UNFAIR & NOT SO LOVELY:
EXPLORING THE DARKER SIDE OF GLOBALIZATION, THE MEDIA & INDIAN BEAUTY STANDARDS

by

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Abstract

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As the world continues to be more global and accessible, ideologies, values and thoughts can easily be transferred to different parts of the world. This is particularly done through the media and other related mediums. The concept of beauty is greatly influenced by the media and the media impacts a society greatly especially if a specific set of standards are deemed as "beautiful". As the media utilizes different mediums to showcase the "ideal" standards of beauty for Indian women, we began to see a problem arise for those who don't "fit" the standards. This paper seeks to examine what influence this globalization through media has on its audience and in particular, on their perspective of beauty. Additionally, through the use of an auto ethnographic lense, this paper deconstructs topics such as identity formation, culture and beauty.

Keywords: colonialism, colorism, beauty standards, stereotypes, cultural chameleon, identity, gender, race, culture, cognitive miser

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1.Introduction

Due to the rapid growth and the expansion of globalization in the current digital era, ideologies, thoughts and values from various places are more easily accessible globally, especially due to the media. Along with this, there seems to be a form of cultural standards that may be spreading to India, which is of Western beauty (Gelles, 2011). The media and other sources have the ability to showcase and influence the "ideal" standards of beauty for Indian women. Of course with this, we see the birth of narrow and rigid stereotypes.

Among these stereotypical media portrayals lay a number of misrepresentations of Indian culture that produces a false sense of reality for those who are seeking to know more about India. While many mediums such as social media provide the opportunity to diminish international boundaries and open up culture to a whole new level, it only suffices to provide a low resolution lense of reality and is limited to stereotypes.

This is particularly relevant to indian youth living abroad, who may rely on the media to learn about their country of origin. Many are building ideas about indian culture which ends up being stereotypical since mainstream media plays a significant role in carefully crafting societal expectations of beauty standards, ideals and even identity.

The media operates within the confines of a capitalistic economy, where they survive by producing content that their consumers digest. The more consumers, the more advertising. With that in mind, people used to rely on the media for news and news sharing. However, with the advent of social media and online sharing, things have started going 'viral'. Today, a lot more focus is given to producing content that is "viral friendly" to get as big an audience as possible. Increasingly, social media feeds are used to substantiate their own beliefs. Due to this, it becomes important to examine what impact

globalization has had on Indian women, and to explore whether this impact is shifting or not. To thoroughly understand this issue, there are questions that must be answered. The first is what Indian standards of beauty were historically and how they have changed. The second is what is the importance of cultural hybridity and how does it affect our notions of beauty and identity? The third is what role do networks and agencies have in resisting rigid standards and traditional ideologies plus allowing for the change in narratives? This paper will attempt to answer all of these questions and additionally, through the use of an autoethnographic lense, this paper will deconstruct four main topics which are identity formation, culture, beauty and the media.

2. Literature Review

Some of the ways that the media has influenced the ideas and notions of beauty is through utilizing conventional media and new emerging media platforms. Through my research I was able to summarize the methods that have been used by traditional media to circulate one dominant idea within a society and as the world evolves, how these traditional methods morph into conventional ones. The most reliable finding in the literature is that exposure to fair skinned media images makes women want to be fairer (Malik, 2010). Rather than simply being passive recipients of unrealistic beauty ideals communicated to them via the media, a great number of individuals actually seek out idealized images in the media (Malik, 2020). This showcases that there are opportunities to study and understand the role of mass media in impacting society's perception of beauty and notions of idealized physical forms (Malik, 2020). Several attempts have been made by individuals to resist against these rigid ideologies in relation to beauty, but with mass media peaking into our insecurities, there is an alarming number of mental health cases on the rise. According to Gelles, the obsession of fair skin in India can be attributed to India's long colonial history where multiple invasions led the people of India to believe that being fair skinned meant that you were privileged. This is because; oftentimes the invaders granted more liberty and offered special treatment to Indians who were fair skinned. However, there is also an ongoing debate, which states that there is evidence of fondness for skin in ancient scriptures of India where the concept of "light" portrays gods and goddesses and the concept of "dark" portrays negativity and villains. This statement does have some contradictions though and that is because some reputable gods of India are dark blue in color but are regarded as heroes.

3.Methodology

The methods I have used for my research are autoethnography, semiotic analysis and textual analysis. Since a large component of my research is aimed towards producing contextual real-world knowledge about the behaviors, social structures and shared beliefs of a specific group of people, I found that these methods combined are best suited for this approach. Autoethnography refers to a qualitative research method that offers a way of giving voice to personal experiences for the purpose of extending sociological understanding (Wall 2008). Since this type of methodology is less controlled and more interpretive, it allowed me to have ease of access to data since I was able to call on my own lived experiences and perception as a source to investigate a particular phenomenon. Furthermore, since I am employing strategies to interpret qualitative data, I found that by placing myself as an subject of research and providing personal stories, autoethnography helps to make contributions to the study of identity and culture.

Semiotic analysis refers to the study of the production, transmission and interpretation of meaning represented symbolically in signs and messages, primarily but not exclusively in language (Mingers & Willcocks 2017). This research paper presents a view of semiotics that provides some theoretical elements for bridging some of the gaps between cultural psychology and social representation theory. This is done, firstly, through an exploration of history and into the concept of 'representation' and, then, by exploring how semiotic action is able to produce signs of increased complexity which ultimately result in representations capable of supporting and communicating shared views of the world within a specific cultural community. Semiotic analysis has the advantage of enabling a richer analysis of texts by focusing on the visual communication

objective formal relationships, which to some degree account for differences in what, and how, images mean. (Bell & Milic, 2015)

Textual analysis is a method of data analysis that closely examines either the content and meaning of texts or their structure and discourse. Since the media is a large component of my research, by utilizing this method I am able to analyze the output of communication (messages produced by communicators). In terms of acquiring texts, outputs of communication are more readily available than transcripts, making this approach more suitable for my research. Through textual analysis, I am able to follow a step-by-step procedure in order to answer research questions and test hypotheses. This is considered an unobtrusive technique because it allows researchers to study texts that already exist (Frey, et. al., 1999).

Chapter 1: Media as Extension of Existing Cultures

Where Do Indian Standards Come From?

The expansion of the cosmetics industry in India and the introduction of products plus procedures can be linked to the fact that many Indian women have been led to feel insecure about their appearance (Mohan, 2016). It is believed that cultural changes such as urbanization and westernization can lead to many women developing poor body image, and an increase in cases of eating disorders (Chandra et al., 2012). While ten years ago, the cases of eating disorders were negligent in India, in recent years, the number of cases diagnosed have been on the rise (Lyons, 2019). While eating disorders may be diagnosed more frequently from an increased awareness of their existence, perhaps, these changes suggest that in India, beauty standards have narrowed and become increasingly constricted (Gelles, 2011).

