

# “Mirror, Mirror. . . .” A Preliminary Investigation of Skin Tone Dissatisfaction and Its Impact Among British Adults

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This study examined skin tone dissatisfaction, measured using a skin tone chart, among a multiethnic sample of British adults. A total of 648 British White individuals, 292 British South Asians, and 260 British African Caribbean participants completed a visual task in which they were asked to indicate their actual and ideal skin tones. They also completed measures of body appreciation, self-esteem, and ethnic identity attachment. Results showed that Asians had a lighter skin tone ideal than White and African Caribbean participants. Conversely, White participants had higher skin tone dissatisfaction (preferring a darker skin tone) than Asian and African Caribbean participants, who preferred a lighter skin tone. Results also showed that skin tone dissatisfaction predicted body appreciation once the effects of participant ethnicity, age, ethnic identity attachment, and self-esteem had been accounted for. Implications of our findings and suggestions for future research are discussed.

*Keywords:* skin tone, body image, attractiveness ideal, body appreciation, self-esteem

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In the past several decades, a large body of research has documented the existence of cultural factors that impact an individual's perception of his/her body image (e.g., Flynn & Fitzgibbon, 1998; Rubin, Fitts, & Becker, 2003). One of the most important, although also least-studied, of these cultural factors is skin tone, which is known to be associated with a range of experiences and outcomes among ethnic minority groups. For example, studies of African Americans have shown that lighter skin tone is associated with improved material well-being (Hersch, 2006; Hill, 2000; Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Hunter, Allen, & Telles, 2001; Keith & Herring, 1991). Data from other arenas have shown the same association between lighter skin tone and social advantage, including in terms of hiring decisions (Wade, Romano, & Blue, 2004) and interpersonal relationships (Edwards, Carter-Tellison, & Herring, 2004).

Such findings have been explained as a function of *colorism*, that is, a “tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone” (Maddox & Gray, 2002, p. 250). More specifically, it is argued that people attend to differences in skin tone (Blair, Judd, & Fallman, 2004) and attribute meaning to those differences in accordance with sociohistorical norms. Historically, lightness has typically been associated with goodness, whereas darkness or

blackness has been derided and denigrated (Hall, 1995; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). European colonialism and contemporary racism have exacerbated such associations, constructing lighter skin tones as fair and attractive and darker skin tones as disadvantaged (Hunter, 2002; Swami, 2007).

It is not surprising, then, that skin tone remains one of the most important distinguishing features of individuals (Swami & Furnham, 2008), with lighter skin tones generally perceived as more attractive than darker skin tones across cultural groups (Belletti & Wade, 2008; Dixon, Dixon, Morgan, & Anderson, 2007; Feinman & Gill, 1978; Frost, 1994; Paw[sws]lowski & Szymanczyk, 2008; Stephen, Smith, Stirrat, & Perrett, 2009; Swami, Furnham, & Joshi, 2008; Van den Bergh & Frost, 1986; Wade, Irvine, & Cooper, 2004; but see Lewis, 2010, 2011; Swami, Rozmus-Wrzesinska, et al., 2008). Combined with the higher status accorded Caucasoid features in most Western societies (Neal & Wilson, 1989), it has been suggested that these ideals have important psychosocial consequences for ethnic minority individuals (Boyd-Franklin, 1991; Russell et al., 1992).

For one thing, studies in the United States typically have shown that African Americans internalize societal ideals of skin tone, with lighter skin tones rated as more attractive than darker skin tones (Altabe, 1998; Bond & Cash, 1992). Although ethnic minority individuals do sometimes attempt to manage the discrepancy between their own appearance and Eurocentric ideals (Sekayi, 2003), the use of light skin as a point of reference for attractiveness ideals can affect self-esteem and self-identity (Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, & Ward, 1987). Thus, for example, there is some evidence to suggest that lighter skin tones among African Americans are associated with improved self-esteem (Robinson & Ward, 1995), even after controlling for variables such as income, marital status, and education (Thompson & Keith, 2001).

