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Colorism and its Impact on Social Work in India: Employing Hall's Q-Sort Protocol as a Diagnostic Strategy

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Abstract

Colorism is a sustained transgression in India over an extended period of time. As defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, colorism is discrimination within a racial or ethnic group. It is manifested as bias favoring people with lighter skin at the expense of those with darker skin. In fact, colorism is merely melanin-based discrimination. In the aftermath of minimal colorism research, India's society at-large is apt to exercise colorism in the conduct of critical life choices that must be eliminated for the benefit of social work clientele and Indian society at-large. The suggested strategy is Hall's Q sort diagnostic protocol. The Q sort mathematical equation significantly reduces verbiage conveying the same information in eight selected characters. In the aftermath said protocol will prevail in the rescue of social work clientele from their colorism pathologies and successfully confront critics such as Etzioni who challenge social work's professional integrity as a semi-profession.

Key words: Q sort; colorism; social work; India

Introduction

Colorism has been sustained in India over an extended period of time. Subsequently there appears to be no evidence that its longevity will be interrupted. Not only in India but in other South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Shri Lanka provide evidence of the same tendency. While colorism in India is often assumed to be the aftermath of British colonization alone its origins in India are in fact complex and not fully understood by outside observers. Therefore, many able scholars who study colorism acknowledge its existence prior to the arrival of British colonials. In fact, colorism is intimately associated with India's caste system where skin color is closely aligned via the organization of Indian society [1].

According to Indian history the caste system was devised by a light-skinned invading group called Aryans who arrived approximately 1500 BC. As invaders Aryans became a powerful faction of the Indian population who often ignored local traditions and customs of the indigenous people. In the aftermath the less powerful factions of the population were relegated to the South where jungles and mountainous terrains were located. Following Aryan domination Indian society was organized in the arrangement of distinct divisions. These divisions were selected by various criteria such as religion, occupation, and ultimately skin color. Located at the very top of this arrangement were Brahmins. Brahmins consisted of priests, and other high status symbolized by a light complexion. Next in order were the middle castes. Middle castes included warriors and merchants. Lastly, those who performed manual labor and who were poor were frequently very dark-skinned and classified as Sudras [2].

Currently in the modern era discrimination on the basis of caste in Indian society is considered illegal. In fact, as pertains to rural areas of India consequences attributed to caste are commonplace including a resort to violence. What's more during British rule in India from 1858 to 1957 the caste system was rigorously reinforced. However, in addition to cultural criteria the British fortified caste primarily by occupation and skin color placing Europeans—light-skinned--at the very top of the hierarchy. This exacerbated the idealization of light skin brought by invading Aryans. In an effort to maintain control of Indian society, British colonials then used skin color to determine which Indians were qualified to work in their vicinity and/or close proximity [3]. What's more according to the Calico Act of 1721 which terminated exports of cotton to British enterprises left many Indians unemployed and hence destined for poverty. The lack of work made it difficult for such Indians to ascend in society because they lacked access to education and the acquisition of wealth [4]. As a result of such difficulty the British were able to reinforce skin color via the introduction of colorism. This colorism was carried forth within Indian society amidst minimal objections from the Indian people.

One of the major forces of colorism in the modern era is the existence of colorism promoted by the Indian film industry. Known the world over as an entertainment colossus, Bollywood is reputed

to be one of the major contributing factors to Indian colorism attributed to its audience access. Since the 1930s Bollywood has applied the colorism promoted by British colonial rule. Therefore, it is quite common in Bollywood films to witness the portrayal of villains having dark skin and lower caste alongside heroes who are light-skinned and of the upper caste [4]. In particular, as pertains to Indian women the most attractive are all but exclusively light-skinned in complexion. For example, among the most popular of Indian actresses in Bollywood films include Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan both of whom are very light-skinned. Unfortunately, given their popularity Bollywood then imposes unfair and discriminatory beauty standards upon Indian women and the Indian society in which they live.

