

# Colorism and Usage of Makeup and its Effect on Self-esteem and Fear of Negative Appearance in Females

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Women in South Asia are prone to be discriminated against based on their skin, with higher use of cosmetics and a high prevalence of psychological distress. This study aims to study the effect of colorism and usage of makeup on self-esteem and fear of negative appearance evaluation in young females. With a snowball sampling, young female participants ( $N = 212$ ; mean age = 20.5 years;  $SD = 1.97$ ) from Bengaluru, India, completed self-report measures of makeup usage, skin tone, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Fear of Negative Appearance evaluation scale. With the Kruskal-Wallis H test, it was found that skin tone affected on self-esteem and had little to no effect on fear of negative appearance evaluation. It was also found that makeup has no effect on self-esteem, whereas individuals with a high fear of negative appearance evaluation had more significant makeup usage.

*Keywords:* makeup usage, colorism in indian women, self-esteem, fear of negative appearance evaluation

Colorism is 'prejudiced attitudes/or discriminatory acts against people based on the color (shade or tone) of their skin' (Sharda, 2020). In India, colorism is highly gendered, rooted in the mythical Aryan race supremacy, followed by the British colonial norm of whiteness being associated with supremacy, and derogatory terms are used for darker skin tones (Kukreja, 2021). The internalized beliefs about skin color, such as lighter skin with high status and attractiveness and dark skin color with lower status, result in lower self-esteem in dark-skinned women (Abrams et al., 2020; Kukreja, 2021; Sharif & Siddique, 2020; Thompson & Keith, 2001).

Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as "the evaluation which the individual customarily makes and maintains concerning himself: it expresses an attitude of approval/disapproval" based on external standards correlating to societal attitudes, norms, and customs and could be based on their physical appearance, intelligence, and other dimensions of personal aspects. The discrepancy between the image of oneself and the expectations from oneself results in lower self-esteem, determining psychological well-being and motivation. It is least studied in developing nations, wherein a favor towards fair skin tone has resulted in lower self-esteem in females (Sharif & Siddique, 2020).

Studies have shown that women with lower self-esteem, with regard to their skin tone indulge in the usage of makeup (Tran et al.,

2020; Brinegar & Weddle, 2014; Kosmala et al., 2019; Chen & Mei-Chi, 2022). According to the Self Determination Theory (SDT), individuals have intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to wear makeup. Women with intrinsic motivation seek pleasure by wearing makeup for their inherent satisfaction. In contrast, women with low self-esteem and autonomy have an extrinsic motivation to please an external demand, which could be makeup usage due to peer pressure. Women with extrinsic motivational factors have been seen to have negative self-esteem and enhance their self-esteem by applying makeup to receive compliments and feel more confident (Tran et al., 2020).

With an increased fear of being evaluated and with the internalization of skin color, there is an increase in skin lighteners and skin-bleaching cosmetic surgeries in countries like India, Mexico, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, and many other including the USA (Hunter, 2007). With this, individuals are more vulnerable to developing a fear of negative appearance evaluation, the fear that one's self will be judged negatively, which is expressed by women mostly with respect to their physical appearance, leading to indulgence in maladaptive perfectionism strategies (Lundgren et al., 2004). This has been correlated with a high prevalence of social anxiety (Levinson et al., 2013) leading to an increased rate of cosmetic surgeries in midlife women (Dunaev et al., 2016). It has been observed that young adults, such as university students, tend to use makeup as a mechanism to hide the fear of being negatively evaluated (Masood et al., 2022). Studies have aimed at the fear of negative appearance concerning body images (Sharma et al., 2022) to cosmetic usage (Cash & Cash, 1982) but have not explored the fear of negative appearance evaluation concerning facial aspects and skin color.

Low self-esteem has been associated with social anxiety, with an increased fear of negative evaluation from others, making self-esteem a predictor of social anxiety. Individuals with high public self-consciousness are more aware and are vulnerable to negative evaluation (Kocovski & Endler, 2000). Skin color is a trait that has been a factor affecting self-esteem, and the increased usage of cosmetics and skin-lightening creams has been promoting negative stereotypes for dark skin tones, resulting in a fear associated with dark skin color and criticism (Masood et al., 2022). With the media

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influence of an “ideal woman,” there is a rise in the dissatisfaction expressed by women with their appearance. With the dissatisfaction with their appearance, makeup usage has been considered a solution to overcome the criticism (Kosmala et al., 2019).