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There is also some evidence that dissatisfaction with skin tone is associated with body image variables. In a seminal study, [Bond and Cash \(1992\)](#) reported that actual skin tone among African American participants was not associated with facets of body image satisfaction; importantly, however, they did find significant associations between skin tone satisfaction and satisfaction with overall appearance and with the face. More recent studies have reported that greater dissatisfaction with skin tone among ethnic minority individuals is associated with more negative body image ([Buchanan, Fischer, Tokar, & Yoder, 2008](#)) and body dysmorphic symptoms ([Marques et al., 2011](#)). In one study, for example, it was reported that greater dissatisfaction with skin tone was associated with more negative appearance evaluation and greater dissatisfaction with specific body areas ([Falconer & Neville, 2000](#)).

Although the above evidence does appear to be fairly robust, a number of limitations restrict the conclusions that can be drawn from this research. First, the focus of the extant literature on African American samples potentially masks important differences in the corporeal experiences related to skin tone between minority and majority groups. On the one hand, ethnic minority groups must contend with societal norms of attractiveness ([Celious & Oyserman, 2001](#); [Wade, 1996](#)) as well as the power structures that they reflect ([Landale & Oropesa, 2002](#)). In this sense, evaluations of skin tone among ethnic minority groups are likely to be related to such aspects of the self as ethnic and racial identity, self-definition, and degree of assimilation into mainstream society ([Portes & Rumbaut, 1990](#)). That is, it is the negotiation of self-perceptions in relation to mainstream beauty ideals and colorism as reflected in power structures that matters most in relation to skin tone dissatisfaction among ethnic minority groups.

By contrast, majority White populations, by virtue of their Eurocentric features, are less likely to have to deal with biased power structures. However, this is not to say that majority White populations do not experience skin tone dissatisfaction. For example, recent studies have highlighted the contemporary popularity of tanning in Western societies (e.g., [Cafri et al., 2006](#)), as well as the more positive attributions accorded tan figures (e.g., [Smith, Cornelissen, & Tovée, 2007](#); [Swami, Rozmus-Wrzesinska, et al., 2008](#)). To the extent that a tan ideal is now prevalent in most Western societies, it is quite possible that rates of skin tone dissatisfaction have risen among majority White samples. That is, changing societal ideals and fashions may have led to White individuals now experiencing skin tone dissatisfaction to the extent that their actual skin tones are different from their ideals.

A related limitation of previous work is the fact that studies that have examined skin tone dissatisfaction have not focused on gender differences. This is important because the colorism bias may occur differently for women and men ([Maddox, 2004](#)). For example, among African Americans, darker skin tone is related to more negative self-worth among women ([Harvey, 1995](#); [Neal & Wilson, 1989](#)) but greater self-perceptions of attractiveness among men ([Wade, 1996](#)). Moreover, the available evidence suggests that skin tone distinctions in relation to material well-being are more debilitating for dark-skinned women ([Keith & Herring, 1991](#)). More broadly, women of all ethnic groups experience greater pressure than men to conform to societal standards of beauty ([Swami & Furnham, 2008](#)). Taken together, the available evidence would seem to indicate that women experience greater skin tone

dissatisfaction than men, although this hypothesis has not been previously tested.

Related to the issue of between-groups differences in skin tone dissatisfaction is the fact that almost all previous studies have been conducted with samples from the United States, which makes unclear the extent to which similar patterns of skin tone dissatisfaction may be found in other nations. As one example, the extant evidence on body image suggests that there are few differences between Hispanic and White women in the United States (for a review, see [Grabe & Hyde, 2006](#)), whereas similar comparisons suggest more marked differences among the same ethnic groups in Britain ([Swami, Airs, Chouhan, Padilla Leon, & Towell, 2009](#)). In the absence of empirical data, then, it remains uncertain to what extent the evidence of skin tone dissatisfaction among African Americans will generalize to ethnic minority groups outside the United States.

A second limitation with the extant literature is that, from a methodological point of view, it is notable that previous studies have tended to operationalize skin tone dissatisfaction using Likert-type scales, such as the Skin Color Satisfaction Scale (SCSS; [Falconer & Neville, 2000](#)). The internal consistency of the SCSS has proved unstable, requiring omission of certain items ([Buchanan et al., 2008](#)); in any case, such scales may have low ecological validity. An alternative method to operationalize skin tone dissatisfaction is to use a visual discrepancy task, as is frequently used when assessing actual-ideal weight discrepancy. In terms of the latter, it is common to present participants with figures ranging in body size; participants are asked to rate the figures that best represent their actual body size and their ideal body size, and a body dissatisfaction score is computed as the discrepancy between the two ratings (for a review, see [Gardner & Brown, 2010](#)). In terms of skin tone specifically, the use of a similar visual task may offer a quick and effective means of assessing dissatisfaction with one's skin tone.