The promotion of light skin as ideal of the Indian film industry has also been exploited by the cosmetic industry in its marketing and sell of bleaching creams. Attributed to Indian television and advertisements in Indian newspapers are the promotion of such products as Fair and Lovely. Popular light-skinned actresses star in the television commercials for such products. The message conveyed is that as an example of attractiveness accessible by dark-skinned Indians bleaching creams will make light skin available to all who desire it [5]. As a result of this practice Indian film and cosmetic industries not necessarily intended join in the promotion and reinforcement of Indian colorism. Unfortunately, it is Indian women much more then Indian men who suffer the consequences.

One of the most obvious outcomes of colorism for Indian women who bleach for light skin pertain to marriage potential. Less publicly acknowledged is the fact that a dark-skinned Indian woman has less marriage potential due to her dark complexion. Subsequently to be considered qualified and attractive dark-skinned Indian women are expected to have more education, be employed in a higher status occupation, or come from a wealthy family [3]. Alternatively light-skinned Indian women by virtue of having light skin are the standard of beauty and thus require no such criteria to qualify for marital attractiveness. Indian men regardless of skin color are not equally confronted by such colorism in a marital context. The qualification of Indian grooms is based more upon wealth, occupation, and caste. As per the aforementioned, colorism in India is then sustained at multi-levels of history and society existing well into the 21st century and potentially much beyond. The implications for social work clientele are urgent and significant. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to provide by mathematical equation a diagnostic protocol that will facilitate empirical evidence of colorism in India. The accumulation of empirical evidence will enhance both practice and policy for the benefit of the profession and Indian social work clientele simultaneously. Said benefit will be carried out via the following: (a) colorism defined; (b) Indian empirical colorism; and (c) Hall's Q sort diagnostic protocol.

Colorism Defined

As defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, colorism pertains to "prejudice or discrimination especially within a racial or ethnic group favoring people with lighter skin over those with darker skin" [6]. Considering online references including the National Conference for Community and Justice, colorism is referred to as a "practice of discrimination by which those with lighter skin are treated more favorably than those with darker skin" [7]. In actuality both definitions are arguably incomplete or incorrect. The Western academic mainstream has erroneously referred to colorism as limited to discrimination by light-skinned persons against dark-skinned persons. Such a definition attempts to address the universe of colorism by mere example. A more accurate definition of colorism simply put considers discrimination on the basis of melanin content in human skin [8]. Therefore, those endowed with light skin are no more given to colorism discrimination for different reasons than those endowed by dark skin [9]. However, in India and elsewhere the

exercise of such discrimination is more often attributed to light-skinned members of Indian society against their dark-skinned counterpart not irrelevant to caste.

The incidents of colorism in India exists as a worldwide, global, and primordial transgression. In the aftermath of European colonization commensurate with the Atlantic slave trade and the dominance of Western civilization at-large made it possible for colorism to cross all borders and nation sovereignties. As a result, colorism today is not only existent in India but other areas of the globe such as Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Its only differentiation among the various locations pertains to the cultural nuances by which it is expressed. Relative to the fact in 1967 a Dutch scientist named Harry Hoetink devised the concept of somatic norm image for purposes of colorism analysis [10]. His initial consideration was to devise an explanation of segregation among the peoples of local Caribbean societies that had been the focus of his study. By definition, Hoetink refers to the somatic norm image as the complex of physical characteristics which are accepted by a people as its preferred norm and/or ideal (p 120). Specifically, Hoetink contends that colorism as that in India is a significant factor of discrimination. Said Indian version of colorism defines what exists in other worldwide locations including the Hispanic Caribbean and the totality of Latin America. Therefore, Hoetink's definition of colorism challenges the rigidity of Western race constructs emphasized by the Western academy and its associated intellectual power structures. Consequently, European white as in light skin evolved as a symbol of superiority where dark skin evolved similarly as an inferior counterpart. Altogether within societies such as that of India light skin was internalized as the supreme characteristic consistent with the notions of white racism and white supremacy [11].