According to the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDA), cosmetics and makeup are defined as 'articles intended to be rubbed, poured, sprinkled or sprayed on, introduced into, otherwise applied to the human body for cleansing, beautifying, promoting attractiveness or altering appearance' (Brinegar & Weddle, 2014). With cosmetic usage, women increase their perceived facial attractiveness (Hunter, 2007). The traits such as self-consciousness, public-body consciousness, social anxiety, and facets of body image have been associated with facial cosmetic usage. The relationship between appearance and health is emphasized by the supporting effects of makeup products on women's mental health, regulating mood and emotions, and influencing self-esteem and well-being (Korichi et al., 2008) boosting their self-confidence, and they viewed themselves as more pleasing, attractive, and assertive (Cash et al., 1989).

In developing countries such as India and Pakistan, female victims of gender discrimination who also experience discrimination based on skin tone have a greater impact on their mental health (Sharif & Siddique, 2020). Women in India have been reported to have lower self-esteem due to skin tone comparisons between relatives (Kukreja, 2021). Literature shows a positive correlation between skin tone and self-esteem in women (Sharif & Siddique, 2020; Lee & Oh, 2018; Brinegar & Weddle, 2014). A positive correlation was found between cosmetic usage (Lee & Oh, 2018) anxiety, introversion, conformity, and self-consciousness, and a negative correlation with extroversion, social confidence, emotional stability, and intellect, affecting social interactions. Women who wore makeup were concerned about their appearance, believed that makeup helped enhance social behavior, and judged themselves to be more attractive (Brinegar & Weddle, 2014).

Skin tone correlated with attractiveness, with lighter skin being more beautiful and vice versa (Abrams et al., 2020; Hunter, 2007). The internalization of the stereotypes about skin color has been associated with social mobility and education level, wherein dark skin was associated with lower status and lighter skin with higher status, has been prevalent in the adolescent population (Abrams et al., 2020). Low self-esteem and an increased fear of negative evaluation are correlated with loneliness and are bidirectional (Geukens et al., 2020).

Studies have been done on skin tone and its effect on self-esteem, makeup on self-esteem, self-esteem, and fear of negative evaluation. However, there is a lack of Indian studies on these issues, especially in the young female population with a rise in cosmetic surgeries and depression (Sharma et al., 2022) social anxiety, and body dysmorphic disorders cases result from low self-esteem and fear of negative appearance evaluation, and mainly focused on the oppression of women during marriage (Kukreja, 2021). Hence, this study tries to study the effect of skin tone and makeup usage on self-esteem, and it also aims to look at skin tone as a predictor of fear of negative appearance evaluation.

Makeup has the potential to regulate mood and self-esteem and hence can be used as a potential form of art therapy. Cosmetic camouflage makeup in patients with dermatological conditions such as vitiligo, acne, rosacea, and psoriasis around their neck, face, and

hands was found to be an effective therapeutic intervention technique in reducing depression and anxiety and enhancing self-esteem (Levy & Emer, 2012). The results from this study would help in understanding the impact and the potential implications of art therapy and boosting self-esteem through makeup, especially in women of color. The implications of art therapy can boost self-confidence and self-esteem, reduce anxiety, and enhance emotive expressions (Tran et al., 2020; Kosmala et al., 2019).

### *Aim of the Study*

To study the effect of skin tone and usage of makeup on self-esteem, and the skin tone and its effect on fear of negative appearance evaluation in young females of India.

### *Objectives of the Study*

- To study the effect of skin tone on the usage of makeup.
- To study the effect of skin tone and usage of makeup on self-esteem.
- To study the effect of skin tone on fear of negative appearance evaluation.

## Method

### *Participants*

The data used in the present study were initially collected from 284 female participants using snowball sampling. Participants residing in a city other than Bengaluru who had any physical, psychological, or skin diseases and did not fit the age criteria were removed. The final dataset included 212 female participants, aged between 18 to 25 years, unmarried, studying, having no physical, psychological, or skin diseases, and residing in Bengaluru ( $M=20.5$  years,  $SD=1.97$ ).

### *Measures*

*Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale (Lundgren et al., 2004)*: is a six-item self-report measure that assesses apprehension about appearance evaluation. The scale was modified from an eight-item scale to a six-item Likert scale by developing and modifying a few items. It has inter-rater reliability ( $\alpha = 0.97$ ) and two-week test-retest reliability ( $r = 0.94$ ). An inter-item reliability score of 0.917 and a reliability score of 0.806 was found in the present sample.

*Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)*: a 10-item self-report scale measures global self-worth by measuring positive and negative feelings about the self. The items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format. The Cronbach coefficient shows  $M=0.81$ , and the test-retest score after two weeks is 0.85 and 0.88, with an internal consistency Guttman scale coefficient of reproducibility of 0.92. An inter-item reliability score of 0.865 and a reliability score of 0.764 was found in the present sample.