A third limitation is that studies that have examined the associations between skin tone dissatisfaction and body image have included only a limited range of additional variables, such as African self-consciousness ([Falconer & Neville, 2000](#)). One potentially neglected variable is an individual's ethnic identity, that is, "a feeling of belonging to one's [ethnic] group, a clear understanding of the meaning of one's [group] membership, positive attitudes toward the group, familiarity with its history and culture, and involvement in its practices" ([Phinney, DuPont, Espinosa, Revill, & Sanders, 1994](#), p. 169). Although this definition of ethnic identity includes both affective (the affirmation, belonging, and commitment to one's ethnic group—what we henceforth refer to as *ethnic identity attachment*) and developmental-cognitive components (the search for one's ethnic identity), it is the former that may play an important role in terms of skin tone dissatisfaction. That is, in examining relationships between skin tone dissatisfaction and body image, it is important to control for both an individual's objective ethnicity as well as his or her affective sense of belonging to and affirmation of his or her ethnic group and perceived distance from other ethnic groups. Indeed, there is some research to indicate that greater affirmation of one's ethnic group among ethnic minority women in Britain may buffer them from negative corporeal attitudes (see [Swami & Hendrikse](#), in press). Thus, when examining associations between skin tone dissatisfaction and body image, it will be important to take into account the effects of both

ethnicity and ethnic identity attachment. That is, it remains to be shown that skin tone dissatisfaction has an independent effect on body image once other variables such as ethnic identity attachment and self-esteem have been taken into account.

### The Present Study

The present study, then, was conceived with the above limitations in mind. Specifically, we conducted a preliminary examination of skin tone dissatisfaction, operationalized using a novel visual scale, among a multiethnic sample of British adults (White, South Asian, and African Caribbean participants). As a preliminary hypothesis, and based on the extant literature, we predicted that ethnic minority groups in Britain (South Asian and African Caribbean participants) would have higher skin tone dissatisfaction than British Whites, with a specific pursuit of skin tones that are lighter than their actual skin tones. Nevertheless, based on the contemporary popularity of tanning, we also included a preliminary hypothesis that British White participants would want to be darker than they currently are. We also predicted that women would have significantly higher skin tone dissatisfaction compared with men.

In addition, we also investigated the independent effects of skin tone dissatisfaction in predicting body image (operationalized as body appreciation) once the effects of participant gender, ethnicity, ethnic identity attachment, and self-esteem were taken into account. That is, our aim was to investigate the extent to which skin tone dissatisfaction has a direct relationship with body image, independent of the effects of variables that have been identified in the literature as having significant associations with skin tone evaluations. To the extent that body image is independently predicted by skin tone dissatisfaction, it would provide further evidence of the importance of understanding the latter as a unique corporeal experience relevant to body image.

## Method

### Participants

The participants of this study initially consisted of a pool of 1,268 participants recruited from London, United Kingdom. However, because of the relatively small number of participants who self-reported as being of "other" ethnicity ( $n = 68$ ), these participants were excluded from the final sample, which consisted of 648 individuals who self-reported being White, 292 as South Asians, and 260 as African Caribbean. All participants were British residents and were at least second-generation Britons. The total sample consisted of 724 women and 476 men and had a mean age of 24.23 years ( $SD = 7.77$ ). Of these participants, the majority had completed secondary education (51.0%), 35.0% had an undergraduate degree, 8.0% had a postgraduate degree, and 6.0% had some other qualification. In terms of marital status, 56.0% were single, 35.0% were in a committed relationship, 7.0% were married, and the remainder were separated, divorced, or widowed.