Although the media is not the sole reason for the prevalence of these issues within the Indian community, the media does play a significant role in influencing certain beauty standards (Mishra 2015). The media, in its diverse forms, has become a powerful tool for construction and portrayal of the "shoulds, oughts, and musts" of a woman's body (Nagar et al., 2017). Advertisements and other forms of media are circulating and reinforcing modern beauty standards, which lead Indian women to admire and encourage themselves to alter their appearances in order to match the set standards despite it being harmful both mentally and physically (Gelles, 2011).

If we wish to explore whether or not Indian women have begun measuring themselves against international beauty standards, the first part of this chapter will dive into the historical evolution of beauty standards in India. Since all the texts from history are forms of media messages, understanding their influence requires revisiting history

and its biases (Puri 1999). The Vedas, the most ancient and sacred Hindu texts, are a form of media and have influenced, if not defined, Indian cultural norms for centuries (Mark, 2020).

The second part of this chapter examines colorism embedded in India's beauty standards. Skin color is an important aspect of India's beauty standards and people are very conscious of their skin tone. By examining the concept of colorism, we can begin to understand the cultural norms and values pertaining to skin color in India (Mishra, 2015). Colorism is a customary practice perpetuated by cultural beliefs and values, social institutions, and the media (Sims & Hirudayaraj, 2015). According to Sims and Hirudayaraj, "It is a phenomenon that affects women disproportionately where light skin tone is interpreted as beauty, and beauty operates as social capital for women" (Sims & Hirudayaraj, 2015). Author Lyda Hanifan referred to social capital as "those tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit" (Farr 2004). Basically, we can conceptualize social capital as the links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together (Keeley, 2007).

Women & Their Role in Society

The most ancient sacred texts of the Hindus, the Vedas or records of revealed truth, which go back to 1500 B.C.E., show us a society that had room for women to take part in religious and intellectual activities (Bose 2000). Through these sacred texts, which describe and prescribe women's status, privileges, and duties, it is suggested that women had led less subjugated lives (Bose 2000). According to Bose, this statement can be

further validated by examining the epic Mahabharata, estimated to be written during 4th century BC, and by the early Smriti literature, estimated to be written during 1500–1200 BCE, which prescribe detailed codes of conduct governing every facet of social and personal life for men as well as women (Bose 2000).

As society began to settle into the ruts of tradition, stricter rules were advocated under the umbrella of dharma to sustain order and maintain a strong social structure therefore, the burden of maintaining order within the family fell on women. (Bose 2000). Bose concludes the statement by saying that the amount of power and equality that was available to women during the ancient times began to disappear and in order to understand where the shift in power and equality occurred, it is important to understand India's ancient history and how the construction of identity and gender were (Bose, 2000).

Female Figures In Ancient History

The earliest images of female figures in India are from the Mauryan period, from the fourth to the second century BCE, and represent women with "large breasts, wide hips, and tapering legs."(Gelles, 1999). This representation continued in the Sunga period, during the first century BCE, where images from Bhartut portray women with "elaborately plaited" hair and "large round breasts, thin waist, and wide hips"(Gelles 2011). Half a century later, still during the Sunga period, images of women in Sanchi show bodies contorted into an "S‟ shaped curve" (Tripathi 2005). From observing these visual representations it is evident that the dominance of an hourglass figure was very prominent (Gelles, 2011). In addition, "thinness" is usually not a traditionally ideal physical characteristic for many Eastern cultures including India because being thin is

seen as sickly, indicative of poverty, and a lack of privileged upbringing (Nagar et al., 2017).

According to Puri, "in order to understand how women in current-day India conceptualize their gender and sexuality, we can look at various potential approaches to explore how the contemporary country state verbalizes and fortifies hegemonic and normalizing scripts of sex and sexuality" (Puri, 1999). One such perspective that constructs these scripts are sex educational materials produced by state-funded agencies and these materials reveal the state's ability to articulate hegemonic, normalizing, and regulating codes of gender and sexuality (Puri, 1999). These texts provide a more specific and convenient way to analyze how the nation-state can produce and reinforce the discourses of gender and sexuality (Puri, 1999).

Middle and upper-class women are expected to embody national cultural identity and If their bodies and identities are used to articulate discourses of modernity and development in post-colonial India, then these are also the sites where fears of loss of national tradition are expressed (Puri 1999). Furthermore, these transnational cultural codes have impactful effects on normalizing and regulating women's narratives (Puri, 1999).

According to author Jyoti Puri, if feminist theorizing has been useful in indicting the links between nation-states and women, and has emphasized the role of women in reproducing and resisting dominant ideologies, it has not sufficiently challenged categories of womanhood or nation-states (Puri,1999). The primary role of motherhood revolves around womahood and is limited to bearing children.

Feminist historiography of colonial India persuasively demonstrate the ways in which discourses of liberal reform and education disguised how middle-class women's gendered bodies, sexualities, and gender roles were realigned to the purpose of an emergent anticolonial, elitist nationalism (Puri, 1999). In the context of colonial state and anticolonial, hegemonic nationalisms, education had to serve a dual role to elaborate and specify changing, politically charged definitions of womanhood and sexuality as well as make them appear normal and natural to the audience and therefore, women's narratives are shaped both by the nation-state and transnational processes (Puri, 1999).

Body image

Women's bodies are symbolic sites where debates about the development of a nation take place (Balogun & Hoang, 2013). Shifts in the global economy, cultural globalization, and postcolonial trajectories map onto women's altered embodiments (Balogun & Hoang, 2013).

Weddings, as they are presented in bridal magazines, are a ritual where exactly these floating parameters are given attention but still marginalised (for the lifestyle magazines are inherently conservative in their moral values). There is an interesting emphasis on bride's sensuality and her sexual desires that mark the coming of the wedding in various articles in bridal magazines, most of all, with respect to the wedding night's promise of erotic pleasure (a rather western concept, shifting attention from reproduction to pleasure). There is an emphasis on the bride's responsibility to ensure the relationship holds. Responsibility has seemed to shift from reproduction or pleasing the inlaws to the relationship's "chemistry" and sustainability. With this shift also comes the change in preference for certain beauty standards over others, therefore it is evident that this shift

can explain the strong preference for fair skin color as the dominating beauty standard as opposed to the body shape.

Judith Butler has maintained that " to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to a historical idea of ‚woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to a historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler, 2013, pg. 394). By exploring the historic representations of what was considered beautiful, it is possible to see a clear image that has been perpetuated over the years.

