

UNFAIR

Untangling India's obsession with fair skin



Graduate thesis

MFA Design for Social Innovation

School of Visual Arts

2019-2020

Project by:

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Advisors:

Kara Meyer & Archie Lee Coates IV



AN ALTERNATE REALITY WHERE
ALL INDIANS FEEL **COMFORTABLE,**
BEAUTIFUL AND **ATTRACTIVE** IN
THEIR OWN SKIN



**UNFAIR IS AIMED AT
REIMAGINING A MORE
EQUITABLE FUTURE STATE
OF MAINSTREAM INDIAN MEDIA BY
BUILDING RADICAL INCLUSIVITY
TO SHIFT THE AGE-OLD
COLOURIST NARRATIVE
THAT PAINTS FAIR SKIN
AS SUPERIOR AND MORE
DESIRABLE TO DARK SKIN**

**Kartik Krishnan**

A Social and Strategy designer from Mumbai, India. With a passion to bring equity in the education and healthcare sector in India, Kartik hopes to be able to make a difference in the lives of the underserved. Kartik values compassion, generosity, inclusivity, and love, and wants to work toward these values through his practice.

Aditi Kapre

A communication designer turned social designer with strengths in research, strategy, and storytelling. Aditi is driven by a commitment to create safe and inclusive systems that enable people to gain power, agency, and capacity for resilience. At the centre of her practice is a focus on constant self-reflection and an undying need to question social inequities.

ABOUT US

PREFACE

Amongst the various reasons to enroll in DSI, one that was common for us, was to gain the capacity to build equitable futures in our home country, India. So it was only natural for us to pick projects that were local and rooted in the realities of modern India. The decision to partner up came a little later in our process and turned out to be the best for us. This partnership helped us expand our scope of work and experience real creative collaboration. Having set agreements and values at the beginning of our project, looking back, all our actions feel like they were in congruence to those values and commitments. Due to a major chunk of the project being remote, we worked with a unique set of challenges but every little failure and roadblock taught us invaluable lessons and has only made us stronger.

From the very beginning, we devoted ourselves to the process and let our research guide where our project went. New layers of our work emerged organically with active listening and iteration. Wanting to experience the social design process in its most authentic-messy form and also create a meaningful impact, we were able to do so with the support of our amazing community partners at Seeds of Awareness (Mumbai), our parents, our DSI Family, our two thesis advisors (Archie Lee Coates IV and Kara Meyer) and of course DSI Chair Miya Osaki, who always pushed us to do better and cheered us on.

Project Unfair is built with a lot of love and care from both of us, and even though our graduate thesis has come to an end, we intend to keep these efforts alive.

Authenticity

For us: Show up authentically with all our opinions & biases, and work on them along the way.

Project: Help people live their most authentic lives.

Equity

For us: Practice equity in the work we do, our processes and the tasks we take on.

Project: Build Equity through our interventions.

Happiness

For us: We need to feel happy in order to produce our best work. Speak up when bothered by something. (Even external worries that may impact our work)

Project: Make sure that the people we are working with are happy with us/our work. Make sure to not do any harm.

Democracy

For us: Creating the right atmosphere for feeling /belonging to a collective. And being democratic in our work process.

Project: Making sure that everyone knows that they have a stake in our work and that their voice is important to us.

Trust

For us: Building trust with each other and in our process

Project: Work on building trust in the communities we work with by showing up as our most honest selves.

Tolerance

For us: Always having a sense of understanding for each other

Project: Having a sense of understanding towards the people we work with and understanding that everyone is in a different place in their own journey.

OUR VALUES

CONTENTS

Problem	01
Background	
History of colourism in India	
Current Reality	
The Fairness-products saga	
Shifting gears	03
Reframing the problem	
Indian Media: Current reality	
Intervention	04
Ideation	
Project Goals	
Spreading Awareness	
Education	
Co-creating action	
Measurement	
Looking forward	05
Sustaining this work and impact	
Research	02
Community partner	
Focusing on schools and kids	

now visuals, and case studies. - 10 mins

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e other factors that continue to colour our relationship with our skin.
into the narratives of today where there is a complete lack of
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minate with over 60% of the market share. This led to a skin MNC contin

miserly of millions of brown skinned individuals

Our thesis journey

Our thesis journey began examining se
discovering Comprehensive Sex Edu
stakeholders led us to probing m
Skin Colour. Diving deeper, we
could be leveraged to talk to

People are deeply influen
they see and hear. And
man-made and intent
So if we want things
We wanted to inter

This led us to
the creation
in India?
So here

LANGUAGE SETTING

Since our problem is situated in India, a context that might not be familiar to people, we thought it might be helpful to define some of the language that we use throughout the project. Most of these terms are universally used but have slightly different meanings in an Indian context.

Colourism

When people of the same race or ethnic group differentiate based on the colour of someone's skin /prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group.

Shadeism

A form of prejudice or discrimination usually from members of the same race in which people are treated differently.

NOTE: Colourism and Shadeism can be used interchangeably, we are using colourism since it's more widely understood by people.

Comprehensive Sex Education [CSE]

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) says that "The primary goal of comprehensive sexuality education is to promote sexual health. It should assist young people in developing a positive view of sexuality, provide them with information they need to take care of their sexual health, and help them acquire skills to make informed decisions now and in the future".

Skin whitening/Skin bleaching

Skin whitening is a treatment designed to give you a skin tone lighter than the one you were born with. Skin whitening can be dangerous, painful and expensive. The goal of skin whitening (or skin bleaching) is to lighten or fade your complexion beyond the natural skin tone.

Skin lightening

Skin lightening is a treatment designed to treat uneven skin caused by hyperpigmentation, such as sun damage or melasma.

Skin brightening

Skin brightening is a treatment designed to increase skin radiance by removing dead cells . Mostly cosmetic. Like a scrub.

Dusky

Perceived to be a shade/few shades lighter than dark

Dark

Brown skin, but relatively dark and perceived to be close to "black". Typically associated with South Indians.

Wheatish

Brown skin perceived to be a lighter shade of brown than standard Indian skin colour and closer to fairer skin.

Fair

Brown skin but relatively lighter and perceived to be close to "white". Often associated with north Indians.

Sawla: Hindi for dark skinned

Gora/Gori: Hindi for fair skinned

Kala: Hindi for black

Matrimonial advertising

Arranged marriages are a significant cultural norm in India. Alliances are sought through matrimonial advertising in newspapers and matrimonial websites. They are paid for by the word, causing people to only mention traits they consider important.

NEWS

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Indian woman kills herself over 'dark complexion taunts'

30 October 2019

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A fair complexion is considered ideal in India

A 21-year-old Indian woman has allegedly killed herself because of constant harassment by her husband over her "dark complexion", police said.

This is not the first time that taunts over "dark complexion" have allegedly caused Indian women to take their lives.

A 29-year-old woman killed herself in 2014 after her husband taunted her over her skin colour, police said.

And in 2018, **a 14-year-old girl took her own life**, reportedly after her classmates bullied her and called her "ugly" because she was "dark".

UNDERSTANDING THE

PROBLEM

01 BACKGROUND

THERE'S A PROBLEM:

INDIA HAS AN OBSESSION WITH FAIR SKIN

IT'S LITERALLY EVERYWHERE.

**HOME, SCHOOL,
WORKPLACE, JOB
MARKETS,
FILM INDUSTRY,
BILLBOARDS,
LOCAL TRAINS,
CARTOONS, TV ADS,
DAILY SOAPS,
STORYBOOKS,
WEDDINGS,
PRODUCT PACKAGING,
CRAYONS,
MAKE-UP AND
SO MUCH MORE**

02 HISTORY

For ages, Indians have associated fairer skin with a higher social position. The flawed rationale in play here being a person with fairer skin was wealthy and prosperous allowing them to stay indoors, while the poorer person toiled hard to earn a living in the sun. Colonialism only served to heighten this perception and make it a more dominant part of the Indian psyche

Once known as “Sone ki chidiya” or the Golden Sparrow, the Indian subcontinent was a wealthy and prosperous region, blessed with an abundance of natural resources and commodities like textile, handicrafts, spices, etc. This obviously attracted the envy and piqued the interest of other empires, rulers and settlers. From time immemorial, India has always seen attempts of conquest on its land by foreign invaders.

