American Desi: Representation and Reproduction in the Diaspora

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ABSTRACT

American Desi: Representation and Reproduction in the Diaspora

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This study explores how South Asian diasporic film represents and reproduces South Asian identity in the diaspora. It commences with a review of the literature in cultural studies and post-colonial theory on identity in the diaspora. A textual analysis of three films: American Desi, Bollywood/Hollywood, and East Is East, helps frame the characteristics of South Asian diasporic film. Theoretical concepts of diaspora and identity are extended to this reading of the films. In-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants to test the validity of theoretical concepts through participants' own reading of American Desi. Findings indicate that while theoretical concepts of identity can be usefully applied at the level of the text, these perspectives do not always easily explain participants' interpretation of the film in relation to their everyday experiences.
CHAPTER

Engagement of Armament and Munition

In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasize that, compared to the defensive armament and munition, the offensive armament and munition are significantly more powerful. Nevertheless, the defensive armament and munition are equally indispensable for the security of the state.

In this context, it is important to note that the development of offensive armament and munition should be balanced with defensive armament and munition to ensure a comprehensive defense capability.
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Introduction

The aim of this project is to learn how South Asian diasporic film represents and reproduces identity in the diaspora. The questions I ask here are: What is the nature of South Asian identity in the diaspora? What are the characteristics of South Asian diasporic film? How are expressions of South Asian diasporic film understood and interpreted by the audience? This study demonstrates that South Asian diasporic film is a site where South Asian identity is represented and reproduced by South Asian viewers in their everyday lives. South Asian diasporic film as popular culture and its consumption and interpretation in everyday use, is the main focus of the research. It concentrates on second-generation South Asian youth and how they negotiate the politics of cultural and racial identity using the resource of South Asian diasporic film in their everyday lives.

The following chapters progress in sequential order building on one another, acknowledging the research questions posed in this study: Chapter 1: “Identity, Diaspora, and the Postcolonial Experience” considers the nature of identity in the diaspora. Chapter 2: “Narrative, Genre and the Diasporic Film” looks at the characteristics of South Asian diasporic film. Chapter 3: “Watching American Desi” outlines the methodology undertaken to study audience responses to American Desi. Chapter 4: “American Desi in the Flesh” tests the validity of theoretical concepts against the audience’s reading of American Desi. Chapter 5: “Conclusion” outlines the implications of the research findings and future topics of study.

Chapter 1 reviews the literature on identity and the diaspora. It provides the theoretical background to understanding the nature of identity in the diaspora. Stuart Hall’s concept of “minimal selves” is first introduced to address the problem of identity
and the contradictory nature of identification. Hall’s “minimal selves” is contrasted with Paul Gilroy’s “primordial being”, focusing on the fluidity of identity and the problematic nature of fixed and pre-given identities. To further theorize this debate, Homi Bhabha’s notions of the “Third Space”, “hybridity”, and the process of identification are explored. Bhabha’s intersubjective approach is examined in order to move beyond the concept of identity in favour of analyzing the process of identification. Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Homi Bhabha consider cultural and racial identity in diasporic communities and therefore contribute to a post-colonial analysis. Bhabha’s, Hall’s, and Gilroy’s concepts show how theories of cultural and racial identity can be extended to the South Asian diaspora. R. Radhakrishna’s discussion of diaspora, along with Arjun Appadurai’s notion of “imagined worlds”, Jigna Desai’s theoretical framework of the “Brown Atlantic”, and Sunaina Maira’s ‘cultural fossilization’, are considered in order to examine the construction of identity, the ‘homeland’, and the diaspora. Theoretical concepts of identity and the diaspora are interdependent, giving us a better understanding of cultural dislocation.