Definitions of colorism as exists in India is not irrelevant to brown racism where "brown" is representative of non-white peoples exclusively. Brown racism devised by Washington in an Indian context is defined commensurate with intra-racial interpretations. As defined by Washington brown racism pertains to a socio-cultural colonial event carried out by the victims of a previous colonial world order against a similarly victimized colonial population [12]. Washington equates brown racism with a dramatic world order extended from white supremacy and the idealization of light skin. It is perpetuated by victims such as Indians who were either colonized, conquered, or otherwise dominated by European power structures. When such victims travel abroad and settle in Western sovereignties brown racism is a factor in their ability to correspond with other victims of colorism. Among those who manifest these behaviors according to Washington include Mestizos, Chinese, Filipinos, and various Asians. For the most part their behavior toward one another is a variation of white supremacy that likely occurred in the aftermath of European domination. As a result, such immigrants many of whom are of significantly dark complexions then discriminate against similarly dark-skinned persons including members of their native ethnic group. Given that such transgressions exist among Indians both at home and abroad is evidence of an international heretofore dismissed worldwide trend of colorism.

While colorism is more often defined as a Western trend its longevity in India is superior to any known Western origins. Much before European colonization and the Atlantic slave trade colorism had been a factor in Indian society as a matter of history. It originally began as a loose hierarchy expressed as class by varna and caste by jati. Over time this dichotomy became more rigid and substantial. Its resulting caste hierarchy was contingent upon four primary pillars that evolved into subcastes. Sudras were located at the lowest ranks of castes and inferior to other castes. Their outdoor work enabled dark complexions that were dramatically distinct from those who were Brahmin. However, the resulting caste by skin color is more complex than might appear. In fact, skin color was a convenient tool

for differentiating dark-skinned Dravidians from light-skinned Aryans. Eventually dark skin then functioned as a proxy for filth and otherwise inferiority. At some point complexion came to symbolize caste affiliation more stringent and inheritable. Ultimately the objective of caste was to preserve blood purity. Thus, by defining colorism Aryans eventually expanded the caste system inclusive of skin color [13]. It is dramatically evident by the empirical verification of colorism in India today.

Indian Empirical Colorism

According to empirical investigators a colonial mentality is one of the most destructive outcomes of colonization. Under such an arrangement, colonizers are perceived as superior in culture and in heritage compared to their colonial subjects [14]. As pertains to Asian Indians impacted by colonial influence may be manifested in shame, inferiority and the contrasting idealization of light skin. The objective of the current empirical study conducted by Nikalje and Ciftci [15] was to apply a post-colonial context to the experiences of Indian Asians residing in the United States. The intent was to explore the commonality of colonial ideals endorsed by Indians and how group differences impact endorsement. Such information might reveal the interactions of a colonial mentality and the relationship between racism stress and number of depressive symptoms. By access to a sample of 198 Indian participants investigators concluded that 32% of the sample supported a colonial mentality that included significant group differences. The colonial mentality also rationalized considerable variance pertaining to racism related stress and number of depressive symptoms reported [15].

The idealization of light skin and the denigration of dark skin remains significant in Indian society. As pertains to the theory of colorism it is suggested that regardless of an Indian voter's skin color, they will show a preference for selecting light-skinned candidates. This is so despite the fact that a considerable number of dark-skinned Indian politicians get elected to office in India regularly. Reflecting an effort to investigate colorism in Indian politics researchers Ahuja, Ostermann and Mehta [16] conducted a survey experiment. During this experiment participants were randomly given one of three choices based upon candidates' skin color. The choices of skin color they were offered included light, "wheatish" (medium brown), and dark skin. In conclusion there existed weak evidence of colorism. However, by skin color participants more often preferred the light-skinned candidate over their darker-skinned counterparts. It was thus determined that skin color preferences are heterogeneous pertaining to participating groups. Dalit Indians and other poor Indians being darker-skinned compared to various other groups have been politically motivated to support dark-skinned candidates more so than many others. Considering the participants who do not belong to any such groups the light-skinned candidate consistently prevails as the preferred choice. Subsequently, given the absence of skin color based elections, complexion becomes an implicit factor of politically motivated identities that ultimately can enable colorism [16].