For our purposes, we differentiated them into two distinct buckets. One, the invaders and rulers who exploited, conquered or tried to conquer India, but eventually become one with our culture. They wished to make the Indian subcontinent “their own land” or “own home”
Two, the European colonists [The British, the French, the Portuguese, the Dutch] whose singular purpose was to exploit the land for the benefit of “their home”.

Robert Cecil, secretary of state for India in the 1870s, remarked that “India is to be bled”. The purpose was clear from the beginning. The high command of Britain believed that it was Great Britain’s duty to **civilize** and Christianize the natives. For this purpose, they drew a clear distinction between the natives and them.



The British policy was to divide and conquer- which they successfully implemented, making distinctions based heavily on skin colour- **marking the dark-skinned as uncivilized**. Rules and laws were created at will to implement their thinking into action. The commons and establishments of commerce that the British frequented, were out of bounds for most of the local Indian population. "Indians and Dogs not allowed", a popular colonial signboard outside recreational establishments. Moreover, they also created differences within the Indian population. **During their rule, when it came to employment, they gave more preference to lighter skin individuals. They also provided them with more power and made alliances with them.** The very fundamental pillar of the British rule in India was establishing power through violence. Their real crime was dehumanizing the people, in their own land. That's what makes this tragedy universally relatable.

Unfortunately, the ramifications of this still exist in the subconscious association of fairer skin with power and desirability. This translates even into the narratives of today where there is a complete lack of representation of dark or darker skin colour in modern India's imagery and media. Not just that, there is nothing that dispels old colourist myths.

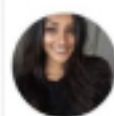
And this is consistent even with more international narratives like "The Crown" for instance, a show on Netflix, which tries to tell the story of the English Monarchy from a "Fly on the wall" perspective, while completely hiding the ruthless crimes of a significant man in the British colonial history- Winston Churchill. It's a painfully known fact to Indians that Churchill was a Racist and extremist extraordinaire. ***He is famously remembered for saying things like "I hate Indians, They are a beastly people with a beastly religion."***

THE ASSOCIATIONS OF INFERIORITY AND DISGUST WITH DARK SKIN WERE VERY MUCH MAN-MADE AND INTENTIONALLY ENGINEERED INTO OUR MINDS TO SHOW UP IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

03 CURRENT REALITY

Post-independence, this discrimination continues to be a part of Indian culture, in a bizarre fashion, where **the “darker”, amongst an entirely brown society, continue to be marginalised and oppressed for being brown.**

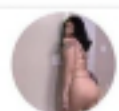
A lot of cultures around the world continue to have a similar experience, making colourism a **universally relatable challenge.**



Anjali C. @anj3llyfish · 04 Dec.
Imagine internalizing **colonialism** so hard you think colonizers are more attractive than you 😞

Having dark skin in India means facing many **invisible barriers** throughout your life. From a very young age, kids receive subliminal messaging teaching them to loathe dark skin and often fear dark-skinned individuals. Often parents consult doctors in all seriousness with things like, “What can we do to make sure this baby comes out fair-skinned?” Subjected to things like homemade “cures” for dark skin, or taunts and jibes from people- darker-skinned kids start **internalising that they are somehow inferior** to their fairer-skinned peers.

This leads to seriously damaging self-esteem issues. Even as adults, they continue to face challenges like being overlooked for job positions and matrimonies. We heard from someone about their friend’s experience with this. The groom’s family demanded an exorbitant sum of money as dowry on seeing that the girl was dark-skinned. The social conditioning against dark skin passes on from generation to generation, doing more and more harm along the way.



beaner baby ❤️
@sadgirlriri

1/2

brown ppl... how old were you when you realized the darker parts of your body that you scrubbed extra hard... weren't gonna get lighter bc it isn't dirty in the first place?

9:49 AM · 06 May 20 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

3,492 Retweets **31.3K** Likes



This leads to seriously damaging self-esteem issues. Even as adults, they continue to face challenges like being overlooked for job positions and matrimonies. We heard from someone about their friend's experience with this. The groom's family demanded an exorbitant sum of money as dowry on seeing that the girl was dark-skinned. The social conditioning against dark skin passes on from generation to generation, doing more and more harm along the way.

04 THE FAIRNESS PRODUCTS SAGA

British-Dutch Multinational Company- Unilever's *Fair and Lovely*, which entered the market around 1975, was amongst the first "fairness" creams in India. Fair and Lovely ended up creating a new category in the cosmetics market, the success of which encouraged other players to enter the market. By the late 90's the Indian "fairness" market had seen many new domestic brands making a foray and grabbing a chunk of the market. Eventually global corporations like Garnier, Ponds and Lakme decided that they too wanted a piece of the exploitation pie!

Almost 5 decades later, **Fair and Lovely continues to dominate with over 60% market share.** These companies keep exploiting the misery of millions of brown-skinned Individuals, pushing in-your-face racist advertising through different mediums like radio, movies, TV shows, commercials, billboards, etc.





Colourism has become self-sustaining within most societies and, encouraging a strange form of self-hate that does not actually benefit anyone, but the multinational corporations that are extracting profit from it. The work started by White Supremacists is, to this day, being continued by them, **making fortunes with a false promise of a better life through fairer skin.**

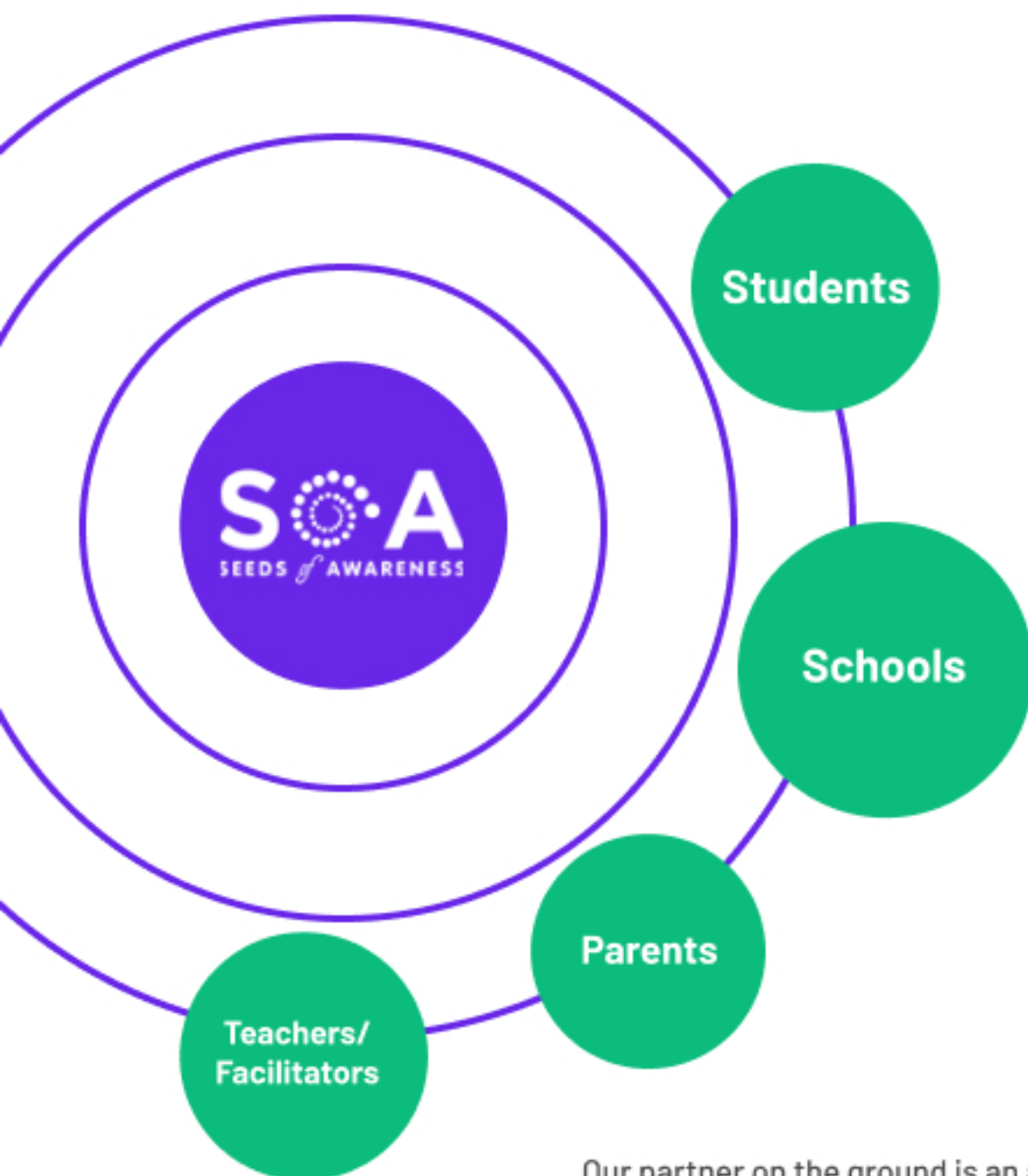




DIVING INTO

RESEARCH

01 COMMUNITY PARTNER



Our partner on the ground is an amazing organisation: **Seeds of Awareness**. Over the past 10 years, SOA has been working with children alongside schools to teach sexual health comprehensively. With their help, we were able to connect with some of our primary stakeholders and learn from their experiences first hand.