### Measures

**Skin tone dissatisfaction.** To measure skin tone dissatisfaction, we initially obtained a skin color chart developed for use by

the cosmetics industry (<http://www.outlineskincare.co.uk>; see the Appendix). In this chart, users are presented with 13 skin tones, which, for the present purposes, we numbered consecutively from darkest to lightest (1 = *darkest skin tone* and 13 = *lightest skin tone*). Although we do not have evidence that the chart was designed to depict exact skin tone morphology among British samples, it does appear to capture the range of skin tones found among the British population (see Results). Based on the skin tone chart, participants were asked to rate the color that most closely matched their current skin tone (actual) and the skin tone that they would most like to possess (ideal), with lower ratings reflecting darker skin tones and higher ratings reflecting lighter skin tones. In initial analyses, we treated the actual and ideal ratings independently, but for further analyses, we also computed a skin tone dissatisfaction score as the discrepancy between actual and ideal ratings. For these dissatisfaction ratings, we retained signed scores so that positive scores reflect a pursuit of darker skin tones and negative values reflect a pursuit of lighter skin tones. The measurement of a dissatisfaction score as the difference between actual and ideal ratings mirrors the calculation of body dissatisfaction scores using figural rating scales (for a review, see Gardner & Brown, 2010).

**Body appreciation.** We used the Body Appreciation Scale (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005), a 13-item scale that measures related aspects of positive body image. The scale can be used to measure body appreciation among both women and men, with one item being gender-specific (referring to unrealistically thin images for women and unrealistically muscular images for men). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*), with higher scores reflecting greater body appreciation. An overall body appreciation score is computed as the mean of 13 items. The scale has been shown to consist of a single factor and has good construct, discriminant, and incremental validity among Western samples (Avalos et al., 2005; Swami, Stieger, Haubner, & Voracek, 2008). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .90.

**Ethnic identity attachment.** To measure ethnic identity attachment, we used the Affective subscale of Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. This subscale measures an individual's sense of affirmation, belonging, and commitment to his/her own ethnic group and consists of seven items (three items that are used for identification and categorization by ethnicity among North American samples in the full version of the scale were omitted for the present purposes). Items in the subscale are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Subscale scores were computed by taking the mean of the seven items (Phinney, 1992), with higher scores reflecting greater ethnic identity attachment. The subscale has been shown to have good internal consistency and good patterns of validity (Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999). Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study was .84.

**Self-esteem.** To measure self-esteem, we used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the most widely used measure of global perceptions of an individual's sense of worthiness as a person. The scale consists of 10 items that are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Prior to analyses, five items were reverse-coded and an overall score was computed as the mean of 10 items. Higher scores on this scale reflect more positive self-

esteem. The scale has been shown to consist of a single factor of global self-esteem and has good patterns of validity (Whiteside-Mansell & Corwyn, 2003). The internal consistency of the scale in the present study was .73.

**Demographics.** Participants provided their age, gender, highest educational qualification, marital status, and ethnicity. For the latter item, participants were asked to indicate whether they belonged to any of the three main ethnic groups in the United Kingdom (White; British South Asian; or Black or African or Caribbean or British Black or African or Caribbean). An "other ethnic group" option was provided for participants who did not fall into any of these three categories.

## Procedure

Once ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee, eight experimenters recruited participants using the convenience sample method. Potential participants were invited to take part in a study ostensibly on health and ethnicity. The only criteria limiting participation were that participants should be of adult age and should have normal color vision. Once participation had been agreed, participants provided informed consent and completed a four-page, paper-and-pencil questionnaire. The order of presentation of the above scales in the questionnaire was semi-randomized for each participant, with the demographic items always appearing last.

The skin tone chart section of the questionnaire was printed on high-quality paper, allowing participants to hold the chart near their skin for matching purposes (this mirrors the way skin tone charts are used in the cosmetics industry). The questionnaire took approximately 15 min to complete and was returned to the experimenters in a sealed envelope. All participants took part on a voluntary basis and received no remuneration. Once they had returned their questionnaires, participants were provided with a debrief sheet containing further information about the study and contact details of the corresponding author. The data were analyzed using PASW Statistics 18.

## Results

### Initial Analyses

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for all variables included in the present study as a function of participant gender and ethnicity are reported in Table 1. As a simple check of the ability of our skin tone scale to capture the majority of perceived skin tones among our participants, we examined the frequency of responses on the scale to the item on actual skin tone ( $Mdn = 7.00$ , variance = 8.48, skewness = .22, kurtosis = -.88). The extreme ends of the scale were rated relatively infrequently (1 = 1.3%, 13 = 4.7%), and the majority of responses (58.6%) were accorded to the middle of the scale (Skin Tones 5 through 9). In general, then, it would seem that the skin tone chart was sufficient to capture our participants' perceptions of their own skin tone, with fewer responses at extreme ends of the scale.