The ideal traditional Indian woman is fair or medium-complexioned, has a narrow waist but wider hips and breasts, and has large eyes, full red lips, and long black hair that is either straight or wavy (Gelles, 2011). This image, or some form of it, has managed to endure for centuries, perhaps encouraged by the religious imagery of Hindu goddesses. It would be unexpected, then, for this vision of Indian beauty to change significantly**.**

Colorism over time: From the Vedas to Contemporary Media

One recent study found that "78 percent of women would like to be two shades lighter, as it makes them more attractive and confident (Gelles, 2011). These desires are reinforced by society‟s negative treatment of darker-skinned women. Being dark sometimes results in social segregation and name-calling and it sometimes diminishes the ability to make friends (Gelles, 2011). Women even prevent their daughters from going outside to play for too long for fear that they will tan. (Ansari, 2020). This preoccupation with lighter skin tones is a form of colorism, a "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same race people based solely on their color" (Mariam, 2017). Colorism is a subtype of racial bias

in which skin tone is used as a metric by which to discriminate against those outside or within one's own racioethnic group (Utley & Darity, 2016).

Some scholars suggest that colorism is a direct result of European imperialism; others argue that people around the world possess a natural affinity for light skin (Utley & Darity, 2016). In any case, colorism promotes prejudice and is deeply rooted and ingrained within India's history and culture.

The caste system has been credited by many to be the cause of discrimination in India. (Sharma 2003). Many researchers have conjectured that the oral recitation method used to convey the Vedas and other important scriptures may have led to misinterpretation of such metaphors, eventually evolving into caste and color discrimination. (Sonawat, 2001).

Fear of Dark Skin: The Layered Impact of Colonizations

Since India is a country that consists of 29 states and 7 union territories, it is difficult to determine the vast range of beauty standards prevalent in each state and union territory. However, the desire for fair skin seems to exist across the states and territories (Sharma 2012).

The concept of preference for fair skin can be linked to India's history of colonization. India has a long history of being colonized and conquered by light-skinned oppressors such as the Aryans, the Persians, the Mughals, and the British, which has led to the systemic belief that light skin is better and is associated with power (Keppens, M., & De Roover, 2020). Furthermore, colorism was reinforced by the invasion of the Aryans. Around 1500 BCE, the Aryans came into India from Europe and Central Asia and were naturally fairer than the Native people who were largely darker (Gelles, 2011). If the

conquest by the Aryans and the caste system created the predilection for light skin, the colonization by the British bolstered it (Bhangle, 2020).

During the British Empire, colonizers kept light-skinned Indians as allies, giving them extra advantages over the rest of the "blacks (Mishra, 2015). The British colonizers were able to build on India's existing caste system, a socio-economic hierarchy with origins in Hinduism but which now permeates across Indian society and this also created a superiority complex amongst Indians where they began to see that being fair-skinned meant being privileged (Mishra, 2015).

Fair skin has been a dominating and an ideal beauty standard in India for centuries. Since conceptions of beauty are strongly influenced by prestige, it is no surprise that the skin colour of the prestige groups, the conquerors and colonizers, would be adopted as the ideal (Gelles, 2011). Interestingly, in the early 1920's Euro American culture shifted from prizing pale and untanned skin, which was formerly associated with privilege, to considering tanned skin glamorous, sexy, and representative of an active lifestyle (Chen et al., 2019). Tanned skin developed a higher status, as it was associated with the middle and upper classes not having to work and having an abundance of outdoor leisure time (Skinner, J, et al., 2003). This higher status was further cultivated with the wealthy being able to travel and holiday in warm and sunny climates where they could develop a tan (Randle 1997). Whereas in India, this is the opposite and darker skin tones are not the ideal beauty standard since being of darker complexion links to the notion of being part of a lower class.

Matrimonial Ads: Mirrors of Colorist & Gender Power Structures

In Indian society, marriage is considered as a sacramental union and an important social institution as it is the basis for the family (Sharma et al., 2013). The functions of marriage include regulation of sexual behavior, reproduction, nurturance, protection of children, socialization, consumption, and passing on of the race (Sharma et al., 2013).
Historically, India followed a patriarchal family system. In these marriages, the man makes the decisions and is in charge of the household. In the Indian community, "marriage" and "motherhood" are the primary status roles for women (Sharma et al., 2013).

Beauty is a form of social capital (Hunter 2002) and an interesting relationship between skin colour and beauty exists that connects lightness with beauty (Utley & Darity, 2016). It may not be a big surprise therefore if parents, family members, or even prospective brides and grooms themselves equate fair skin with physical beauty in seeking suitable partners for their daughters, siblings or themselves, using fairness as the desired status symbol, much like in popular cultural texts, undercutting other achievements of women (Chattopadhyay 2019).
Since India has a tradition of arranged marriages, it's important to understand how women and women's bodies are showcased in matrimonial ads because this will exhibit and reflect the thoughts and values of society. In order to understand and examine how potential brides were advertised, we can take a look at India's most popular matrimonial website, Shaadi.com. The role of such websites is to enable match seekers to create profiles online and seek matches, based on particular search algorithms and there are various filters to narrow search options: one such filter is skin tone (Chattopadhyay 2019).

Historically, families who are looking to form an alliance on these matrimonial websites often examine factors such as: social status, class, caste, and overall appearance. When it comes to beauty standards though, a common feature in arranged marriages is the fascination for fair skin, especially in prospective brides (Chattopadhyay 2019). One textual analysis of matrimonial ads across four Indian websites showed an overwhelming bias among males or their parents for women/brides who were fairer than themselves or their sons (Ramasubramanian & Jain, 2009). Other studies also have found evidence of bias towards fair-skinned women in India's matrimonial advertisements (Dey & Mishra, 2015).

According to researchers Subramanian and Jain: "Beauty for women, in the context of matrimonial ads in India, seems to be quite narrowly defined as being fair, slim, and physically attractive" (Ramasubramanian & Jain, 2009). The researchers also stated that "matrimonial ads echo the messages found in media in general and, therefore, reflect an internalization of messages of skewed, culturally narrow, standards of beauty, wealth, and success"(Ramasubramanian & Jain, 2009). An example of an ad shared on a matrimonial website, put out by the family of a thirteen-year-old girl from Calcutta in 1910, describes their daughter as having a "medium complexion, beautiful face, and a good figure" (Gelles 2011). Chattopadhyay conducted a study on matrimonial ads that looked at how the attitude of society and the inherent gender bias is overtly reflected through the language used in them (Chattopadhyay 2019). An examination of newspaper ads revealed that "men are so vocal about their demand for a fair and beautiful girl, whereas 85% of girls were silent on this aspect in men. This points to the deeply rooted

socio-cultural conditioning that teaches a woman to be silent and non-assertive (Chattopadhyay 2019).

According to Jain, men's yearning to marry a 'fair' bride has objectified Indian women who often suffer from low self-esteem due to skin complexion issues (Jain, 2005). If a strong connection exists between skin color preferences and notions of idealized beauty, it is a gendered connection as these beauty standards are more likely to be applied to women than men (Ramasubramanian & Jain, 2009).