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

30+ Hours of interactions
with stakeholders

2 Schools with different
socio-economic backgrounds

200+ Conversations with
Adolescents

20 Interviews & conversations
with **Teachers**

12 **Parents** from different
communities

+ Ongoing conversations with
Subject Matter Experts

02 FOCUSING ON SCHOOLS AND KIDS

Initially our focus was on trying to assess how best we could work with kids in schools to figure out **where and how these associations with skin colour start to form**- how early they start learning and how we could teach them otherwise. Towards that, we conducted interviews, focus groups, surveys and conversations at 2 schools and a residential community, with over 200 adolescents, 25 teachers and facilitators and about 12 parents.



We learnt that **kids get conditioned at a very early age**. They are influenced heavily by not only what they hear from their parents & teachers but also from what they see, hear and read in the media, like advertisements, stories, movies, etc.

A teacher mentioned that she often sees kids make fun of each other's complexions.

ADOLESCENTS IN INDIA GROW UP WITH SOCIAL CONDITIONING AGAINST DARK SKIN, LARGELY OWING TO THE LACK OF A MECHANISM THAT TEACHES THEM OTHERWISE.

They are constantly exposed to a culture of rampant colourism. There's nothing that points to the fact that prejudice against skin colour is wrong, so they just don't know to not indulge in it.

AT THIS, THEY START TO DEVELOP STRONG NOTIONS ABOUT ATTRACTIVENESS AND TAKE ACTIONS TO FIT INTO THESE IDEALS.

They start turning to things like fairness products which are not only heavily advertised, but also readily available in grocery stores and general stores in India.

"I started using fairness products by the age 11-12, because my mother was much fairer than me."

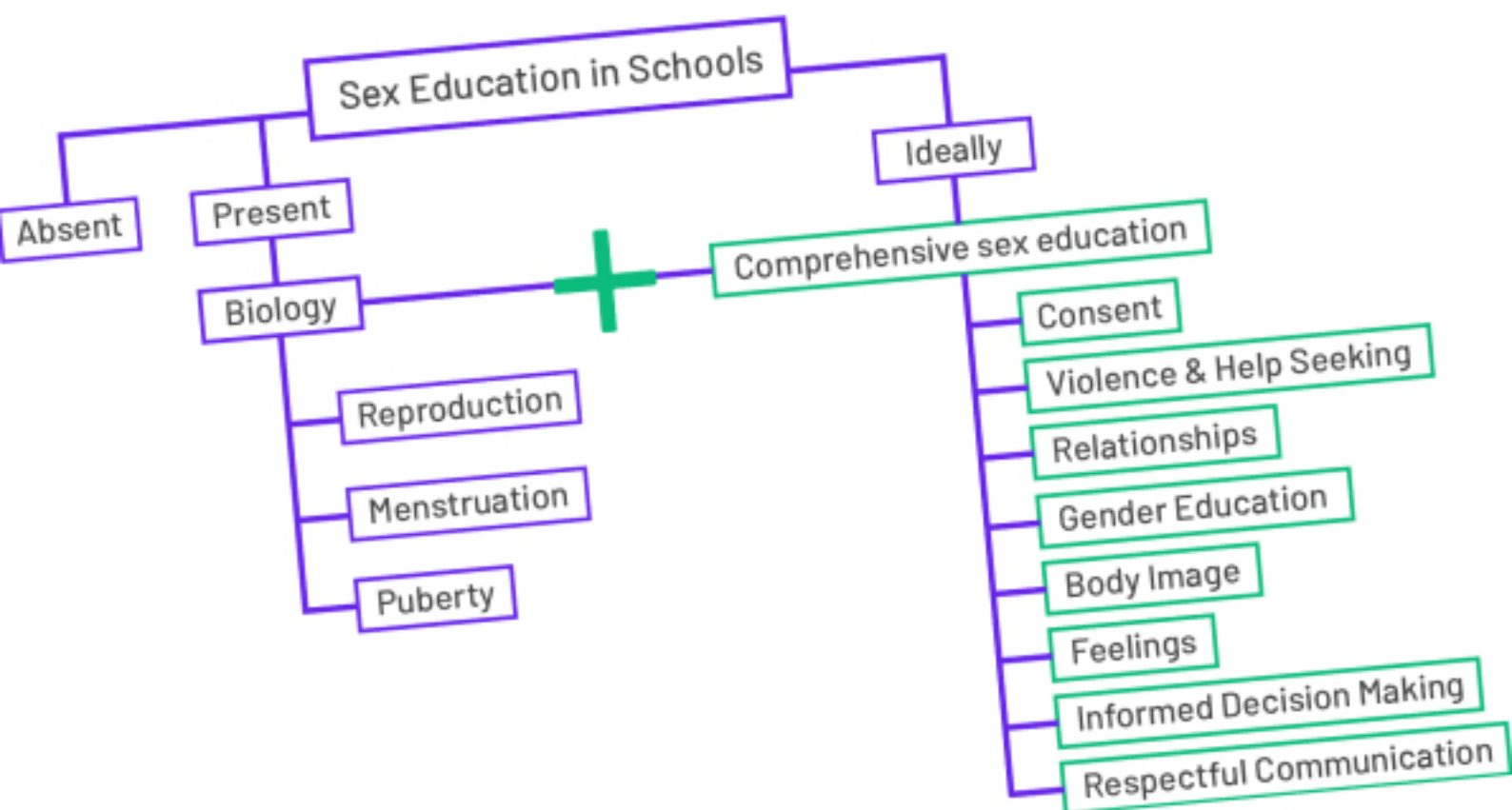
"At home they ask me to not go outside to play in the sun because I'll get tanned."

"When her school put on a performance, fair skinned kids were placed at the front regardless of their heights, and darker skinned children were all made to stand at the back, including my daughter. It broke my heart."

"My friends make jokes about me like 'oh no there's no light we won't be able to see you'. It happens very very often."

Unfortunately stories like these are plentiful in India.

All through their childhood and in growing into an adult, **kids encounter blatant biases and stereotyping** regarding skin colour.



Since Seeds of Awareness focuses extensively on Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) curriculums for schools, we too decided to understand and probe into it.

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) says that “The primary goal of comprehensive sexuality education is to promote sexual health. It should assist young people in developing a positive view of sexuality, provide them with information they need to take care of their sexual health, and help them acquire skills to make informed decisions now and in the future”.

CSE includes modules like consent, relationships, Gender Education, Body Image, amongst others. Hence we thought that our intervention about skin colour could live in the body image aspect of CSE so that it could become a regular practice in schools.