### Between-Groups Differences

Also reported in Table 1 are the results of a series of  $2 \times 3$  (gender: women vs. men; ethnicity: White vs. Asian vs. African Caribbean) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with all primary factors included in the present study as dependent variables. As can be seen, although there were a number of significant interactions between participant gender and ethnicity, the effect sizes for these effects were negligible in all cases ( $\eta_p^2 \leq .01$ ). For this reason, we focused on the significant main effects for gender and ethnicity and, where appropriate, report on the results of post hoc Tukey's tests below. In addition, although there were significant main effects of participant gender and ethnicity on age, the effect sizes of these differences were likewise negligible ( $\eta_p^2 < .01$ ). When we ran analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) with all remaining variables, there was no significant effect of covariate age (details are available from the corresponding author). For these reasons, we report on ANOVA, rather than ANCOVA, results below.

As reported in Table 1, there were significant main effects of participant gender on ratings of actual skin tone and ideal skin tone, with women having higher ratings (reflecting lighter skin

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics as a Function of Participant Gender and Ethnicity and Results of Univariate Analyses of Variance

Variable	Gender				Ethnicity						Main effect of gender			Main effect of ethnicity			Gender $\times$ Ethnicity		
	Women		Men		White		South Asian		African Caribbean		F	p	$\eta_p^2$	F	p	$\eta_p^2$	F	p	$\eta_p^2$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD									
Participant age	22.89	6.95	24.75	8.85	24.41	8.38	23.27	5.96	24.75	7.94	11.32	.001	<.01	3.25	.039	<.01	7.14	.001	<.01
Actual skin tone <sup>a</sup>	7.88	3.11	7.07	2.51	8.71	2.70	6.71	2.31	5.63	2.68	20.82	<.001	.02	137.06	<.001	.19	4.91	.008	<.01
Ideal skin tone <sup>a</sup>	6.82	2.74	6.46	2.47	6.84	2.30	7.53	2.81	5.32	2.72	8.83	.003	<.01	54.63	<.001	.08	0.14	.868	<.01
Skin tone dissatisfaction <sup>b</sup>	0.85	2.68	0.34	2.16	1.87	2.27	-0.82	2.06	-0.77	1.76	10.33	.001	<.01	223.06	<.001	.27	3.55	.029	<.01
Body appreciation <sup>c</sup>	3.56	0.78	3.75	0.53	3.53	0.65	3.77	0.69	3.75	0.78	12.28	<.001	.01	14.35	<.001	.02	2.58	.076	<.01
Self-esteem <sup>c</sup>	3.01	0.49	3.08	0.52	3.00	0.47	3.13	0.51	3.02	0.56	1.39	.238	<.01	6.35	.002	.01	3.55	.029	<.01
Ethnic identity attachment <sup>c</sup>	3.09	0.81	2.85	0.60	2.84	0.64	3.07	0.78	3.26	0.86	47.15	<.001	.04	23.78	<.001	.04	7.93	.001	.01

Note. Main effect of gender  $df = 1, 1194$ ; Main effect of ethnicity  $df = 2, 1194$ ; Interaction  $df = 2, 1194$ .

<sup>a</sup> Lower ratings reflect darker skin tones (higher ratings reflect lighter skin tones). <sup>b</sup> Positive scores reflect a pursuit of darker skin tones and negative values reflect a pursuit of lighter skin tones. <sup>c</sup> Higher scores reflect greater body appreciation, self-esteem, or ethnic identity attachment.

tones) on both variables. In addition, women reported significantly higher skin tone dissatisfaction than men. Women also reported significantly higher ethnic identity attachment, although men did have significantly higher scores on body appreciation, which is consistent with previous work (Avalos et al., 2005; Swami, Rozmus-Wrzesinska, et al., 2008). Overall, however, the significant main effects that we found for participant gender generally had weak effect sizes, with  $\eta_p^2$  values ranging from less than .01 to .05.