As we have examined throughout this chapter, there seems to be a specific image in mind when it comes to beauty standards in Indian society and this image has managed to stick around for centuries and therefore It is unlikely for this notion of Indian beauty to change drastically.

Chapter 2: *An Autoethnographic Exploration of Third Culture Kid Transition: "Where are you really from"?*

In this chapter, I explore cultural hybridity, cultural detachment, identity explorations and the influence of media through my lived experience. I use an autoethnographic lens to examine hybrid forms of culture and identity. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that offers a way of giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding (Wall, 2008). By presenting ourselves as objects of research and providing personal stories, autoethnography helps to make contributions to the study of identity and culture (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2011).

Identity and culture plays a key role in defining a particular community or a given group of people (Nagel 1994). This is because culture has been defined as "features that are shared and bind people together into a community" (Bhugra & Becker 2005). According to Bhugra, "Identity is the totality of one's perception of self, or how we as individuals view ourselves as unique from others". Bhugra further notes that racial, cultural and ethnic identities form part of one's identity, and identity will change with development at a personal as well as at a social level along with migration and acculturation (Bhugra & Becker 2005).

Cultural identity provides a common value system for people of a given community to understand how they fit in (or don't) and It also outlines that some groups have more social, political, and economic power than others (The Critical Media Project, 2013). Furthermore, social media allows for the exposure of various cultures and communities which allows individuals to actively choose and participate in. Not only does social media serve as a platform for the extension of oneself but also becomes an

institution where individuals have the ability to gain more knowledge about other cultures and form their own identity (Sawyer, 2011).

Cultural identity is tied to social identity, as it defines the characteristics of social roles, such as being a father, mother, friend, employer, employee, etc (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). While race is a cultural construct, based on shared physical attributes; it is also a social and political construct (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

Furthermore, in order to expand on and examine trans-cultural interactions, it is imperative to understand how cultural identity is used in the shaping of people's lives. Trans-cultural interactions are defined as "various forms of communication between people with diversified cultural backgrounds (Horiuchi 2008). Trans-cultural interactions are visible through social media due to the fact that it's simply convenient to exist through that medium. Most of these communication processes across and between cultures are experienced by individuals belonging at the same time to different societal groups and cultural segments and having in today's complex society multifaceted forms of *hybrid identities*, *bonding* to their own cultural background, and at the same time *bridging between cultures* (Bonfadelli 2016).

The relevance of Trans-cultural interactions in India is due to the country's, racial, linguistic, religious and/or caste diversity, making India one of the most diverse nations in the world.

Understanding culture is vital because cultural influences determine how a community socializes with others and each other. Furthermore, culture plays a significant role in determining how we understand and experience the world, as well as shaping the types of opportunities and challenges we face (The Critical Media Project, 2013).

The first part of this chapter explores the importance of cultural hybridity and its impact on Third Culture Kids. The Second part of this chapter explores how cultural hybridity manifests itself online. The third part of this chapter explores how this manifestation affects our notions of beauty and identity.

"Where are you really from"?

In today's globalized world, there are several individuals who identify themselves as immigrants. These people have had to learn how to behave within a specific community and learn to adapt to the cultural environment. Their children are often considered Third Culture Kid: "a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture, building relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any" (Hopkins 2015).

I identify as a Third Culture Kid. TCKs typically grow up in a "neither/nor world, an "imaginary homeland" so to speak," a world initially defined as a negative construction: "neither fully the world of their parents' culture (or cultures) nor fully the world of the other culture (or cultures) in which they were raised" (Hopkins 2015). In a way, TCK's are homeless and therefore the question, "Where are you from?" is difficult to answer. For most people home is where you live, but for me, home is a feeling rather than a place. Born in India and raised in Canada by a Hindu Punjabi mother and a Christian South Indian father, I spent my childhood in my hometown in India until we moved to Canada due to my parents' desire to provide a better life and standard of living for my brother and I.

Like many second-generation immigrants, I grew up with the unique challenge of understanding and forming my identity while being a part of different cultures. My brown

skin color gives clues of my ethnicity, but is misleading as to who I am and what my culture actually is. I may look Indian, but I think like a Canadian.

Being displaced at an early age and growing up in a country that is different from my birthplace makes it very challenging for me to answer the question "where are you from?". Since I do not belong to one place and one culture, alternatively, a better question to ask would be where do I really belong? Depending on the circumstance and who I am speaking to, I'll have different answers to this question. Like many other TCKs, I will either go into the long explanation and story of my hybridity or sometimes I will go for the quick answer and tell white lies.

Being a TCK certainly comes with benefits which has definitely given me an advantage. TCKs are similar to "gifted children" as they share many of the same characteristics, including "knowledge beyond that of their classmates" (Sheard 2008; Hopkins 2015). Individuals who have experienced culturally diverse settings are known to be psychologically more resilient, and interpersonally and academically more proficient (Teoh 2019). Additionally, TCK's can cross and change cultures easily, meaning that because TCK's are adaptive and have combined knowledge about other cultures, it allows them to develop excellent interpersonal skills and intercultural skills (Straffon 2003; Johnson 2013). Despite being multiculturally exposed as a result of their families' geographical mobility, Third Culture Kids (TCKs) experience psychological and sociocultural adaptation difficulties when they return to their passport countries (Pollock & Reken, 2017).

Role of Media In Developing Cultural Identity For TCKs

As a TCK, I can certainly relate to those difficult feelings of being homeless and displaced. Recently, I went to India. My hope was to learn more about my ancestral culture, but I found myself to be marginalized. I often felt left out of family discussions, I simply didn't know what they were talking about and/or I couldn't relate. I found myself being restricted to talk about my school, friends and lifestyle in Canada but my limited ability to speak Hindi definitely made things more challenging. This trip to India was a culture shock. I may be Indian to Canadians, but in India, many glanced at me as if I was some alien.

Decades of literature purporting that the experience of repatriation can be a difficult time fraught with feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress (Davis et. al., 2013, pg. 134). Many TCKs frequently feel homeless, and reentry can highlight that feeling: "The absence of a home in their life becomes most apparent when participants moved to their passport country" (Gilbert, 2008 p. 105). Many times TCKs are left with the challenge of constructing an intangible sense of home or cultural identity having exposure to multiple cultures, also known as that of their third culture (Fryar 2020). They do not have a consistent physical place to call home, having spent a majority of their formative years in a variety of cultural settings (Fryar 2020). Due to these challenges, TCK's are not able to be brought up with a traditional upbringing and lack the understanding of certain beliefs and values of Indian society.

Instead, many TCK's may opt to build social currency, which is a way for an individual to influence and construct their identity, which is correlated to their online presence on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook (Tandoc et. al. 2020). Social currency refers to personal assets and attributes of an individual that help

them succeed in interactive social channels. It derives from the idea of social capital theory, which refers to increasing an individual's sense of community, by displaying and accessing information (Bhandari et al., 2009). Through social currency, an individual is able to share information about themselves which follows a process to be recognized and circulated, thus helping with the formation of identity. Additionally, it allows the individual to interact and associate with like-minded people.