So, we began to think about

**HOW MIGHT WE CREATE A
MECHANISM AS A PART OF
CSE, FOR ADOLESCENTS
TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE AND
HEALTHY BODY IMAGE
ASOCIATIONS WITH
REGARD TO SKIN COLOUR?**

CURRENT BEHAVIOUR

- ① THINKING THAT ONLY FAIR^{ER} SKIN IS ATTRACTIVE & DARK^{ER} SKIN IS UNATTRACTIVE
- ② MATRIMONIALS MENTION FAIRNESS AS A PREREQUISITE / DESIRE
- ③ TEASING & TAUNTING DARK^{ER} PEOPLE BY PASSING EXTREMELY INSENSITIVE REMARKS/COMMENTS
Eg- COMPARING THEM TO CROWS, ROAD TAR, COAL.
"ANDHERE MEIN NAHI DIKHEZA"
— WON'T BE VISIBLE IN THE DARK
- ④ SALE & ADVERTISING FAIRNESS PRODUCTS
- ⑤ USE OF FAIRNESS PRODUCTS

DESIRED BEHAVIOUR

- ACCEPTANCE + NORMALISING ALL SKIN COLOURS
- SKIN COLOUR SHOULDN'T BE A CRITERIA FOR CONSIDERATION
- DON'T BE ASSHOLES.
- DON'T MAKE SOMEONE'S SKIN COLOUR THE SUBJECT OF A JOKE.
- BAN THE SALE OF HARMFUL SKIN FAIRNESS PRODUCTS
- STOP USING THEM : (

OUR INSIGHTS LED US TO

**SHIFTING
GEARS**

01 REFRAMING THE PROBLEM

During one of our conversations with SOA, founder Shalaka said something that stuck with us and gave us food for thought:

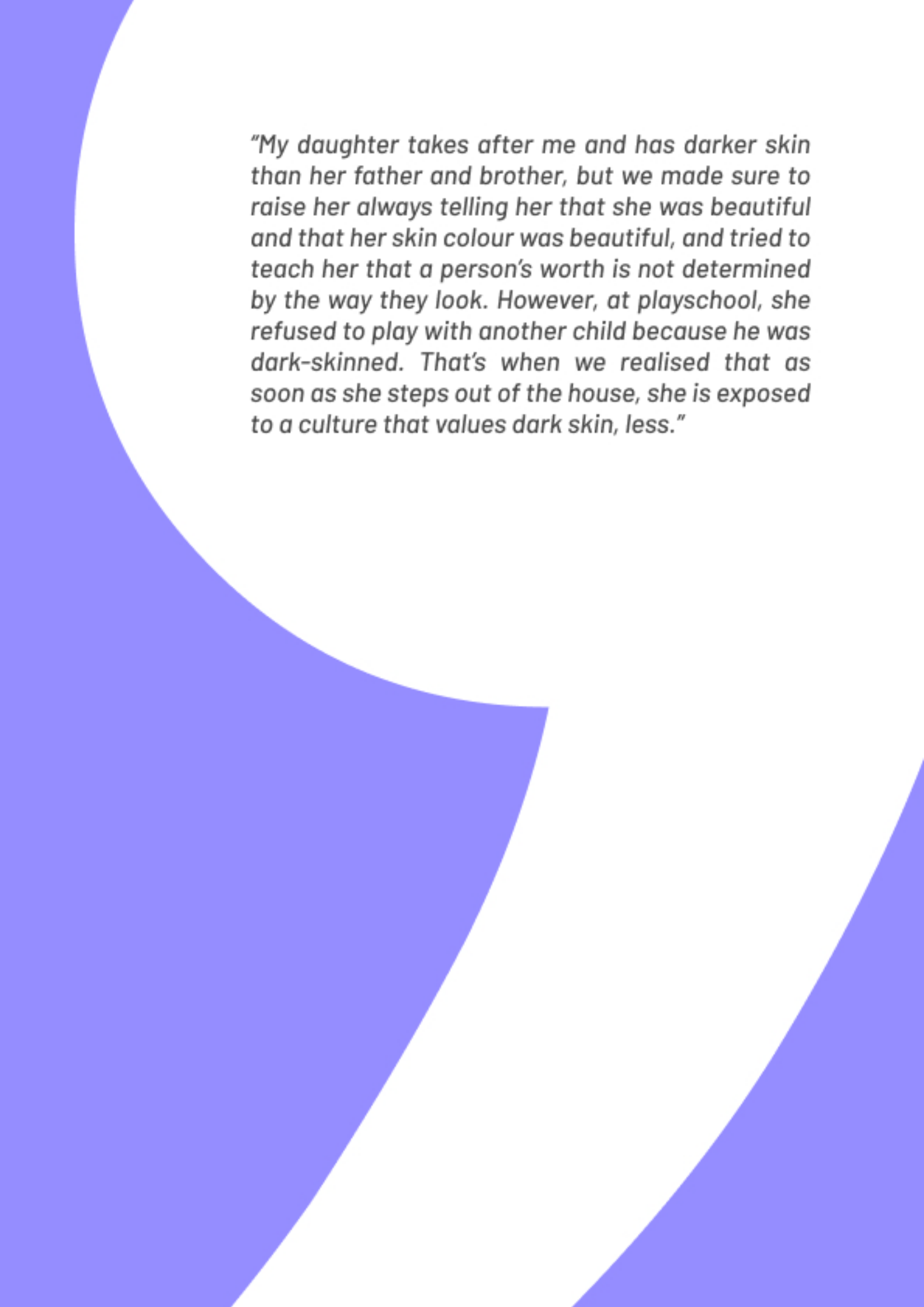
“It’s really easy to get the students to say the right things in school if you quiz them, but **the real challenge arises once they step out of the school setting, where they are influenced by their parents, siblings, peers and the media.**”

We read the account of a parent, about how she raised her daughter to believe that her dark skin was beautiful and worthy, and yet in school, she refused to play with another kid because he was dark-skinned.

Having heard things like this repeatedly, we realised that we needed a change in our approach. Teaching something to kids as a part of their curriculum alone wasn’t going to help in undoing this deeply ingrained social conditioning. Our intervention needed to be relevant even outside the bounds of a school and perhaps focus on the aspect of our lives that is a constant influence on our conscience- The media.

ACCORDING TO RESEARCH, AN AVERAGE CHILD IS EXPOSED TO OVER **40,000 COMMERCIALS THROUGH TV EVERY YEAR**

(U.S. MARKET FOR KIDS' FOODS AND BEVERAGES, 2003)



"My daughter takes after me and has darker skin than her father and brother, but we made sure to raise her always telling her that she was beautiful and that her skin colour was beautiful, and tried to teach her that a person's worth is not determined by the way they look. However, at playschool, she refused to play with another child because he was dark-skinned. That's when we realised that as soon as she steps out of the house, she is exposed to a culture that values dark skin, less."

02 CURRENT MEDIA REALITY

There is a serious lack of representation of Indian skin tones- specifically dark skin in our everyday content. **Growing up with no one to relate to, darker-skinned Indians internalise the notion that only fair skin equals normal and worthy.**



Film and tv producers choose to cast only fair-skinned actors in lead roles claiming that is what brings audiences to film halls. This then extends into bizarre practices like casting fair-skinned actors to play roles of dark-skinned people by changing their skin tones in makeup and editing. Most times one would struggle to see the portrayal of a person from a poorer economic background in Bollywood to be played by someone who is fair skinned, without dramatically altering their appearance to look dark. This also works in reverse where darker actors almost exclusively feature as side-kicks and villains.

Arranged marriages are a significant cultural norm in India. Most matrimonial advertising in newspapers and websites, mention fairness as a virtue. According to jeevansathi.com* statistics, 71% of women want responses from fair-skinned men, while 70% of men register their skin tone as 'fair'. Not surprisingly, these men get 5 times better responses. We have heard and read several accounts of people who were rejected for matrimonies because they were dark skinned.

*A popular matrimonial website in India.