*Skin Tone Palette*. a skin tone palette will be provided, with 12 different shades suiting the Indian skin tone; participants self-rated their skin tone.

*Demographic Details and Survey*. Participants provided demographic details (age, marital status, education, income status, self-reported skin tone, & makeup usage). A self-assessment questionnaire/Survey was built on understanding the makeup usage behavior of women. Only some questions were based on the Likert scale, and some required the participants to answer the questions.

*Procedure*

Participants completed all measures online. Their informed consent was acquired. The demographic questionnaire and survey on makeup were filled first, followed by the remaining measures of skin tone palette, Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, and Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale. The Institutional Review Board of the University approved this study.

**Results**

The sample comprised  $N=212$  participants between the ages of 18 to 25 years ( $M = 20.5$ ). Means scores for fear of negative appearance evaluation and self-esteem at each division of skin tone (light skin tone  $N = 117$ ; medium skin tone  $N = 71$ ; & dark skin tone  $N = 24$ ) and the usage of makeup (every day, often, occasionally, often, & never) are presented in Table 1. It was observed that the self-esteem of individuals with lighter skin tones ( $M = 18.9$ ) and medium skin tones ( $M = 18.8$ ) was comparatively greater than the self-esteem of dark-

skin-toned individuals ( $M = 17.2$ ). It was observed that the fear of negative appearance evaluation is comparatively higher in individuals with dark skin tones ( $M = 17.7$ ) than in medium skin tones and lighter skin tones ( $M = 15.7$ ;  $M = 15.3$ ), respectively.

**Table 1**

*Mean Scores of the Sample on Self-esteem and Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation*

	Skin Tone	N	Mean	SD
FNAES	Light Skin Tone	117	15.3	6.01
	Medium Skin Tone	71	15.7	5.62
	Dark Skin Tone	24	17.7	7.09
SES	Light Skin Tone	117	18.9	4.97
	Medium Skin Tone	71	18.8	4.94
	Dark Skin Tone	24	17.2	5.93

*Note.* SES = Self-esteem Score; FNAES = Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Score

**Table 2**

*Mean Scores of the Sample on Self-esteem and Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation based on the Three Categories*

	Makeup usage	Skin Tone	N	Mean	Median
SES	Everyday	Light Skin Tone	9	16.44	16.0
		Medium Skin Tone	4	16.50	18.0
		Dark Skin Tone	1	10	10.0
	Often	Light Skin Tone	17	17.53	17.0
		Medium Skin Tone	13	18.77	19.0
		Dark Skin Tone	4	15	12.0
	Occasionally	Light Skin Tone	56	19.34	19.0
		Medium Skin Tone	30	19.27	18.0
		Dark Skin Tone	12	18.58	18.0
	Sometimes	Light Skin Tone	27	18.41	18.0
		Medium Skin Tone	15	18.33	19.0
		Dark Skin Tone	3	15.67	16.0
Never	Light Skin Tone	8	23.13	22.5	
	Medium Skin Tone	15	19.22	19.0	
	Dark Skin Tone	9	18.25	17.5	
FNAES	Everyday	Light Skin Tone	9	19.67	17.0
		Medium Skin Tone	9	11.78	13.0
		Dark Skin Tone	4	14.75	12.5
	Often	Light Skin Tone	17	17.53	18.0
		Medium Skin Tone	13	17.31	18.0
		Dark Skin Tone	4	23.75	25.5
	Occasionally	Light Skin Tone	56	14.41	13.0
		Medium Skin Tone	30	15.33	16.0
		Dark Skin Tone	12	15.25	14.5
	Sometimes	Light Skin Tone	27	16.33	15.0
		Medium Skin Tone	15	16.53	17.0
		Dark Skin Tone	3	20.33	19.0
Never	Light Skin Tone	8	9	8.0	
	Medium Skin Tone	9	11.78	13.0	
	Dark Skin Tone	4	14.75	12.5	

*Note.* SES = Self-esteem Score; FNAES = Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Score

Table 2 shows the categorized mean scores of the sample. It can be seen that the majority of the sample opted that they use makeup 'occasionally,' had an average level of fear of negative appearance evaluation, and an average level of self-esteem. Women with dark skin tones had a greater score of fear of negative appearance evaluation, irrespective of their makeup usage. Likewise, women with lighter skin tones showed a greater score of self-esteem, irrespective of their makeup usage.