Light skin in India may be regarded as a manifestation of capital in particular as pertains to Indian men and women who aspire to the marriage market. The utilization of light skin as preference in marital partners is evidence of colorism in modern Indian society. The current study conducted by Utley and Darity [17] consisted of an examination of marital advertisements appearing in an Indian newspaper. A single day was selected in March of 2013 for speculation. The objective was to determine how often skin color was mentioned by persons seeking grooms and brides. Also considered were how these preferences were expressed via age and type of language that described a participants' skin color. The results suggests that skin color was more significant for brides than for grooms. Subsequently, whenever skin color was mentioned there was also a decided preference for light skin as the preferred choice [17].

Sims and Hirudayaraj [18] investigated the impact of colorism on career aspirations and opportunities for women living in India. Colorism was assumed to be expressed by a preference for light skin over dark skin. The investigator contends that this preference is gender biased and most significantly impact Indian women. That impact creates social and workplace inequalities that have a negative influence upon Indian women as workers. In fact, according to Indian custom, colorism is reinforced by cultural beliefs, cultural values, social institutions, and the Indian media. While a number of studies of such phenomena have been conducted in the US, qualitative research on colorism and career opportunities for Indian women of color are all but non-existent. Sims and Hirudayaraj's study suggest that education about colorism can assist in the empowerment of Indian women in the workplace. What's more, in the modern era women of color from various backgrounds globally must understand the implications of colorism. A benefit of the current study in discussing six India-born women confronted by colorism increases awareness and contributes to the literature to provide strategies for empowering Indian women's career options [18].

A critical aspect of Indian colorism pertains to skin lightening via bleaching creams. Shrestha [19] investigated colorism by the lightening of skin in India. Said investigation contextualized media coverage of the bleaching cream industry in India. It was analyzed in a moment of imperial crisis and early 21st century US operations. An analysis of news media suggests Indian primitiveness, traditionalism, and gender difference that overlap with American post-racial ideology. The aforementioned characteristics were documented to disassociate US consumers from the Indian public. The examples of skin lightening are intended to relax US anxieties. This was accomplished in view of a faltering US economy and the rise of economies such as that of India in concert with American exceptionalism. Unfortunately, not only does this view obscure racism and colorism it obscures the overlap between beauty culture and commercialization within which the idealization of light skin prevails, and skin lightening products are profitable [19].

The existence of colorism in India has been empirically established by the aforementioned investigators using rigorous, empirical, scientific methods. The historical invasion of the country by light-skinned Aryans whose color contrasted with the original dark-skinned Dravidians culminated in the idealization of light skin [20]. Said idealization of light skin was subsequently exacerbated by British colonial occupation which imposed upon the most critical sectors of Indian society. Among the essential are politics, marriage, career and as per Indian women in particular a burgeoning cosmetic industry.

In the context of politics Indians elect candidates by virtue of colorism. While they express ideals for light skin, dark-skinned candidates are no less likely elected via dark-skinned voters who might support dark-skinned candidates exclusively. Therefore, what may appear to be a contradiction is in fact an expressed colorism by opposition to the denigration of dark skin by dark-skinned participants. The same participants who support dark-skinned candidates in politics prefer light-skinned marital partners as empirically established by marital advertisements posted in Indian newspapers. This choice is acute for Indian women in their career patterns and employment opportunities. Their colorism has facilitated the cosmetic industry which has profited from the popular sale of bleaching creams Indian women apply to lighten their dark skin. Indian men located under the same social circumstances are less victimized as they have career and marital options unavailable to Indian women [21]. In the aftermath it is empirically apparent that India's society at-large is subject to exercise colorism in the conduct of critical life choices. Therefore, the social work academy relative to practice and policy is challenged to devise a strategy to diagnose and/or detect the existence of colorism among individual social work clientele. The suggested strategy is implementation of Hall's Q sort diagnostic protocol.