Wanted Groom

R.C.Goan girl 26/5'3" B.Sc, MBA, fair company's Manager, trustworthy, expects suitable qualified intelligent, good personality value oriented

✓ Suitable match for Mahajan Girl, 5'3", June 1983, Lecturer engineering college near Chandigarh. Upper caste no bar send particular,

SUITABLE Match for very beautiful, fair, slim, Jat girl (Gotra Kadian Dangi Dalal) 23/5'7", Pursuing M.A. English, B.Ed., Haryana Jat boy settled

Suitable Match for Hindu Sethi (Khatra) Girl (Non-Manglik) MA. Fair. Slim, Beautiful, 5'3", September 13, 1987 (1:40 AM/ Chandigarh). High

Wanted Bride

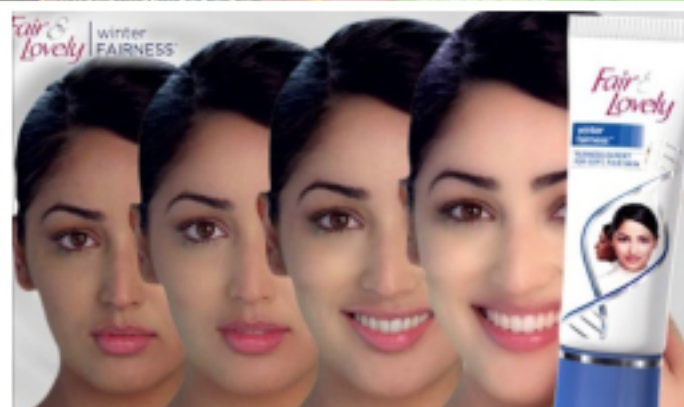
✓ Gaur Brahmin Nm 28/5'8 Bel 8- Lpa Working P (local) Maharashtra Seeks Working Girl Pref. 9033XXXXXX, 941XXXXXX

Vinod jalan, dob: 05.08.1980, time: 7.05 pm, 5'10" fair, bansal, senior software engineer, Blakh baran : 90XXXXXXX,

☐ Diet ☐ No ☐ Occasionally
☐ Smoke ☐ Yes ☐ No
☐ Drink ☐ Slim ☐ Average ☐ Athletic ☐ Heavy
☐ Body Type ☐ Very Fair ☐ Fair ☐ Wheatish ☐ Dark
☐ Complexion ☐ None
☐ Special Cases ☐ (Describe yourself, likes & dislikes, kind of per
☐ About Yourself (Describe yourself, likes & dislikes, kind of per
☐ etc.)

Looking after the family business. We are looking for a very fair, slim, exceptionally Beautiful Convented Girl from an affluent Industrialist

Commercials for fairness products often rope in popular Bollywood celebrities to endorse them. These products show the unattainable promise of fairer skin to their users. **The fairness products industry in India is estimated to surpass an astonishing 700 million dollar mark by the year 2023.**



Historically commercials for fairness products have been extremely problematic with rampant and open discrimination against darker skin. This is also ultimately a reflection of the society at that point in time and what it considered to be normal. However, over time with constant pressure from activists and consumers, these companies have toned down their over the top advertising, into more subtle forms of colourism. While it's good that they have changed a bit, the battle is long from won.

In 2009, an organisation called **'Women of worth'** launched an advocacy campaign called **'Dark is Beautiful'** to fight against colourism and help people regain their self worth. By 2014 the campaign had picked up a lot of steam and had eminent filmmaker and actor Nandita Das join forces with them. "Given how widespread the advertising for fairness and skin-lightening products is and the concerns of different stakeholders in society, ASCI saw the need to set up specific guidelines for this product category," said Partha Rakshit, Chairman, ASCI

The body further said, "Specifically, advertising should not directly or implicitly show people with darker skin, in a way that is widely seen as unattractive, unhappy, depressed or concerned. These ads should not portray people with darker skin in a way that is widely seen as a disadvantage of any kind, or inferior, or unsuccessful in any aspect of life, particularly in relation to being attractive to the opposite sex, matrimony, job placement, promotions and other prospects". In addition, it has said that in the depiction of the model before usage of the product, companies should ensure that expressions should not be negative or unhappy.

It also said that ad campaigns should not associate darker or lighter colour skin with any particular socio-economic strata, caste, community, religion, profession or ethnicity. **"Advertising should not perpetuate gender based discrimination because of skin colour"**, said the ad watchdog.

"No advertisement should communicate any discrimination or reinforce negative social stereotyping on the basis of skin colour."

- Advertising standards council



Screengrab from Dark and Beautiful's campaign video

Kavitha Emmanuel, Director Women of Worth, said: *"...it would only be fair for all cosmetic brands to take heed to this change and ensure that all discriminatory advertisements are taken off our TV screens and print media. We hope that these guidelines are made legal at some point."*

Yet, even with the passing of these guidelines, ads continue to be problematic and colourist 6 years later. Ironically brands like Emami and L'Oreal say they agree that advertisements should not encourage social discrimination of people based on skin colour, while continuing to peddle fairness products in the Indian market even in today.

In early 2020 the ministry of health and family welfare proposed amendments to Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable

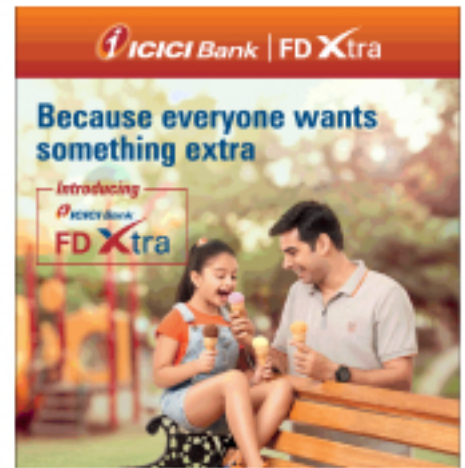
Advertisements) Bill. The draft amendment **bans advertisements of products that promote fairness creams**, enhance sexual performance, cure premature ageing and greying of hair, improvement in height of children or adults, increase in brain capacity and memory, improvement in strength of teeth and vision, change of foetal gender by drugs.

Under Section 7 of the current Act, the first conviction is punishable with imprisonment of up to six months or fine or both; and a subsequent conviction can result in imprisonment of up to a year or fine, or both. The amendment proposes to increase the penalties. For the first conviction, the proposed punishment is imprisonment of up to two years and fine up to Rs 10 lakh. For subsequent conviction, the imprisonment may extend to five years with a fine of up to Rs 50 lakh.



We remain optimistic of the successful passing of these guidelines and enforcement of the same. However, this alone won't be enough because the effects of colorism run much deeper.

Colourism makes an appearance everywhere, like in the most innocuous product commercials from toilet cleaners to snack items like chips, ad makers usually only rope in fair skinned actors in them.





Children's textbooks have been seen portraying dark skin as unwanted or unattractive. In story books/cartoons, the dark skinned characters make often make the villains. There's a complete lack of diversity of skin tones in the imagery and illustrations.



Everything, from billboards to milk packets, almost exclusively features fair-skinned people.

Shifting gears





Having looked at the colourism problem from a media perspective, led us to the question that we want to answer through our thesis:

**HOW MIGHT WE ENABLE
THE CREATION OF HEALTHY,
POSITIVE AND RADICALLY
INCLUSIVE NARRATIVES
SURROUNDING SKIN COLOUR
IN THE INDIAN MEDIA?**

WIRE COMMUNICATIONS
WIRE COMMUNICATIONS

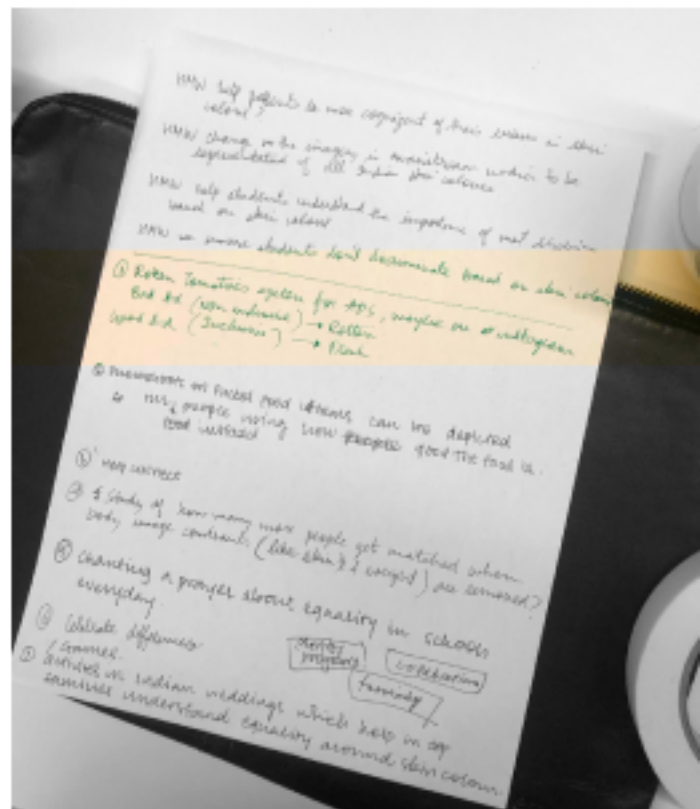
DESIGNING AN

INTERVENTION

01 IDEATION

Once we had established what we were working towards, we jumped into ideation mode. We used several frameworks like 2/2 matrix. and IDEO's Mashup Ideation method.