On the other hand, there were significant main effects of ethnicity, with weak to moderate effect sizes ( $\eta_p^2 = .02-.27$ ), on all but one of the ANOVAs. First, there was a significant main effect of ethnicity on ratings of actual skin tone, with post hoc Tukey's tests showing that White participants had significantly lighter skin tone than both Asian and African Caribbean participants, and Asians had significantly lighter skin tone than African Caribbean participants ( $ps < .001$ ). There was also a significant main effect of ethnicity on ratings of ideal skin tone. Employing the post hoc Tukey's test, we found that Asian participants had a significantly lighter ideal than both White and African Caribbean participants, and White participants had a significantly lighter ideal than African Caribbean individuals ( $ps < .001$ ). In terms of skin tone dissatisfaction, post hoc Tukey's tests showed that White participants had significantly greater dissatisfaction than Asian and African Caribbean participants ( $ps < .001$ ). On the other hand, there was no significant difference between Asian and African Caribbean participants ( $p = .960$ ).

The same pattern of findings was found for body appreciation scores, with White participants reporting significantly lower body appreciation than Asian and African Caribbean participants ( $ps < .001$ ), and there was no significant difference between Asian and African Caribbean participants ( $p = .958$ ). Although this pattern of differences is consistent with previous work (Swami et al., 2009), it should also be noted that the effect size of the overall difference was small ( $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ). Finally, post hoc Tukey's tests showed that White participants had significantly lower scores on ethnic identity attachment compared with Asian and African Caribbean participants ( $ps < .001$ ). In addition, African Caribbean participants had significantly higher ethnic identity attachment than Asian participants ( $p = .005$ ).

### Interscale Correlations and Multiple Regression

Partial correlations were computed to examine the associations between skin tone dissatisfaction, body appreciation, self-esteem, ethnic identity attachment, and age while controlling for participant ethnicity. Separate analyses were conducted for women and men. As can be seen in Table 2, greater skin tone dissatisfaction among women was significantly correlated with body appreciation and self-esteem, whereas skin tone dissatisfaction among men was significantly correlated only with body appreciation. Next, to test whether skin tone dissatisfaction predicts body appreciation over and above other variables in our study, we conducted a multiple hierarchical regression in which body appreciation was the dependent variable. In the first step of the regression, participant ethnicity, gender, ethnic identity attachment, age, and self-esteem were entered as predictor variables; in the second step, skin tone dissatisfaction was entered on its own. We chose a hierarchical regression as this

Table 2

*Partial Correlations Between Skin Tone Dissatisfaction, Body Appreciation, Self-Esteem, Ethnic Identity Salience, and Age, Controlling for Participant Ethnicity*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Skin tone dissatisfaction		-.13***	-.10**	.03	.03
2. Body appreciation	-.15***		.09**	.05	.03
3. Self-esteem	-.05	.09		.22***	.08*
4. Ethnic identity attachment	-.07	.15***	-.01		.05
5. Participant age	-.08	-.02	.11**	.06	

Note.  $N = 1,200$ . Results for women are in the top diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

allowed us to examine the unique effects of skin tone dissatisfaction in predicting body appreciation.

Results showed that the first step of the regression was significant,  $F(5, 1194) = 13.38, p < .001, \text{adj. } R^2 = .05$ , with participant ethnicity, gender, ethnic identity attachment, and self-esteem emerging as significant predictors (see Table 3 for regression coefficients). The second step of the regression was also significant,  $F(6, 1193) = 15.54, p < .001, \text{adj. } R^2 = .07$ , with gender, ethnic identity attachment, self-esteem, and skin tone dissatisfaction emerging as significant predictors. Based on the regression coefficients, it was notable that skin tone dissatisfaction emerged as the strongest predictor of body appreciation in our sample, even after taking into account the effects of gender.

### Discussion

Consistent with previous findings among African Americans (e.g., Altabe, 1998; Bond & Cash, 1992; Buchanan et al., 2008), our results showed that ethnic minority individuals in Britain (British South Asian and African Caribbean participants) generally experienced skin tone dissatisfaction. Specifically, they appeared to show a pursuit of lighter skin tones than they currently had. As various authors have indicated, the pursuit of lighter skin tones among ethnic minority groups likely reflects the more positive traits that are accorded lighter skin tones in most Western societies (Hunter, 2002; Maddox & Gray, 2002; Swami, 2007). In addition, lighter skin tone may lead to social and economic rewards for ethnic minority individuals (Hersch, 2006; Hill, 2000; Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Hunter et al., 2001; Keith & Herring, 1991); from this view, ethnic minority individuals may view lighter skin tone as a form of social capital (Buchanan et al., 2008).