Chapter 2 outlines South Asian diasporic film as the object of study and begins to apply the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 1. This chapter uses a comparative analysis of the three films: American Desi (Pandya, 2001), Bollywood/Hollywood, (Mehta, 2002), and East Is East (O’Donnell, 1999), to examine how South Asian diasporic film represents South Asian identity in the diaspora with careful consideration of the films and their specific diasporic contexts. These films have been selected because they emerge from heavily populated diasporic sectors in the world: America, Canada and the United Kingdom. Each film takes place in areas with a heavy concentration of South
Asian immigrants and second-generation youth – Toronto, New Jersey/New York area, and Manchester. An analysis of form and text in this chapter will demonstrate how the popular genres of family drama and romantic comedy are inflected by the South Asian experience in the production of South Asian diasporic film. South Asian diasporic film as a generic category is considered within two dimensions: (a) industrial and production aspects such as new media, diasporic channels of circulation, Bollywood’s influence, and the global hegemony of Hollywood, and (b) thematic elements such as ‘place’, iconography, camp and mimicry, and the ‘model minority myth’. Finally, the second chapter moves from a comparative analysis of the three films to focus on expressions of “minimal selves”, “primordial being”, and the “Third Space” in American Desi. American Desi is a key cinematic representation of South Asian identity because it takes place in the first year of university, at time when second-generation youth become aware of and begin to question expressions of cultural identification. The film conveys complex articulations of identity by its many characters. Theoretical concepts applied to American Desi help frame potential readings of the film by second-generation South Asians.

Chapter 3 maps out the mixed methodology undertaken to test the relevance of theoretical concepts to the experience of a second-generation South Asian cohort. This chapter justifies the use of the in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview to explore South Asian youths’ everyday use of and interpretation of popular cultural phenomena. This method was chosen to connect concepts such as “minimal selves” and “hybridity” as they emerge from texts, while asking if these concepts resonate with the people who watch South Asian diasporic films. In this manner theoretical concepts extended to South Asian diasporic film are further tested against the audience’s reading of the film to see
how South Asian identity is reproduced in the audience through the everyday use of and interpretation of popular culture. *American Desi* is particularly suited to test the readings of second-generation South Asians between the ages of 18 and 25 because the film’s ‘coming of age’ narrative explores the moment in time when the problem of identity begins to surface.

Chapter 4 analyzes the participants’ reading of *American Desi* using theoretical concepts framed in Chapter 1. Careful consideration is given to how expressions of identity are represented in the film, and how they are reproduced in the everyday lives of second-generation South Asians. This chapter provides grounded research, stressing how articulations of cultural identification are made by second-generation South Asians. Participants’ responses also point to audience expectations for film genres and how audience members form generic classifications and co-construct meaning along with media producers.

A recent *Statistics Canada* study “Population Projections of Visible Minority Groups, Canada, Provinces, and Regions”, released on March 22 2005, along with responses to the study such as Sarah Green’s article in the *Toronto Sun* on March 23 2005, “Minorities Change the Face of Toronto”, and Haroon Siddiqui’s piece in the *Toronto Star* on March 27 2005, “Why hugging an immigrant is a good idea”, all point to the growing population of visible minorities and the increasing awareness of diversity in the diaspora. The *Statistics Canada* study highlights that by 2017 Canadian Muslims will number 1.45 million, Sikhs 496 000, and Hindus 584,000 (Siddiqui, March 27 2005, p. D1). These data demonstrate the rapid increase in the South Asian population in Canada and therefore suggest the need to better understand articulations of cultural and racial
The text is not visible in the image provided.
identification in the diaspora. Media articulations and representations of identity, especially in film, are important to analyze. Film represents a critical site where the problem of identity can be examined. This study makes a unique contribution to understanding the South Asian diaspora. Research findings may also apply to other cultural groups in the diaspora who share common racial and cultural locations, but is unique as it considers racial and cultural specificity of South Asian youth.

Participants in the study benefited from being able to discuss their experiences and perceptions of how South Asian diasporic film represents and reproduces South Asian identity in the diaspora. Participants had the opportunity to reflect on their contributions to South Asian culture within the diaspora. The study also contributes to the development of further theoretical knowledge about the function of South Asian diasporic film within South Asian communities and within the wider diaspora. The empirical study and comparative analysis of South Asian diasporic film in this research helps ground theoretical perspectives on identity drawn from the humanities, social sciences, and South Asian studies.

Cinema provides a significant site for investigating the representation and reproduction of South Asian identity in the diaspora and the everyday use of and interpretation of popular culture. Theoretical perspectives are grounded in participants’ responses to the film/text to show how meaning is co-constructed by media producers and media consumers. This study concludes that the South Asian audience has developed its own expectations of traditional Hollywood genres, which are already inflected by the South Asian experience.
Chapter 1: Identity, Diaspora, and the Postcolonial Experience