And although we thought of a lot of ideas like building games or toolkits, we realised we needed to dig deeper, and think about systemic and sustainable change. So we made a list- of the current reality and our ideal future state. This helped to give us direction and form goals for the project.



ELEMENTS OF MM	THINGS YOU FIND IN A GROCERY STORE	CLASSROOM RITUALS	THINGS YOU SEE AT INDIAN WEDDING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADVERTISEMENTS PHOTOSHOOTS • CASTING • NEWSPAPER ARTICLES • BOOK WRITERS • PRODUCERS • STOCK IMAGERY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LABELS / LABELLING • ONE PRODUCT - MANY VARIATIONS • SENSIBLE PLACEMENT OF PRODUCT AISLES • OPEN SPACE • NAME TAGS FOR EMPLOYEES • CUSTOMER SERVICE • BILLING COUNTER • CANDY AND MINTS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELECTIONS FOR MONITORS • CLASS CLEANING DAY • SHARING Tiffin FOOD • READING TIME • READING WHERE LAST • PERSON LEFT OFF • ATTENDANCE SCREAMING • MEDITATION 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FOOD BUFFET • OPEN BAR • GIFT BAGS & STATIONS • ITINERARY / PROGRAMS • GOSSIPING • CAMERAS • HASHTAGS FOR INSTA

02 PROJECT GOALS

1.

**ENGAGE PEOPLE IN
CONVERSATIONS
AROUND COLOURISM,
HOW DEEP ROOTED IT IS
AND HOW IT MANIFESTS
IN OUR DAILY LIVES**

We know that colourism has existed for a really long time. We aren't the first ones to talk about it and certainly won't be the last. But we believe that it is vital to keep having conversations around the issue, while also showing people how pervasive it is.

2.

**STOP PERPETUATING
THE PROBLEM BY
PREPARING THE
NEXT GENERATION
TO DO BETTER**

Since this problem of colourism is so deeply rooted in the Indian psyche, we believe that it is critical to educate the next generation about the issue and ways to overcome it.

3.

**DEVELOP
METHODOLOGIES TO
COMBAT FURTHER
PROPOGATION OF
COLOURISM IN
CURRENT NARRATIVES**

We also want to think about developing methodologies to put into practice now, to make sure that we don't make the mistakes of the past again.

**WE AIM TO MEET THESE GOALS THROUGH 3
PATHWAYS: AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND ACTION.**

03 SPREADING AWARENESS

The first pathway is awareness, and to achieve this we launched an Instagram page, think **A 'Rotten Tomatoes' but for ads, where we would rate adverts on how well or poorly they score on inclusivity.** In addition, we want to shine a spotlight on campaigns and brands championing inclusivity and give people a platform to share their experiences with colourism, in order to bring people together and push the need for change.

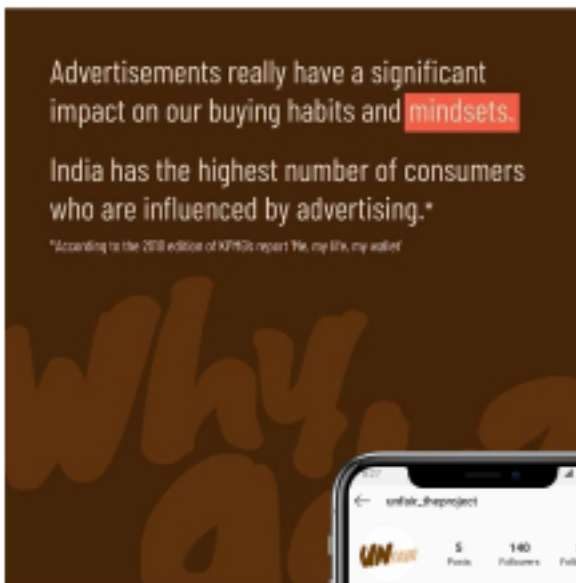
Our first few posts focus on telling our audience what this project is all about, what kind of content they can expect to see, how we would like to engage with them and establishing an overall tone for the brand.

We are being careful in trying to be **conversational and not preachy** and have a tone that encourages companies to learn and want to do better.

significant
mindsets.
consumers
].*



UNFAIR_THEPROJECT
Posts

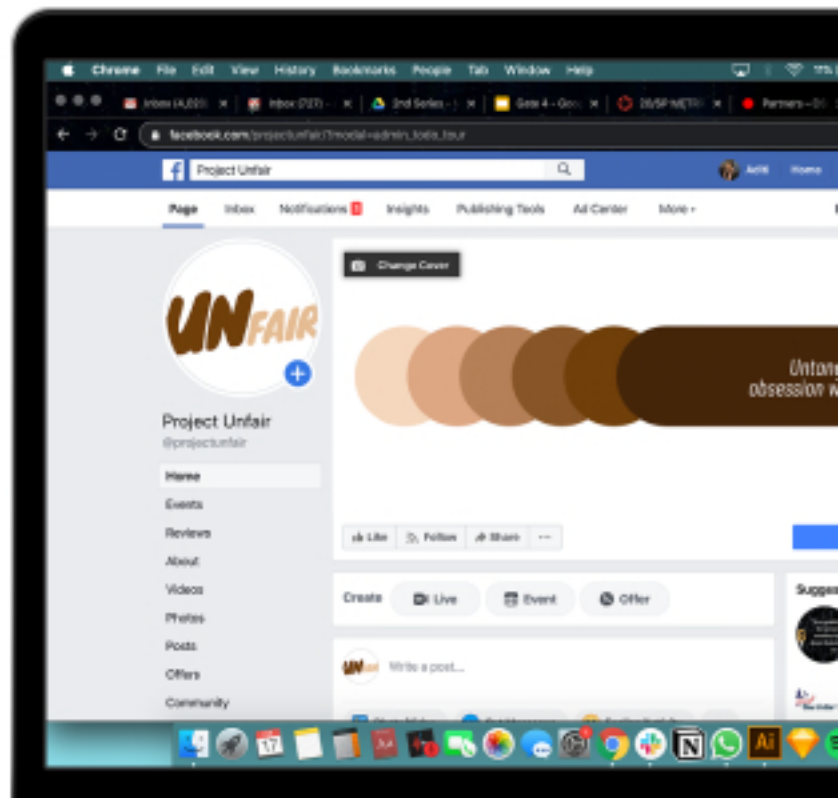


View Insights



34 likes

unfair_theproject Tell us about



Ads that do not show dark skin in poor light, or treat people with dark skin differently or inferior to people with fairer skin tones.

Ads that do not glorify/idealize fair skin.

Ads that do not drastically alter the skin tones of people in them to make them fairer or darker.

Ads that include people of various skin tones from the wide spectrum of Indian skin tones.

#PASS



In order to rate ads on their inclusivity, we established some guidelines. Here's how we will decide what's good and what's bad:

The aim is to reach as many people as possible to **shift mindsets and give people a platform to talk about their experiences.**



The ad campaign shows dark skin in poor light.

The ad campaign shows fair skin as superior. It glorifies/ idealizes fair skin.

The ad campaign portrays only one skin tone or only fair/fairer skin tones.