The Cognitive Miser Becomes the Cultural Chameleon

Cognitive miser is a social psychology theory that suggests that humans, valuing their mental processing resources, find different ways to save time and effort when negotiating the social world (Dunn & Risko 2019). The theory holds that humans think and act with rationality whilst engaging in detailed and nuanced thought processes for both complex and everyday actions (Heider 1958). Applying this framework to human thought processes, naive scientists seek the consistency and stability that comes from the coherent view of the world and the need for environmental control (Dunn & Risko 2019). This framework is commonly applied by TCK's who find it a challenge to explain their identity. Based on Heider's hypothesis and attribution theory, Fiske and Taylor hypothesized that "humans, instead of acting like scientists, rationally weighing costs and benefits, testing hypotheses, and updating beliefs based upon results of the experiments that are everyday actions, think economically" (Dunn & Risko 2019). In other words, this theory allows individuals to conserve their mental energy and act as cognitive misers using mental shortcuts to make assessments and decisions (Dunn & Risko 2019). This theory explains my interactions with people who have been confused about my identity based on my social cues and as a way to avoid the complex explanation of who I am,

oftentimes I have found myself agreeing to the thoughts and assumptions of others about me in order to fit in and save the time and effort of explaining my background. Amongst these interactions and assumptions there is a hope that I have for myself which is to be perceived well by the person on the other end of the conversation. Sociologist Erving Goffman describes this as a way that people try to control the impression they make on others in social encounters in order to be credible (Little 2012).

This action gives me the ability to transform my identity and adapt to any situation, making me a "cultural chameleon". Multicultural individuals negotiate multiple cultural settings and choose to present themselves based on the cultural context of a particular situation (Downie et al., 2006). Cultural chameleons have a natural ability to effortlessly make sense of and adjust to their new social environment (Sieck 2014). Although, I must admit that this is a very lengthy and tiring task and I often feel as though I'm wearing different masks, and I am constantly able to reinvent myself.

In his dramaturgical account of human interaction, Goffman argues that we display a series of masks to others in acting roles controlling and staging how we appear ever concerned with how we are coming across, constantly trying to set ourselves in the best light (Little 2012). Wearing masks is linked to how cultural chameleons operate. When I agree to false assumptions about my identity, I am conforming to putting on a mask and transforming my own identity.

According to Goffman, we play a range of different parts determined by the situations we take ourselves to be in and how we think we are coming across, we adapt what we are depending on who we are interacting with (Little 2012). For example, in Indian culture, when you are speaking to an elder person, even how you address that

person changes. I don't address my brother by his name due to the fact that he is older than me, therefore I call him "bhaiya" which means older brother. Goffman's ideas are often used in the analysis of identity and presentation of self in online contexts (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

Beauty & Identity: The Mirror Effect

The online environment, with its enhanced potential for editing the self, can be a safe space to explore/reinvent/exhibit one's identity (Renner, 2019). Since the online environment tends to be a very visual space, physical attributes and beauty standards become an important part of identity formation. Human beauty is a reflection of cultural perceptions and ideas of aesthetics are indigenous to that area, beauty is not one's own, but a reflection of one's culture" (Jain, 2005). This is how we are able to define and present ourselves. According to author Erickson, "we rely on others' perceptions, judgments and appraisals to develop our social self" (Erickson, 2013). The cultural implications of beauty are prominent in every culture and have a strong influence on the way women are perceived (Jain, 2005). Throughout the different parts of the world, culture greatly influences what is perceived as beautiful and oftentimes there is a link between specific beauty standards to sexual appeal and social status.

According to author Neelam Vashi, for decades, mass media have introduced western beauty criteria in many cultures, and more recently social media, instant photo sharing and editing apps have further influenced how society adapts to these beauty principles (Boston University School of Medicine, 2019). According to Jain, our current Western modes of beauty are far from average, they are not even products of natural evolution, but of astute marketing and industrialization (Jain, 2005). Therefore, in order

for a society to evolve and expand their notions of beauty, it is necessary for the media to not keep circulating the narrow vision of what beauty is. Additionally, Jain states that “in the industrialized world, we now live in what can best be described as a "beauty culture"- a culture that in many countries has virtually replaced religion, and mark an important change in what beauty means (Jain, 2005).

Jain concludes her argument by examining a survey that was conducted on students of Asian descent which stated that Hinduism suggests that beauty is demonstrated through a woman's actions and behaviors, and is admired more when reserved (Jain, 2005). It is evident that These traditional beauty standards perpetuated through non verbal forms of communication and embedded in codes of behaviors which were repeatedly exhibited and reinforced by the media. In the present day, we see these standards are alternatively embedded in a woman’s body.

Role of Colonization and Immigration on Identity

The role of colonization and immigration has changed the social identity cues embedded in elements such as name, body and caste. Examining settler colonialism through a historical lens, one can see settler colonialism transforming itself into historical trauma, passing itself down through the generations and solidifying itself through education and sociopolitical structures (Garcia-Olp 2018). If settler colonialism proves to be successful, then it's able to break down and completely diminish identity. The aftermath involves families constructing and reconstructing identity in order to cope with the impacts and trauma associated as settler colonialism manifests itself (Garcia-Olp 2018). Furthermore, with settler colonialism’s success, we have to realize that it is oftentimes invisible and is constantly re-creating itself (McIntosh, 1988). For example, as

a result of settler colonialism, Indian people found themselves as captives of slavery and separated by a caste system, (Spring, 2011; Spring, 2013; Strum, 2010). According to author Wolfe, presently, the generations of today no longer have to contend with the issues that one's Indian's ancestors once faced but what is left behind is an almost invisible form of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006).

My family's experience demonstrates the difficulties of this social hierarchy. In my mother's youth, inter-caste and/or inter-religion marriages were not socially accepted by Indian society, making them uncommon. Even though a multitude of castes and sub-castes existed together for centuries, they were not assimilated because of the rigid caste system (Saroja 1999). The caste system has Its origins in ancient India and for centuries, it has dictated almost every aspect of Hindu religious and social life, with each group occupying a specific place in this complex hierarchy (BBC News 2019). Rural communities have long been arranged on the basis of castes - the upper and lower castes almost always lived in segregated colonies (BBC News 2019). Today, inter-caste marriages exist but mostly as part of the city culture and they constitute a minority of marriages and the rural parts of the country are largely dominated by the same caste marriage (Das, et al. 2011).

What's in a Name?

This "whiteness" my broken Hindi makes apparent is reinforced by my last name. People are always surprised when they find out that "Morris" is my last name. I even had a middle school teacher ask me if my dad was white. While that is not the case, his South Indian Christian culture explains my name.