Conversely, however, the present findings also indicate that skin tone dissatisfaction is not limited to ethnic minority individuals. In fact, our results suggest that White participants had significantly higher skin tone dissatisfaction than ethnic minority participants. Unlike the latter, however, White participants in the present study appeared to idealize a darker skin tone than they currently had. As noted earlier, this likely reflects the contemporary popularity of tanning in Western societies (e.g., Cafri et al., 2006) and the more positive attributions accorded to tan figures in Western nations, including the United Kingdom

Table 3  
*Results of the Multiple Hierarchical Regression With Body Appreciation as the Dependent Variable*

Step	Variable	Coefficient				
		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1	Ethnicity	0.11	0.03	.13	4.33	<.001
	Gender	-0.20	0.04	-.14	-4.80	.001
	Ethnic identity attachment	0.08	0.03	.08	2.69	.007
	Age	0.03	0.01	.03	0.90	.378
	Self-esteem	0.11	0.04	.08	2.87	.004
2	Ethnicity	0.05	0.03	.05	1.61	.108
	Gender	-0.17	0.04	-.12	-4.12	<.001
	Ethnic identity attachment	0.07	0.03	.08	2.66	.008
	Age	0.04	0.01	.03	1.03	.321
	Self-esteem	0.13	0.04	.09	3.25	.001
	Skin tone dissatisfaction	-0.04	0.01	-.16	-4.90	<.001

(e.g., Smith et al., 2007; Swami, Rozmus-Wrzesinska, et al., 2008). In short, it appears that White individuals now experience skin tone dissatisfaction to a significantly higher degree than ethnic minority individuals.

Of course, we should note that the meaning of skin tone dissatisfaction might be very different for White and ethnic minority individuals. For White participants, it is likely that skin tone dissatisfaction is driven mainly by the pursuit of fashionable attractiveness ideals. For ethnic minority individuals, on the other hand, skin tone dissatisfaction may be driven by attractiveness ideals or perceptions of societal ideals, but are also likely to reflect the negative content of contemporary and historical attributions of darker skin tones and the negotiation of power structures (Hunter, 2002; Maddox & Gray, 2002; Wade & Bielitz, 2005). Moreover, the difficulty and dangers of lightening skin (e.g., Charles, 2003), as opposed to tanning to darken skin, may mean that perceived skin tone ideals are beyond the reach of most ethnic minority individuals. In short, then, although members of all ethnic groups that we studied appeared to experience skin tone dissatisfaction, the lived experience of that dissatisfaction may differ between groups in ways that we were unable to investigate with the present design.

Aside from the ethnic differences noted above, our results also indicated that women were generally more dissatisfied with their skin tone than men. This is in accord with the available evidence, which suggests that women are more strongly affected by the idealization of lighter skin tones than men (Neal & Wilson, 1989; Thompson & Keith, 2001). Some authors have ascribed this to the fact that women in most Western societies experience greater pressure to meet standards of attractiveness (Neal & Wilson, 1989). In such a scenario, women may experience greater skin tone dissatisfaction than men because skin tone is viewed as an important indicator of women's physical attractiveness and as a basis for social reward for women. Certainly, there is evidence that women are more detrimentally affected by skin tone bias than men (Boyd-Franklin, 1991; Keith & Herring, 1991; Neal & Wilson, 1989), which would fit with the afore-mentioned explanation of gender difference in skin tone dissatisfaction.