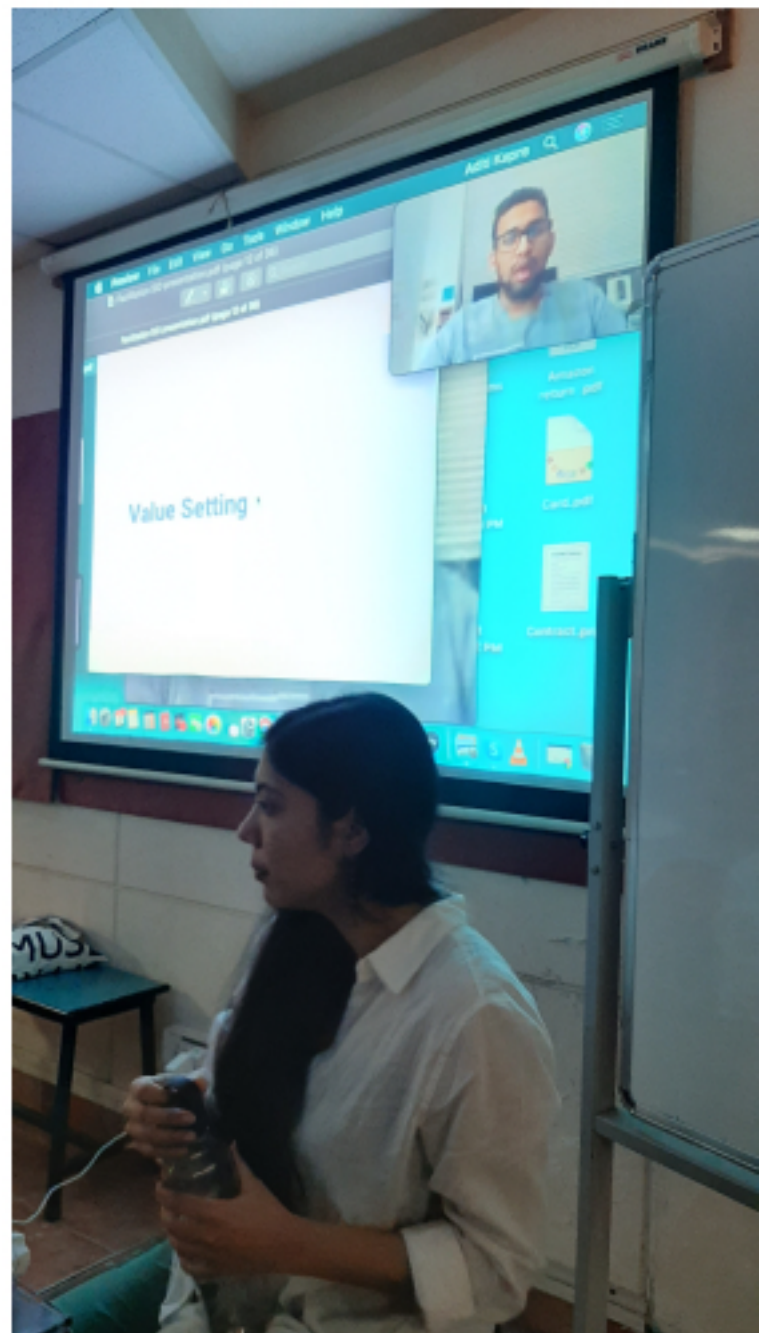
There is a drastic alteration in the skin tone of the people in the ad campaign.

#FAIL

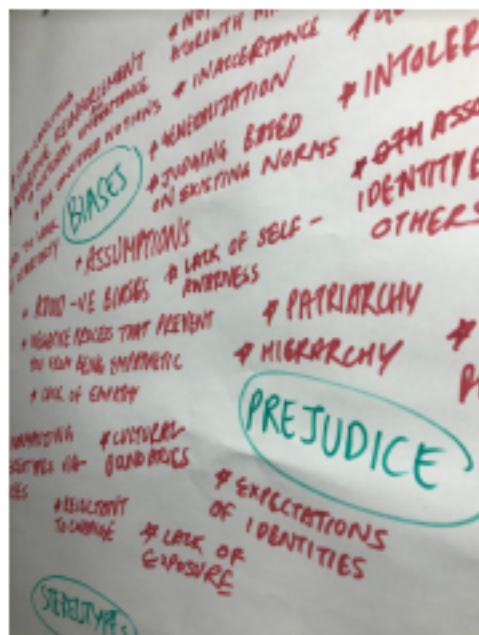
04 EDUCATION

Through the second pathway, education, we hope to focus on helping the creators of tomorrow- Visual design students, weave inclusivity into their practice.

We facilitated a workshop at two design schools in India with **Graphic design students, who are set to enter the industry as creators and impact mainstream media.**



We conducted one workshop in the winter break (dec) and the other in spring break (march). At each time, one of us was physically present and the other remote. It was a challenging setup which gave way to a unique experience.




In the end, students reimagined some existing narratives to be more inclusive using their newly gained knowledge.



Do the following subtractions.

$\begin{array}{r} 9 \\ - 2 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 8 \\ - 4 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 7 \\ - 2 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 5 \\ - 3 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ - 2 \\ \hline \end{array}$
$\begin{array}{r} 7 \\ - 5 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ - 1 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 6 \\ - 2 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 8 \\ - 5 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 8 \\ - 3 \\ \hline \end{array}$
$\begin{array}{r} 8 \\ - 0 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 3 \\ - 1 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 9 \\ - 7 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 1 \\ - 1 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ - 0 \\ \hline \end{array}$



Do the following subtractions.

$\begin{array}{r} 9 \\ - 2 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 8 \\ - 4 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 7 \\ - 2 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 5 \\ - 3 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ - 2 \\ \hline \end{array}$
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$\begin{array}{r} 8 \\ - 0 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 3 \\ - 1 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 9 \\ - 7 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 1 \\ - 1 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ - 0 \\ \hline \end{array}$



37



Pears

This Valentines day,
find that #luckychehra
you wanna Glow old with

#GoldenGlow

Pears

100% MORE GLYCERIN

Look Young.
Stay Young.



POND'S[®]
beauty

For every shade of beauty
Universal color , Universal beauty



No matter what color you are
We have you match

Pears



Celebrating Motherhood



05 CO-CREATION

We heard and felt the need for some sort guidelines that could help creators with this process. This sparked an idea- What if there was a test for colourism- like the Bechdel test, to provide a starting point and urge creators to produce inclusive narratives. In order to bring this idea to life, we facilitated co-creation sessions with a few creators in our network, with the intention to activate and mobilise the Indian creative community to be a part of the movement in ending colourism.

The goal was to create a mechanism that could help creators in making their work inclusive with regard to skin colour.



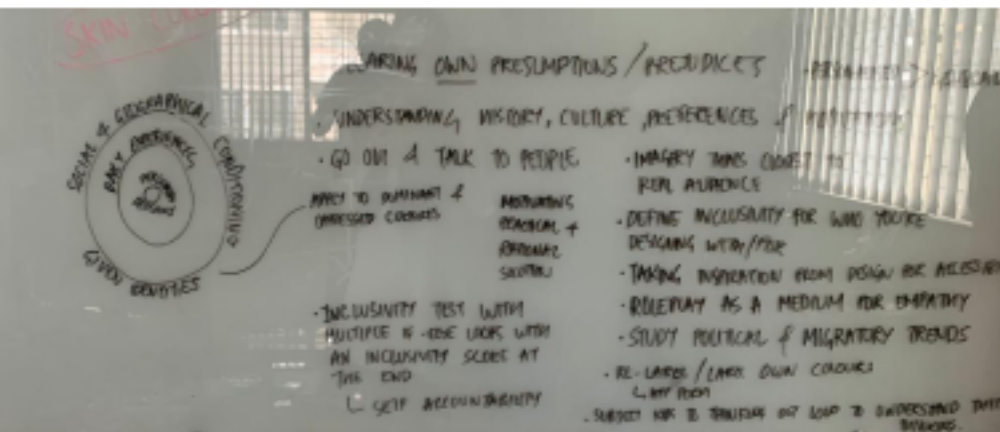
The first session was conducted with practising visual designers. Through the duration of the workshop, they came up with different processes, checklists and frameworks.



The second workshop had participants who are creators from different sectors like film, animation, music, copywriting etc with the intent of testing if they could come up with one kind of a mechanism that could work across all sectors, or if each industry would need a unique test.



It was encouraging to see the community care a great deal about the issue, and willing to show up and contribute towards making a change. The sessions were successful in giving these creators a space to talk and co-create. A lot of important questions and insights came up while we discussed how different design processes look at different jobs, positions, and projects, and the roadblocks that they face in creating inclusive work. By the end, a lot of great ideas started to come up.



A suggestion that came up was to study and take inspiration from the data and theory on design for accessibility.

Another idea was to create something that replicates an accinator. An algorithm containing series of if-else loops that give you an inclusivity score at the end. This would be a self accountability mechanism.

A fun activity idea was to give kids unlabelled crayons, and let them name the colours themselves. This would give an insight into their train of thought and an opportunity to correct any prejudices at an early age incase they show up.

There was also a lot of focus on self-reflection practices, to deal with own biases before designing.



Our hope is to conduct more sessions in order to refine these ideas and create usable guidelines/mechanisms, once the circumstances allow it.

THE NEXT STEP WOULD BE TO TEST THE USABILITY OF THE GUIDELINES/MECHANISM ACROSS SECTORS WITH VARIOUS CREATORS.

