer A. Martin (NIS Project Manager), based on an idea originally developed by Massey, Charles, Lundy, and Fischer (2003) in their work on the National Longitudinal Study of Freshmen.

The scale is an 11-point scale, ranging from zero to 10, with zero representing albinism, or the total absence of color, and 10 representing the darkest possible skin. The ten shades of skin color corresponding to the points 1 to 10 on the Massey and Martin Skin Color Scale are depicted in a chart, with each point represented by a hand, of identical form, but differing in color. The Scale was constructed with assistance from a graphic designer. The M&M Scale is for use by interviewers, who essentially memorize the scale, so that the respondent never sees the chart.

A facsimile of the NIS Skin Color Scale appears in Figure 1.

The Martin and Massey NIS Skin Color Scale was first printed in an appendix to the Field Interviewer Manual during the baseline round of the New Immigrant Survey. The Manual included the following instruction:

As you know, human beings display a wide variety of physical attributes. One of these is skin color. Unfortunately discrimination on the basis of skin color continues to be a reality in American life. Substantial evidence suggests that lighter skinned people fare better in a variety of social and economic settings than those with darker skins. In order to detect such discrimination, it is important that the NIS include a measure of skin color. We therefore ask interviewers to use the Scale of Skin Color Darkness as a guide to rate the skin color of each respondent on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is the lightest possible skin color (such as that of an albino) and 10 is the darkest possible skin color. Please rate the skin color of ALL respondents upon the completion of the interview, be they of European, Asian, Latin American, or African origin. It is very important that we obtain this information for everyone, not just those of obvious African ancestry.

It is important that you become familiar with the scale so that you do not access it during the interview. Respondents should never see the scale.

Users of the NIS Skin Color Scale are requested to kindly notify the NIS Project staff by emailing the Project Manager, Jennifer A. Martin (nis@opr.princeton.edu).

Suggested citation:
Scale of Skin Color Darkness
Appendix B: Survey for Participants
Please answer the questions below as best as you can. There is no right or wrong answer.

1. Please mark all labels that **YOU** identify with. You may mark multiple categories.
   a. White
   b. Asian
   c. South Asian
   d. Black
   e. Middle Eastern
   f. Desi
   g. Arab
   h. Indian
   i. Jain
   j. Brown
   k. European
   l. Jewish
   m. Pakistani
   n. Napalese
   o. Bangladeshi
   p. Christian
   q. American
   r. Sri Lankan
   s. Hindu
   t. South Indian
   u. Person of color
   v. African American
   w. Yellow
   x. Muslim
   y. Sikh
   z. Punjabi
   aa. Native American
   bb. African
   cc. Bhutanese
   dd. Sindhi
   ee. Hispanic
   ff. Spanish
   gg. Bengali
   hh. Gujarati
   ii. Malayalee
   jj. West Indian
   kk. East Indian
   ll. Indian American
   mm. Pakistani American
   nn. Bangladeshi American
   oo. Sikh American
   pp. Latino
   qq. Other
2. Please mark all labels that **OTHERS** identify you with. You may mark multiple categories.
   a. White
   b. Asian
   c. South Asian
   d. Black
   e. Middle Eastern
   f. Desi
   g. Arab
   h. Indian
   i. Jain
   j. Brown
   k. European
   l. Jewish
   m. Pakistani
   n. Napalese
   o. Bangladeshi
   p. Christian
   q. American
   r. Sri Lankan
   s. Hindu
   t. South Indian
   u. Person of color
   v. African American
   w. Yellow
   x. Muslim
   y. Sikh
   z. Punjabi
   aa. Native American
   bb. African
   cc. Bhutanese
   dd. Sindhi
   ee. Hispanic
   ff. Spanish
   gg. Bengali
   hh. Gujarati
   ii. Malayalee
   jj. West Indian
   kk. East Indian
   ll. Indian American
   mm. Pakistani American
   nn. Bangladeshi American
   oo. Sikh American
   pp. Latino
   qq. Other
3. What is your age?

4. Were you born in the U.S? Yes or No
   a. If no, then at what age did you come to the U.S.

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed thus far?

6. What is your occupation?

7. What is your relationship status? Single, never married, no children

8. How many siblings do you have?

9. What is the highest level of education your father completed?

10. What is the highest level of education your mother completed?

11. What is your father’s occupation?

12. What is your mother’s occupation?
NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 8 about Hispanic origin and Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
   - No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
   - Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
   - Yes, Puerto Rican
   - Yes, Cuban
   - Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.

9. What is Person 1's race? Mark one or more boxes.
   - White
   - Black, African Am., or Negro
   - American Indian or Alaska Native — Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.
   - Asian Indian
   - Japanese
   - Native Hawaiian
   - Chinese
   - Korean
   - Guamanian or Chamorro
   - Filipino
   - Vietnamese
   - Samoan
   - Other Asian — Print race, for example, Hmong, Lao, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.
   - Other Pacific Islander — Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.
   - Some other race — Print race.
Bibliography