In addition to between-groups differences, our results also showed that skin tone dissatisfaction predicted body image, defined as body appreciation, over and above participant ethnicity, gender, ethnic identity attachment, and self-esteem. In general, this result is consistent with previous work suggesting that skin tone dissatisfaction is associated with appearance (Bond & Cash, 1992) and body dissatisfaction (Falconer & Neville, 2000). However, our results also extend previous work by showing that the relationship between skin tone dissatisfaction and body image is likely independent of more global traits, such as ethnic identity attachment and self-esteem. Indeed, it was notable that—although our results in terms of a gender difference in body appreciation were in line with previous work (e.g., Swami, Hadji-Michael, & Furnham, 2008)—skin tone dissatisfaction emerged as a stronger predictor of body appreciation than did gender. If this effect can be verified in future work, it may offer researchers a useful means of further defining and conceptualizing body image for different ethnic groups and across genders. That is, the present finding both contribute to and expand the body of research documenting the range of cultural factors that impact perceptions of body image.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the present study is use of a skin tone chart to operationalize skin tone dissatisfaction. This method avoids potential problems with alternative scales for the measurement of skin tone dissatisfaction, such as the low reliability of the SCSS (Falconer & Neville, 2000). Moreover, initial tests suggest that the skin tone chart used in the present work captures the best part of variation in skin tone, at least among different ethnic groups in London. Further support for the validity of our scale comes from the fact that women rated themselves as having lighter skin tones than men in general, which is consistent with the finding that, in almost all cultures, women tend to be fairer and men tend to be darker (Frost, 2005; Jablonski & Chaplin, 2000; Van den Berghe & Frost, 1986). Other strengths of the scale include its relative ease of administration and its ability to operationalize skin tone dissatisfaction as a preference for either lighter or darker skin tones.

On the other hand, our findings in the present study are constrained by a number of limitations. First, it should be noted that the measure used in the present study allowed us only to examine perceived skin tone and not related aspects of skin that may be important in terms of body image. For example, we were not able to assess attitudes toward such factors as skin texture and blemishes, as well as more fine-grained features such as skin surface topography (Fink, Grammer, & Thornhill, 2001). In future work, it will be important to more carefully examine the validity of scores derived from our skin tone scale. This could be achieved, for example, by examining the associations between ratings from our scale and those from alternative scales designed to measure skin tone dissatisfaction, such as the SCSS (Falconer & Neville, 2000).

Similarly, future work would also do well to examine the associations between skin tone dissatisfaction and a wider range of body image and individual difference variables (e.g., facial dissatisfaction, media influences on attractiveness ideals, attitudes toward tanning), as well as behavioral outcomes (e.g., use of tanning salons, obtaining body art; see Cafri et al., 2006; Swami, 2011). One neglected variable that may affect our results is body mass index: Ethnic differences in body mass index may influence body

appreciation (Swami et al., 2009), making this an important factor to consider in future research. In addition, given the present findings, it may also be useful for future research to examine motives for desiring skin tones different from one's actual skin tone, as this may help identify reasons why dissatisfaction varies by ethnic group.

Further limitations of our study concern our method of sampling and the sample itself. In the first instance, our reliance on an opportunistic sample means that we cannot be certain of the representativeness of our sample in relation to the wider British population. Certainly, compared with the last British census, our sample appears to overrepresent ethnic minority groups and is skewed toward younger age groups. In addition, we have critiqued earlier studies for their almost exclusive focus on African American samples from the United States, and a similar critique could be directed at our study. Specifically, the results of our study may be specific to the cultural context in which it was conducted and, therefore, may not generalize to other cultural or national contexts. Certainly, there is scope for extending the present findings to other cultural groups. Finally, our scale may be a useful tool for assessing skin tone dissatisfaction at the societal level, but it does not fully address the phenomenological experience of skin tone dissatisfaction at the level of the individual. As other scholars have noted, qualitative research may be needed to more fully understand the ways in which skin tone affects perceived body image among individuals (Falconer & Neville, 2000).

The above limitations necessarily limit the conclusions that we can draw in this preliminary investigation of skin tone dissatisfaction, but they also highlight the broad scope for future research in the area. In addition, our results may have implications for practitioners dealing with body image concerns among patients from different ethnic groups. For example, our results suggest that skin tone dissatisfaction may take different forms among the different ethnic groups we studied, but also that it may be a mistake to assume that White individuals are immune from skin tone dissatisfaction. Previously, scholars have set out a number of practical steps that should be taken by multiculturally competent practitioners dealing with corporeal experiences among ethnic minority individuals (e.g., Buchanan et al., 2008). Our results suggest that similar efforts should be directed at majority White individuals, who may adopt and internalize darker skin tone ideals. More generally, we concur that practitioners need to be more aware of the multifaceted nature of body image dissatisfaction and allow patients the opportunity to raise and discuss skin tone concerns in a culturally sensitive environment (Boyd-Franklin, 1991).

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## Appendix

### The Skin Tone Chart, With Tones Ranging From Darkest (1) To Lightest (13)



Note. The chart was presented in color. see online supplemental material.