06 LEARNINGS From our Interventions

EDUCATION

Students understand the need for and the importance of the issue on hand. They are aware and think about the problem, but are not sure how to execute on it and need resources or references to learn from.

A check-list or guidelines would be super helpful for students to know that they are on the right track. Covered by Co-creation.

By the end of the session, students were able to reimagine certain works to be more inclusive, but there's still a gap in making it a regular practice. Which leads us to believe that they need more sessions to make this kind of thinking a more common and natural part of their process.

SPREADING AWARENESS

There is a definite lack of good ad campaigns to look up to.

The ad industry standards and norms of casting for almost every ad seem problematic, which points out to the fact that there is immense scope for this idea.

ACTION: CO- CREATION

The design process looks different for different people and depends a lot on timelines, budgets, deliverables etc- so it's challenging to design a mechanism that can become a regular part of this process

There are barriers to inclusive design on many stages- bosses> clients> consumers, so there is work to be done on every level

A lot of the solutions were centred around very personal work for the designer including recognising biases and working towards them actively at each stage/project

The first time around, we didn't have our measurement piece built into the time duration of the workshop, which led us to having to follow up multiple times with students after the workshop ended, to receive their work, so that we could evaluate the success of our workshop.

There is a sizable gap that we have identified, in the form of reviewing advertisements just like movies are rated, graded and/or censored.

Bringing some frameworks or structure of analysis and ideation to the next sessions will be helpful, so that the brainstorming actually results in a product/mechanism.

06 LEARNINGS From the process

To always, always, always start any partnership or collaborative process with shared community agreements and shared values. This goes a long way in establishing trust and a mechanism for accountability.

Let the research guide you, not preset goals.

Spend time gaining a shared understanding of the project, clarifying doubts and defining things for as long as it takes.

Don't let things fester, always talk about anything that bothers you.

Having a project buddy helps! An extra set of eyes to provide fresh perspective and to tell you exactly what works and what doesn't is a great asset to have.

Be agile in making the transition from 'researcher' or 'designer' to 'facilitator' and 'ally', whenever the situation calls for it.

Have faith in the process, and remember that it's not linear. We have to be brave enough to fail, and do the work again.

07 MEASUREMENT

All of our efforts are aimed towards a sustainable long term impact. The pathways of our intervention are similar to puzzle pieces that collectively answer our thesis question: How might we enable the creation of healthy, positive and radically inclusive narratives in India? Having set intangible and long term goals, we had to ask ourselves repeatedly, how do we measure success?

First, we wanted to **create awareness** about the problem on a large scale and **urge consumers to ask for better**, more relatable and inclusive narratives from businesses and creators.

The second step was **future-proofing**. To nip this problematic mindset in the bud, we wanted to ensure that design students who will go on and become creative professionals, have an **understanding of this issue, how biases show up and how to weave inclusivity in practice**.

Third, we wanted to inspire some action through the existing creative community. We shared with them our **understanding of colourism, personal biases and inclusivity in action** and facilitated **co-creation of a mechanism** to combat colourism in current media narratives.

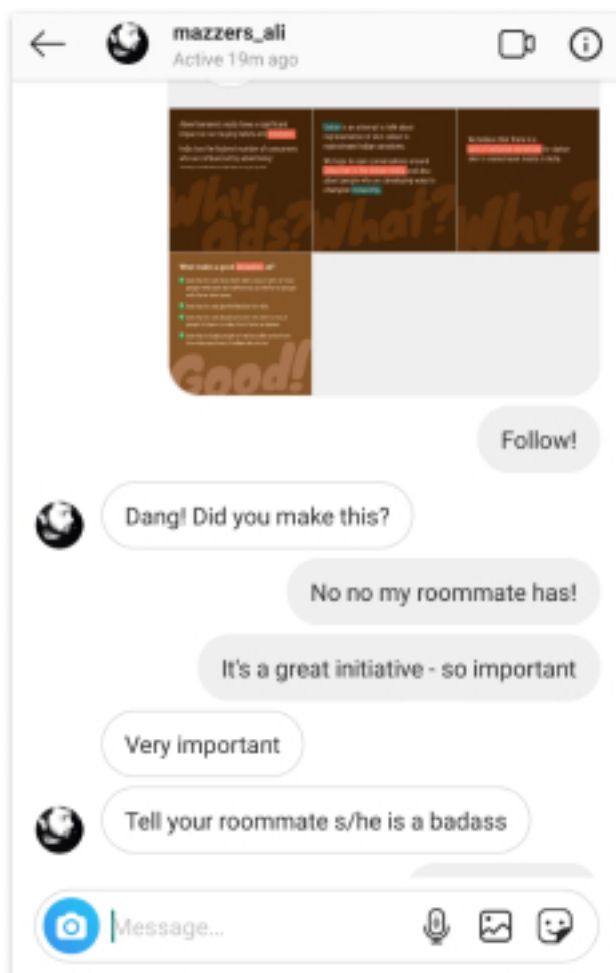
These sub-goals became fundamental pillars of our intervention and guided our M&E plan. We set out to measure a whole lot of impact metrics, but at the **core of our efforts was to develop the understanding of concepts like bias and inclusivity** and that is the metric that we were successful in achieving.

"We have stumbled upon these points (inclusivity) but we've never actually dwelled into how to incorporate it into our work"

"...this is definitely going to be so useful to us in the long run"

Feedback from the participants of workshops at the two design schools

"It was a lot of fun and the only thing I would say is that I would've loved for the discussions to be longer"



Response on the launch of our instagram account

"This is very important work and I think from today I'm going to involuntarily think of this through my work process"

Feedback from the Co-creation session

07 MEASUREMENT: ***THEORY OF CHANGE***

Most of the outcomes in our theory of change are qualitative in nature. So as we continue doing this work, the best way for us to monitor and evaluate our progress is to keep asking relevant questions and get as much in-person feedback as possible. Going forward, a good practice will be to weave some quantitative indicators in with our qualitative ones, so we are able to measure short term challenges/success too.

Goal: A new reality with radical inclusivity for all skin tones.

Thesis Goal: Enable the creation of healthy, positive and radically inclusive narratives in India



BROWN
AND
RELEVANT




BROWN
AND
STRONG



NEXT STEPS

**LOOKING
FORWARD**



The fight against colourism is a long and hard one. By no means do we intend on stopping here. We have to keep fighting the good fight so that the dignity and worth of our future generations does not depend on the colour of their skin.

**"INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A
THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE.
WE ARE CAUGHT IN AN INESCAPABLE
NETWORK OF MUTUALITY, TIED IN A
SINGLE GARMENT OF DESTINY"**

-MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

01 SUSTAINING THIS WORK AND IMPACT

As is true with most interventions to wicked social problems, we don't expect our work to 'solve' colourism or have an immediate impact. Efforts to create awareness and educate young people always take a long time, and we intend on giving this work more time, patience and continued effort.

The current situation with COVID-19 has changed the way we interact with each other and our systems, and it's crucial that we all evolve our practice to be relevant. With project Unfair too, **post COVID we will relaunch our social media awareness efforts** in a diligent, thorough and easy to grasp manner. Along with talking about problematic colourist ads and positive inclusive ads, we will feature stories from our community and conversations with folks pioneering inclusivity in their work. **Feedback from our community and our reach and engagement will determine the impact of our work for us.**

Conducting the workshops in those two design schools truly gave us immense joy and a true feeling of fostering social change. We received great engagement from the students and saw just how curious and willing to learn they all were. So we want to **continue conducting such workshops so that inclusivity becomes an easy everyday part of their design practice**, and these students become agents of change in the creative industry. **How they bring inclusivity into their professional practices will determine the success of these workshops.**

We were also able to host two co-creation sessions with some amazing artists and designers and that brought along such a beautiful sense of community. We hope to keep that sense alive and **host more such sessions** (post-pandemic) so that the ideas & concepts that came up in these sessions can be refined and turned into a Colorism test (like the Bechdel test) or a similar mechanism that helps folks in the creative industry make their work inclusive of all Indian skin colours. **Once we have created that, we will try to test it's usability and whether it can yield real-life impact!** The creative community has immense potential for impact and we want to foster and facilitate the processes that can lead to change.

**"For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf,
and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack"**



WE WERE INCREDIBLY FORTUNATE TO HAVE SO MUCH SUPPORT

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