Colonial contexts have played a crucial historical role in morphing the destiny of India and its people. India is not just a discrete and self-contained continent, but also a cultural construction in the minds of its many peoples (Frykenberg, 2008). The varieties of geographical and physical and climatological contexts, matched by extreme varieties of human organization within virtually every other context, whether of people and language or structures of genetically inspired social and political entities can be difficult enough to comprehend in and of themselves (Frykenberg 2008).

It is evident that colonial rule brought several changes in Indian society. Due to the very ethnically distinct caste groups, inter-religion and/or inter-caste marriages were strictly forbidden. Perhaps this ideology still exists within the minds of some people today. The intricate mosaics and networks of segmented and tightly bound social structure and political power made the task of bringing all of India under one umbrella so difficult to achieve (Frykenberg 2008). It's important to acknowledge that each culture is unique but if we put an effort in understanding each other and learning about different cultures, it will help us understand ourselves and find a sense of belonging.

Christians are one of the cultural groups that exist in India. The heaviest concentration of Christians is in the state of Kerala, which is where my father is from. According to tradition, in A.D. 52., Apostle Thomas went west to India and converted many to Christianity and over time, Christian communities tried to marry their indigenous Indian cultural ethos to Christian values (McGregor, 2000). If there is a long tradition of asserting this hybridity, there is also a long history of tensions between the various religious cultures of India (McGregor, 2000).

Due to India's colonial history and colonial hangover, there are religious disputes and issues within the caste system amongst the communities that exist in India even today and perhaps this is why I have had negative experiences because my last name is a "white" name. People who have constructed their identities within a certain cultural and religious environment are therefore put off by my name since my identity is mixed.

According to Ting-Toomey, a function of culture is to create "us" and "them," and that this causes anxiety for those individuals who are dissimilar to the majority group (Horiuchi 2008). W With that being said, those on top of the caste hierarchy take pride in being "pure". As a TCK, I was not aware of India's history and therefore clueless about the religious disputes, the long-pending tension, and the cultural ideologies.

When you have grown up being oppressed as part of a small group, it's often very difficult to try and understand how others identifying with the dominant portion of a common culture can miss the cruelty present in some cultural norms they don't think twice about (Poepsel, 2018). Therefore, access and exposure to other groups and cultures in a network society can definitely bring about the opportunity to develop a greater understanding but also give way to create greater tension.

The Virtual "Safe" Space: Social Media

Extending past physical social environments, we can examine another space that extends the idea of wearing masks and being a cultural chameleon. Living in a digital world allows us to discover the various masks in the diverse spaces that our virtual bodies inhabit. Mass media channels are important engines of cultural production.

In virtual spaces, social media are not only used to communicate with other people but also to present oneself with certain goals (Krisnawati, 2020). Our avatars are

extensions of ourselves. While often, social media mirrors our local culture, they are places where we have the ability to control what others see (Bal et al, 2018). Individuals have the ability to choose and showcase all the colors of their personality or only some.

Social media and commercial media were the primary cultural institutions that gave me knowledge about my Indian culture. However, since I think like a Canadian, my social media feeds are crafted by algorithms that showcase things that are of interest to me. It creates a certain filter bubble, which keeps me away from information on Indian culture since my interests and way of living differ from those who are living in India.

Algorithms may shape a common culture and may be influenced by user preferences, but they are not always designed for truth, accuracy or information literacy (Poespel, 2018). As mentioned earlier, since the media plays a role in portraying culture and identity, it is evident that the media is a source of identity formation. However, we are often exposed to a false sense of reality and, oftentimes, the media show us stereotypes that we mistake for accurate cultural references and these stereotypes tend to only be skin color deep (Narayan 2017). Since TCK's primarily use media for identity identification, as showcased through my lived experience mentioned above, they may be given a sense of belonging by seeing similar skin color, similar clothing etc, but in reality, most content only showcases stereotypes focused on showing only the physicality of an Indian woman. Social media offers a low-resolution version of a given culture, while the high-resolution cultural reality remains foggy, if not invisible.

The culture shock I suffered came from the misconceptions I had about Indian culture. One crucial way I have learned about my Indian culture is through the media. Everything that I had learned through the media was only a fraction of reality. It left out

elements such as language, accent, cultural settings and ideologies. While the portrayal of Indians and South Asians seems to have improved in global media, non-South Asians continue to bear misconceptions about the region and the media presents people and cultures in a way that lacks any kind of nuance or depth (Narayan, 2017). In India, people saw me pass the colour of my skin. A group of kids yelled "*Angrez ki bachi*" at me which translates to "children of white people". I never would have thought that my differences would be perceived so negatively.

One of the biggest problems in the way the media depicts Indian culture is that it tends to India as a homogeneous nation with a singular culture, despite being a heterogeneous culture (Goel, 2018). The representation of Indians seems to be stuck on a skin-deep level and remains quite one-dimensional.

For those who have lived their whole life as part of the dominant culture, it can be difficult to recognize reactions in digital media spaces that do not relate much to what you see in your physical world, since social media and algorithms make it easy not to see the existence and struggle of various cultural groups (Poepsel, 2018).

In addition, the media fails to educate on the significance and importance of local cultural social cues (some that are part of the body such as accent, language, non verbal cues and the social and cultural values), which are very localized to a specific place. Thus, social media doesn't help understand Indian culture, it simplifies it to stereotypes.

Research analyzing online identity and interaction practices in bloggers and the online world Second Life found that the following elements were important to identity formation expressions given; embellishment as a minor form of persona adoption; dividing the self; conforming and 'fitting in'; and masking, anonymity and pseudonymity

(Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). A key finding was that, contrary to engaging with the process of whole persona adoption, participants were keen to re-create their offline self online, but engaged in editing facets of self (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). This truly emphasizes the main message in Goffman's work, when on the 'front stage', people deliberately chose to project a given identity (Little, 2012).

Our current social media context, where taking selfies and sharing them on popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat is popular has increased tremendously, some people tend to base their self-worth on the crafted identity they have created for themselves, instead of their lived experiences (Erickson, 2013). Valuing how many likes they get on a picture or how many comments/likes they receive after a post, reinforces the idea of not being good enough.

We can begin to see the implications of this mass consumption through the mirror effect that exists particularly in social media. The mirror reflects a horizontally flipped image of our faces as they are viewed by others and recorded in photographs, reversing asymmetries and side-specific details, such as hair orientation (Oranges et al., 2016). This mirror image is what we are familiar with and used to recognize as our real image, and thus many individuals tend to prefer a facial photograph corresponding to their mirror image rather than their true image (Oranges et al., 2016).