**Table 3**

*Frequency of Confidence with Makeup Usage in the Study Sample*

Confidence with makeup	Skin Tone	Counts	% of Total
definitely always	Light Skin Tone	0	0.0 %
	Medium Skin Tone	2	0.9 %
	Dark Skin Tone	0	0.0 %
Always	Light Skin Tone	18	8.5 %
	Medium Skin Tone	8	3.8 %
	Dark Skin Tone	6	2.8 %
Sometimes	Light Skin Tone	67	31.6 %
	Medium Skin Tone	36	17.0 %
	Dark Skin Tone	10	4.7 %
I don't know	Light Skin Tone	4	1.9 %
	Medium Skin Tone	5	2.4 %
	Dark Skin Tone	0	0.0 %
Very rarely	Light Skin Tone	16	7.5 %
	Medium Skin Tone	8	3.8 %
	Dark Skin Tone	3	1.4 %
No	Light Skin Tone	11	5.2 %
	Medium Skin Tone	9	4.2 %
	Dark Skin Tone	5	2.4 %
definitely no	Light Skin Tone	1	0.5 %
	Medium Skin Tone	3	1.4 %
	Dark Skin Tone	0	0.0 %

The frequency of confidence with makeup usage across skin tones is presented in Table 3. Most of the sample opted to feel confident wearing makeup 'sometimes,' and few opted for 'always.'

**Table 4**

*Analysis of One Way ANOVA on Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self-esteem*

	F	df1	df2	p	Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)	
					W	p
FNAES	1.155	2	60.4	0.3228	0.974	<.001*
SES	0.857	2	60.2	0.43*	0.991	0.184

Note. FNAES = Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Score. SES = Self-esteem Score. \* indicates  $p < .05$

**Table 5**

*Analysis of Kruskal-Wallis H Test for Fear of Negative Appearance and Self-esteem Scores*

	$\chi^2$	df	p
FNAES	2.38	2	0.305
SES	2.32	2	0.313

Note. FNAES = Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Score. SES = Self-Esteem Score. \* indicates  $p < .05$ .

There were no missing data, and the data of individuals with exclusion criteria were identified and excluded from the data analysis. A one-way ANOVA showed that the skin tone had little or no impact on the fear of negative appearance evaluation ( $F=1.155, p=0.322$ ) and the self-esteem ( $F=0.857, p=0.43$ ), with a Shapiro-Wilk normality score showing that the data scores have not been significantly distributed in fear of negative appearance evaluation ( $p < 0.001$ ). Hence, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was performed, as presented in Table 5. The results showed no significant effect of skin tone on the fear of negative appearance evaluation score ( $\chi^2=2.38, p=0.305$ ) and the self-esteem score ( $\chi^2=2.32, p=0.313$ ).

## Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the effect of skin tone and usage of makeup on self-esteem while also extending the literature by testing a widely unexplored variable of skin tone impacting fear of negative appearance evaluation on female respondents from Bengaluru, India. The study highlighted that skin tone affected self-esteem, wherein the lighter skin-toned individuals had comparatively greater self-esteem, partially proving that self-rated skin tone is a predictor of self-esteem.

Self-esteem is crucial in determining psychological well-being and plays a significant role in motivation and success. Individuals possess a particular image of themselves and develop specific ideas and expectations of themselves- a discrepancy between the two results in lower self-esteem, which results from external factors such as culture, media, family, and peers. Women from South Asian countries like India and Pakistan are prone to face discrimination based on their skin color (colorism), leading to reduced self-esteem and higher rates of depression, anxiety, and stress (Sharif & Siddique, 2020). Internalization of the stereotypes about skin color has been associated with social mobility and education level, wherein dark skin was associated with lower status and lighter skin with high status (Abrams et al., 2020) affecting women's self-esteem (Sharif & Siddique, 2020). A favor towards fair skin tone by external factors creates discrimination against dark-skin-toned individuals; hence, we can see a negative correlation between skin tone and self-esteem (Sharif & Siddique, 2020).

In their review, Sharma and others (2022) found that individuals compare their appearance with the media's presentation of beauty on social media, resulting in dissatisfaction with their bodies. Indian media representations of dark-skinned individuals failing in their careers and lighter-skinned individuals succeeding in the same gave rise to social comparisons among individuals and a rise in skin-lightening cosmetics. Women who were low on self-body consciousness were seen to be using cosmetics in a generalized manner. Indian media representations of dark-skinned individuals failing in their careers and lighter-skinned individuals succeeding in the same matrimonial advertisements gave rise to social comparisons among individuals and a rise in skin-lightening cosmetics (Sharma et al., 2022).