Hall's Q Sort Diagnostic Protocol

The origin of Hall's Q sort diagnostic protocol extends from the works of a British computer scientist named Tony Hoare. Hoare first came to public attention for his research in 1959. His introduction of the Q sort method was published in an upcoming book in 1961. It contained references to an algorithm which he used for sorting various scientific criteria [22]. Eventually a psychologist named Dr. Carl Rogers incorporated the Q sort method for application in his humanism or client-centered therapy. Not a few social work practitioners around the world rely upon humanism to conduct client-centered therapy sessions in their human service activities. This technique enables the social work practitioner to assess client dysfunction by subjective measures of congruence and incongruence as pertains to their environment per self-concept [23]. This subjective account he labeled phenomenology [24].

Client phenomenology is the subjective matter of a rank ordering of dichotomous adjectives organized by speculation per client social environment. In operation Rogers' Q sort borrowed from Hoare pertains to adjectives associated with skin color and/or colorism. By specification adjectives are English language words which describe something about something in this case colorism. The Q Sort adjectives utilized are composed of 15 descriptive words arranged in dichotomous fashion for a total of 30. Commensurate with a diagnostic protocol social work clientele select from 30 where relevant. This dichotomous arrangement then includes words listed each with their opposite. Therefore, if the term is "light" it must include a choice in opposite manner with "dark" accordingly.

For adjective accuracy as pertains to colorism social workers may refer to Webster's Synonyms, Antonyms and Homonyms [25] or a similar reference such as a thesaurus. Ten adjectives of the 30 chosen by clientele will comprise the "real" list (A) and ten the "ideal" list (B). The "real" represents an objective assessment and the "ideal" is what the client aspires to. Using integers 1-10 will provide a ranking of each adjective in list (A) by accuracy/importance. Using integers 1-10 will also provide ranking of each adjective in list (B) by accuracy/importance. Where ten is the most accurate/important and one the least will provide a ranking of both (A) and (B) lists accordingly. Each integer from 1-10 can only be used once on list (A) and once on list (B). Each list (A) and (B) must be ranked 1-10 independent of one from the other.

The final operation in Hall's Q sort diagnostic protocol is mathematical calculation. Said calculation is accomplished by the mathematical equation of $\sum(A+B) \div (1.1) = Q$. To begin circle adjectives that appear on both list (A) and (B). In calculation for list (A) the rank scores circled remain the same which will contribute to the (A) list total. For list (B) any adjectives circled that differ in rank/score from (A) convert the score on list (B) to what it is on list (A). If scores on (A) and (B) are the same modification of rank/scoring is unnecessary. There now exists a set of 10 integer scores for list (A) and 10 integer scores for list (B) meaning two sets of scores totaling 20. Next total the 10 scores for list (A) and the 10 scores for list (B) separately. After totaling each separate list, add list (A) to list (B) for a combined total score. At this point a mathematical equation per Q sort diagnostic protocol can be applied to calculate the Q sort colorism score. Said equation is written via the following minimization of verbiage in the mathematical symbols: $\sum(A+B) \div (1.1) = Q$.

By minimization of verbiage the Q sort mathematical equation significantly reduces verbiage conveying the same information in eight selected characters. Said characters consist of three letters from the English language alphabet (A, B, Q); four mathematical symbols ($\sum$, +, $\div$, =) and one numerical measure (1.1). As per the "A" is the first designate of the English alphabet; the "B" second; and the "Q"

seventeen. The symbol functions of "$\sum$" pertain to the sum of; "+" to add; "$\div$" to divide; and "=" equals. Lastly, the numerical measure of "1.1" pertains to one whole and .1 additional part of a whole. The ability of the social work practitioner to employ this mathematical equation will allow for total comprehension of the calculation process at a glance.