Salman Rushdie urges us to look at ourselves not as grounded in any particular national culture but as displaced beings who are living the life of an exile (Rushdie, 2016). The world that we live in is rapidly expanding and is allowing us to become more global. Thus we are seeing an increasing trend of humans being displaced. Even if we are not physically displaced, we are all displaced, if not spatially, then at least temporarily,

from the glorious national past that we might want to go back to, and in most cases both (Rushdie, 2016). If this displacement robs us of the national identity that we have been taught to cherish since childhood, then our only option is to form our own hybrid cultural identity by mixing the elements that the world as a whole offers to us (Rushdie, 2016). Our cultural identity and hybridity then becomes a dynamic process of transformation and gives us far more agency to shape ourselves than what is offered by the straightjacket of national identity (Rushdie, 2016). As an audience we need to be able to step away from the dark social media mirror, which distorts our appearances and manipulates us into thinking that we need to change ourselves and be more reflective to what is being seen in the media.

Chapter 3: Alternatives & Resistance in Post Colonial India

In the era of digital culture, the media is consistently revamped in digital environments in a process that combines the appealing parts of existing forms of media with additional functionalities made possible by new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and digital networking capabilities (Poepsel, 2018). Any kind of culture, whether it is personal, group or common culture,a belief or behavior that is shared between two or more groups, relies on shared knowledge (Little, 2016). It is through these shared experiences that we are able to make sense of cultural references otherwise it wouldn't be possible. Mass media influences common culture and has the ability to directly shape it (McGivern, 2016). There are many other institutional influences on common culture such as governments, churches, families and educational systems (Bal 2008).

Even though the influence of mass media messages today have changed and might not be as powerful as they once were in the mid-20th century, where millions of people watched the same type of content at the same time, there is no doubt that demassification has affected the ways common culture is established and fed (Poepsel 2018). The constitution of Indian new media must be positioned within the context of wider social processes such as globalization, changes in the sphere of cultural politics, and the emergence of the transnational elites as agents of new forms and articulations of the politics of identity in a network society (Chattopadhyay, 2011). Although mass media's influence and power over common culture may have decreased over the years, it still has some relevance even today. According to Poepsel, "When an event is considered important enough to multiple media cultures, it is shared across all media platforms,

especially cable television, broadcast television and social media channels, and quickly becomes a piece of popular culture"(Poepsel, 2018). Furthermore, he adds: "If events have a broad enough global impact, they can enter the global collective memory, the shared cultural memory of a group of people" (Poepsel, 2018). The media serves as an institution which allows individuals to adopt cultural cues and make sense of the world based on what he or she identifies with which paves the way for us to choose our own personal culture (Hiemstra 2000).

With the invention of digital networks, we have been given the ability to stay connected with each other and along with this comes the capacity for relatively quick mass social actions to take place (Poepsel, 2018). Due to these social movements and cultural movements arising particularly on social media platforms, it has offered opportunities for resistance against rigid mainstream ideologies. While mass media outlets can spread cultural knowledge and artistic works globally, through networks, people can exercise cultural preferences when it comes to consuming media. As such, the field of mass communication was in a unique position to transmit cultural values (Bal, 2006). Mass media guides a society to understand itself but increasingly includes post-colonialist narratives that reflect the desire for changing value as to what beauty should be. The change in the conversation can be reflected in mass media.

For example, the obsession with fair skin in India has inspired campaigns, such as *Dark is Beautiful* and *#BinTheTube*, which encouraged women to discard their fairness creams (BBC News 2018). However, there are many other examples where color discrimination in India hides behind various other variables such as caste, class, religion,

region, gender and economics (Mishra 2015). The good news is that there have been attempts for change.

Prime Minister's Ban on Fairness products

The amount of advertising happening on fairness creams is demeaning to the Indian folks. The government has proposed to amend the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 (Think Change India, 2020). The notice issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, is proposing in the draft bill a penalty of Rs 50 lakh, and prison time up to 5 years for enablers of advertisements promoting pharmaceutical products for fairness of skin, deafness, improvement of height, hair loss or greying, obesity, among others (Think Change India, 2020)

As we saw in previous chapters, when one thinks of Indian beauty, 'fairness or fair skin' comes immediately to the mind. Pick up any matrimonial ad in the newspaper and the "F" word reigns supreme (Gelles, 2011). The media constantly states and circulates the idea that being fair gives you an advantage, a sort of prestige, whether it has to do with career or love. These carefully manipulative fairness advertisements feed into the minds and insecurities of individuals who don't have fair skin and offer their products as solutions.

In the first part of this chapter I explore what role do networks & agencies have in resisting standards & traditional ideologies. The second part of this chapter explores how social media & activism allow for the change in narratives.

Network theory - Public Sphere

According to author Ingrid Volkmer, the new 'flow' of political information enables us to become informed about issues of global, regional as well as local relevance (Volkmer 2003). The new media infrastructure allows an eyewitness view of events taking place in worldwide locations and these global processes, in which information and knowledge, political values, ethics, aesthetics and lifestyles are exchanged, are becoming increasingly autonomous from nation-state contexts and are beginning to shape a politically relevant 'global' public sphere (Volkmer 2003). The "public sphere" is generally conceived as the "social space in which different opinions are expressed, problems of general concern are discussed, and collective solutions are developed communicatively" (Wessler & Freudenthaler, 2017). There, the public sphere becomes the main and central source for societal communication.

Given the history of international communication in previous centuries, it can be argued that this term referred to international communication in the sense of communication between nations and societal elites, who have a common interest in politics and economic affairs in an international but in many cases clearly defined regional context (Volkmer 2003).

McLuhan's approach to networks was about their profound cultural impact, not so much of internationalization; he foresaw the simultaneous worldwide distribution of cultural techniques on various dispersed societies, development (Volkmer 2003). McLuhan's book titled "*Gutenberg Galaxy*" explores his attempt to outline cultural coordinates of a 'global village' and how they are relevant today to our understanding of 'globalization'. This link inspired McLuhan's vision of a thus far unknown inclusion of

entire cultures and societies into a ‘global village’, which transformed, i.e. homogenized, cultural habits (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967).

As Habermas understood, networks forged a mediated public sphere that allowed conversations amongst users to take place. This has created a new political space in which politically relevant events, although interpreted differently in various countries, created a ‘sameness’ and ‘uniformity’ of visual images and a somewhat common political context (Volkmer 2003).

Social media and other web 2.0 processes have provided people with a platform where they can come together, share opinions, ideas and make a change. An example of this can be demonstrated through a social media campaign that was conducted recently which celebrated people with darker skin shades.

A new global campaign on social media against colourism - #unfairandlovely - is challenging the widely-held belief in many parts of the world that fair skin is the most attractive (Geeta, 2020). The series, called "Unfair & Lovely", became a hit and inspired the hashtag #unfairandlovely - named after the hugely popular Indian skin-lightening cream Fair and Lovely. The social media campaign, which asked dark-skinned people to put their photos on social media: "Our goal was to combat colourism and the under-representation of people of colour in the media”, and to challenge the way colourism permeates Indian people lives.