It was found that skin tone has little to no effect on fear of negative appearance evaluation, leaving possibilities of other factors influencing fear of negative appearance evaluation in females. Nevertheless, it was seen that dark-skin-toned females had higher levels of fear of negative appearance evaluation, making them more prone to having cosmetic surgeries (Dunaev et al., 2016). Further research also found that people also found that makeup usage made women more attractive, enhancing their social behavior (Brinegar & Weddle, 2014).

Positive self-esteem in individuals led them to follow makeup trends. Negative self-esteem, accompanied by denial and discontent, leads individuals to seek pleasure through makeup and transform their inferiority and depression into positive emotions. A positive correlation between cosmetic usage, anxiety, introversion, conformity, and self-consciousness, and a negative correlation between extroversion, social confidence, emotional stability, and intellect affects social interactions (Brinegar & Weddle, 2014). In the present study, women with a greater fear of negative appearance evaluation had more significant makeup usage. A study showed that male subjects who evaluated the photographs reported finding women in makeup more attractive than those without makeup, and female participants expressed similar reports. It was found that makeup boosted their self-confidence, and they viewed themselves as more pleasing, attractive, and assertive (Cash et al., 1989). It has increased self-satisfaction (Brinegar & Weddle, 2014) relieves stress, and provides pleasurable tension (Lee & Oh, 2018). And has been helping in modifying one's appearance, self-image, emotions, and mood (Korichi et al., 2008).

Using skin-lightening products was higher in women of darker skin color, and increased makeup usage to hide their natural skin color was linked to low self-esteem and higher social appearance anxiety in Indian women (Masood et al., 2022). Skin tone has been linked to marriage (Verma, 2010; Sharda, 2020; Masood et al., 2022) and with a higher preference for light-skinned women, it was seen that darker-skinned women had lower self-esteem and behavior to comply with the beauty standards by using skin lightening products. A moderately significant positive correlation is seen between self-rated facial attractiveness and self-esteem, and this effect is more significant in women than in men (Bale, 2010). This shows that facial attractiveness has been a strong predictor of self-esteem in women (Bale, 2010). However, this effect was not seen in our sample, as skin tone did not significantly impact self-esteem and fear of negative appearance evaluation. In the current study, it was found that most of the women were in the “sometimes” category for gaining confidence from makeup, suggesting that makeup as a factor alone does not affect self-esteem.

### Limitations and Future Directions

While this study contributes valuable insights into the subject under investigation, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations that temper the generalisability and depth of the findings. Firstly, the research design does not establish a definitive cause-and-effect due to its observational nature. The absence of experimental manipulation restricts our ability to infer causation between variables. Moreover, the study's reliance on a relatively small sample size raises concerns about the external validity of the results. The findings may not be universally applicable, as the sample's characteristics might introduce a bias, particularly the geographical restriction to a specific city and the inclusion criteria. Participants from the same locale could share common ideologies or behavioral patterns, influencing the study outcome. The sample was predominantly self-rated and light-skinned, reducing the representation of women of color. An underexplored aspect lies in the study's focus on a specific gender, neglecting potential variations in other gender groups. Furthermore, excluding women who are employed, married, and aged 25 and above may not capture the nuances of experiences and perspectives within this demographic, limiting the study's comprehensive applicability. Future research

endeavors should consider these limitations and aim to address them for a more robust and inclusive exploration of the subject matter.

The study did not explore other factors that might influence makeup usage. Studies can be done to explore the impact of skin tone and the usage of makeup in the other genders. And a qualitative understanding of the impact of makeup on fear of negative appearance evaluation. Future research could prospectively explore the variables in individuals with any skin diseases. Policymakers and clinicians can use these findings to understand the rising prevalence rates of mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and other psychological disorders, along with the increasing use of skin-lightening products and cosmetic surgeries, and can have preventive measures.

### Conclusion

In the study, we explored the effect of skin tone and makeup usage on self-esteem and fear of negative appearance evaluation in young females of Bengaluru, India. It was found that skin tone enhanced self-esteem but had little to no effect on fear of negative appearance evaluation. Fear of negative appearance evaluation was not associated with skin color. However, individuals with higher traits had more significant makeup usage. There may be possibilities of a cause-and-effect relationship. However, it has to be explored. A higher fear of negative evaluation is associated with higher chances of cosmetic surgeries, prone to eating disorders, and seemed to have low self-esteem. Our study tried to explore the effect of skin tone on self-esteem, an underlying factor for psychological distress in the women of India, contributing to the rising prevalence rates of anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and a rise in the usage of skin-lightening products and cosmetic surgeries. The outcomes have implications for reducing the potential risk factors of developing any psychological distress in women and will help develop preventive methods.

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