The interpretation of the mathematical equation pertains to the sum of list (A) added to the sum of list (B) combined and divided by 1.1 which equals the Q sort score. The Q sort score is limited to a maximum of 100. A score that exceeds 100 is evidence of a mathematical error that will require a re-calculation of integers. An accurate calculation of the Q sort score suggest significant congruence in higher scores and significant incongruence in lower scores. A perfect maximum score of 100 while mathematically possible is ordinarily not an expected human possibility [26]. Properly calculated this mathematical equation will suffice as Hall's Q Sort diagnostic protocol by which colorism among Indian social work clientele may be empirically substantiated.

Conclusion

India boasts one of the oldest and most accomplished civilizations to have ever existed among mankind. Its longevity exceeds that of any in Europe and elsewhere West for its cultural and technological sophistication [27]. Unfortunately, for the same period of time India and its people have suffered under the consequences of colorism that has stifled potential of the people in general. The complex of social divisions include not only that brought by castes but that brought by colorism and a myriad of other social divisions as well. Subsequently, colorism reinforced by caste has enabled the successes of some Indians at the expense of other Indians that remains such a depressing thought. The emotional and psychological consequences of this colorism then contribute to an increase in the victim ranks of social work clientele. Among the most formidable of obstacles relative to these social work clientele is the dampening of Indian potential. It is manifested in the colorism that visits not only Indian clientele but Indian families, Indian communities and ultimately Indian society at-large for their potential never realized [28].

Loosely defined colorism in India dismisses the talents of aspiring constituents. Said constituents destined for success fail in the wake of colorism that if it were diagnosed and dismissed might prove beneficial to the whole of both Indian individual and the future whole of Indian society. Those who confront the struggles as victims brought by such colorism have transpired in their efforts over millennia necessitating social work services otherwise unnecessary. The tenacity of the problem is attributed unfortunately to its existence as an historical function of both culture and Indian tradition [29].

The most prudent approach to eliminating colorism in Indian society despite its longevity must be initiated by Indian members of the social work profession. Practitioners and policy-makers as well as Indian members of the social work academy must assemble a coop charged with colorism's elimination. No doubt, given to social work values for social justice and social activism there will be a willing and no less enthusiastic social work profession located abroad eager to contribute. Their participation will be validated given to the fact that colorism is more than an Indian transgression but permeates all national borders where people of color including those native to India reside [30]. In unison the elimination of colorism will prompt the conduct of empirical investigation that previously barely existed. Empirical evidence is furthermore critical to social work's colorism elimination efforts that operate both as an informative tool and a factual foundation for policy and law. Currently colorism is in deference to race which has no biological validity or mathematical significance other than the accumulation of nominal data [31]. Such a limitation denigrates the validity of colorism as a critical social work issue which ultimately disserves its eradication.

Social work is a profession less grounded in mathematics which reduces the potential for the accumulation of quantitative empirical evidence. Critics such as Amati Etzioni [32] who describe social work as a semi-profession rely upon such a shortcoming to justify their subjective speculations. Hall's Q sort diagnostic protocol provides a means to rescue social work from the unfair criticisms of those such as Etzioni intent upon articulating speculations in the absence of rigorous evidence. Hall's contribution to the accumulation of quantitative evidence will eventually suffice social work as a legitimate profession.

Hall's Q sort diagnostic protocol is originally derived from the hard sciences which those who criticize the profession are bound to respect. The computer science origins of Hall's Q sort diagnostic protocol otherwise known as an "exact" hard science has been exempted from criticism given to its mathematical foundation and accumulation of empirical evidence. The introduction of Hall's method has not only nominal but ordinal, interval and ratio potential which incorporates mathematical significance and therefore suggestive of exactness. That exactness will additionally serve as validation of the more measurable colorism by more rigorous standards which references to race cannot meet. Furthermore, the historical implications of color in India dramatically exceeds race to the extent of exposing the race fallacy. In the aftermath Hall's Q sort diagnostic protocol will prevail in the rescue of social work clientele from their color pathologies and successfully confront critics who challenge its professional integrity at-large.

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