In terms of identity, historically for many women in India, motherhood was not an option, it was a compulsion. The social stigma, blaming and trauma that a childless woman goes through, was something that no one wants to experience or see (Maji 2017). Mass media reinforce this stereotype. For example, the media constantly portrays

childcare as the sole responsibility of a mother (Maji 2017). Such images strengthen what traditional Indian women already learn socially and culturally, that a child is her responsibility, not pursuing a career nor breaking out of this stereotypical image. Although the female representation in the Indian workforce is worrisome due to the fact that only 27% of Indian women are in the labour force, one must admit that it has been changing towards a positive direction (Saha 2017). Slowly, women have been entering the workforce. As mentioned above, there is a relationship between cultural forms and mass communication in the networked communication age. Therefore the agency and online public sphere contribute to the shifts that we see today. There is a transition from the "motherhood" image to the modern working woman. Networks and agencies have provided young women the ability to access new types of narratives. The next few sections of this paper will highlight how networks and agencies not only shift fixed cultural ideologies and stereotypes but also examine how they are diminished.

Network theory - Agency

According to Cole Fischer, the distribution and exercise of power between organizations and entities play themselves out within particular spheres, or "networks". According to "actor-network" theory, focusing on questions of "identity", particularly questions of self-identity, depends upon accepting and reproducing a set of presuppositions that are concerned primarily with the creation of stable boundaries and hierarchies, between subject and object, and between self and other (Somerville, 1999). Actor-network theory proposes that the notion of "agency" offers an alternative perspective with which to explore how entities, or actors, influence other actors through the process of translation

(Somerville, 1999). The Actor network theory helps to highlight that we exist in multiple concepts and how we come about our sense of culture has multiple facets. The main culture of India is rather traditional but we do see change over the years. This change is due to the fact that people are part of multiple networks. Online networks open the doors for women to see different role models and break out of the stereotypical characters. Furthermore, women gain agency by gaining new perspectives on alternatives lifestyles and identities. Notion of agency is recent and we are going to start seeing the impact of the new agency with the exposure of new narratives and these communities allow women to create new networks for themselves.

Social Media, Social Change & Activism

By the time network culture became a large cultural phenomenon in India, around 2007, the number of women online in India passed the twelve million mark (Chattopadhyay 2011). While this heralded women's participation in the Internet revolution, this represented only twenty three percent of Internet users in India (Chattopadhyay 2011). Across households of diverse socio-economic levels, men and children used personal computers more extensively than women (Harcourt, 2002). Part of the issue was that women often used the Internet to keep in touch with family members through email or to help their children with their homework. The incentive to use the Internet grew out of their family roles and explains why women did not make ample use of technology and restricted their interests in a way that did not seek to fulfill their individual needs and growth (Johnson 2010).

Today, however, women's participation in network culture has changed. In 2016, 70 percent of Indian Internet users were male while 30 percent were female users, which

amounts to approximately 169 million people (The Economic Times, 2019). This was estimated to change to 60 percent male users and 40 percent female users by 2020 (Keelery 2020). Although this is not a massive change we do see an upward trend in the usage of the Internet by women in India. This gives a possible explanation that they are using it for work, transcultural reasons, to meet with their friends etc. The category of urban working women sidestep the pressing issue of the digital divide in a developing country like India (Henry, 2018).

Urban women are participating in the sweeping transformations taking place in post-liberalization India, what Aihwa Ong refers to as "the mutations in citizenship to global flows and their configuration of new spaces of entangled possibilities (Ong 2006). By being active in both online and off-line socializing, may point to several emerging possibilities in the interplay of media, hegemony, and urban women's activism in India (Ong, 2006). Wendy Harcourt argues that women are increasingly developing an influential: "layer of support through the Web and Internet from moments of need and social crisis, to safe spaces where personal struggles can be discussed and solutions shared" and that "Local women's groups gain strength from support solicited at the global level" (Harcourt 2002). To a certain extent, movements like these disseminate women's collective experiences and encourage the realignment of the political domain for gendered social change "(Harcourt, 2002).

Secondly, the politics of belonging is crucial to understanding the interplay between media, hegemony, and urban women's activism. Nira Yuval-Davis points out "belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home,' and…about feeling 'safe'" (Yuval-Davis 2009). Belonging is generally "naturalized and becomes articulated and

politicized only when it is threatened in some way" (Yuval-Davis 2009). According to Yuval-Davis, the politics of belonging: tend to naturalize gender roles and relationships in the same ways that they naturalize boundaries of collectivities, "the feminist political struggles aimed at women's emancipation depend on the denaturalization and debiologisation of women's roles, and thus the possibility of change" (Chattopadhyay 2011).

Fair and Lovely Brand changes name to "Glow and Lovely"

Consumer giant Unilever says it will rebrand its bestselling skin lightening cream Fair and Lovely and drop the word "fair" from its name (Pandey 2020).

Fair and Lovely is India's largest selling skin lightening cream, with approximately $317 million in annual revenue (Pandey 2020). Several famous Bollywood stars have also appeared in advertisements to endorse Fair and Lovely that promote fair skin as a means to finding love or a glamorous job (Pandey, 2020). Recently, Fair & Lovely was trending high on Twitter in India with hundreds demanding a ban on its advertising and sale (Mcevoy 2020). While many celebrated over Fair & Lovely's name change, many people are also hoping to see a change in the advertisements and the messaging as well.

There has been ongoing pressure mounting since the US multinational company Johnson and Johnson announced it would no longer produce or sell two of its creams, which are popular in Asia and the Middle East in response to the death of George Floyd and the worldwide debate about racism it sparked (Pandey 2020). The major cause for change lies in the hands of the consumers who need to examine why these ads promoting fair skin were running successfully in the first place. Ultimately, if we continue to consume

fairness creams based on the fact of wanting to look more fair rather than glowing, then we are actively supporting very rigid beliefs that we have been enduring for centuries. Thus it becomes even more challenging to break the cycle of colourism. Although, Fair and Lovely's name change is definitely a great step for making a difference in Indian society, there is no doubt that there is much more work that needs to be done.

Conclusion

Things have changed in India for women when it comes to their identity and defined stereotypical roles. The media has played a role in changing the culture by adopting the change in the networks and agencies, which have allowed women to participate in a global conversation about what it means to be a woman outside the boundaries of traditional culture. Historically, gatekeepers influenced culture by deciding what stories are considered newsworthy. Gatekeepers can promote cultural values either consciously or unconsciously (Glaser 2009). Gatekeepers had an especially strong influence in old media, in which space and time were limited. The Internet, in contrast, has room for infinite news reports. The interactive nature of the medium also minimizes the gatekeeper function of the media by allowing media consumers to have a voice as well. The digital age combined with networks, agencies, social media and activism have lessened the power of gatekeepers somewhat, as the Internet allows for nearly unlimited space to cover any number of events and stories. This has allowed discussions to take place not only locally but also globally, which has contributed to the formation of India's modern day narratives.

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