This chapter reviews the literature on identity and diaspora. Theorizing diaspora is crucial in understanding how the processes of identity are represented in South Asian diasporic film and reproduced by the audience. We begin by contrasting Stuart Hall’s “minimal selves” with Paul Gilroy’s notion of the “primordial being” to display the fluidity of identity and the problematic nature of static and fixed identities. Next, Homi Bhabha’s notions of the “Third Space”, “hybridity”, and the process of identification are explored as an intersubjective approach that rejects the concept of identity in favour of the process of identification. The challenge is to display ‘culture’ as a problematic entity formed at the site of utterance and point of contact. As scholars in the field of cultural studies, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Homi Bhabha acknowledge identity as modes of racial and cultural identification, spoken through marginality. All three examine identity within diasporic communities and therefore contribute to a post-colonial analysis. We conclude with Arjun Appadurai’s notion of “imagined worlds” applying his concept of nostalgia, Sunaina Maira’s definition of ‘cultural fossilization’, and Jigna Desai’s notion of the “Brown Atlantic”. These theoretical tools focus on the construction of identity in the ‘homeland’, as well as the diaspora.

All these concepts are tied together because they give us a better understanding of cultural dislocation and diaspora. Homi Bhabha’s “Third Space” and Appadurai’s “imagined worlds” are relevant to my analysis of South Asian diasporic film because the South Asian experience is inflected by traditional Hollywood genres. Ideas of cultural authenticity, construction of the ‘homeland’ and the diaspora, and hybridity are chief
characteristics of South Asian diasporic film. This chapter establishes the framework for exploring how ideas of identity are represented in film and reproduced by the audience.

In order to understand the notion of identity in the diaspora, one must first ask: what does identity mean and how is it constructed? The first means by which to acknowledge the concept of identity is to look at the idea of “minimal selves” developed by Stuart Hall (Hall, 1993, p. 136). In Hall’s reading of minimal selves identity is conceptualized as in constant flux. Hall believes that an individual’s notion of “the self”, who they really are, has become more concerned with performance and superficial surface meanings rather than the search for that which is really “within” the individual. Hall suggests that individuals should move beyond this surface reading of “the self” and look deeper into the complex systems within a person that make up an individual’s identity. The “minimal self” is constantly being negotiated, as the construction of identity becomes evident through the difference between cultures. The method by which sentences are created is a metaphorical illustration of the concept of minimal selves. Hall believes the possible discourse surrounding identity is endless and thus an individual must make a full stop at a specific point in time and acknowledge who they are and how they view themselves (Hall, p. 136). In this case, at a specific point in time the person would say, “This is who I am”. Hall notes that a full stop is a period that is provisional in that it will most likely take back what was said in the previous sentence (Hall, p. 136). In this regard the next sentence after the full stop constitutes a kind of wager, meaning the individual’s sentence will not necessarily be universally true, but he or she has now stopped and told others, “This is who I am right now”, and the sentence is not “underpinned by any infinite guarantees” (Hall, p. 137). Hall stresses that, “at some point
in a certain discourse, we call these unfinished closures, ‘the self’, ‘society’, ‘politics’, etc.” (Hall, p. 137).

A clearer example would be to think of the minimal self in comparison to the ‘true self’. The ‘true self’ can be compared to Lacan’s notion of “the real”, as it is a realm of existence beyond language and thus beyond expression (Sarup, 1989, p. 31). An individual is aware that the ‘true self’ exists, it is just they cannot convey it. The various propositions an individual utters can be thought of as masks worn to present a moment in time when he or she declares, “This is me”. In this case, the mask a second-generation South Asian individual may wear allows him or her to identify with the “Bhangra remix” scene or fundamental Hinduism for example. The “minimal self” can be viewed as a state somewhere between the mask of identity negotiation and the ‘true self’. One can see how the “minimal self” is constantly being negotiated, as a specific proposition is followed by a full stop; while the next sentence takes with it a part, whatever the size, of the previous sentence. The concept of minimal selves suggests that identity is in flux as the full stop is provisional and identity is formed at the present time. Individuals, in order to negotiate their culture and identity must have some sense of themselves in order to move to the next sentence.

Many South Asian individuals who take part in the “Bhangra remix” scene, for example, are very aware that their allegiance and dedication to this subculture is not long-term (Maira, 2002, p. 363). Clubs and parties constitute “Bhangra remix” where hybrid remixes of traditional Punjabi Bhangra music are incorporated with Hip-Hop samples. “Bhangra remix” marks a site where South Asian individuals are able to meet and utter instances of minimal selves, as many first- but predominately second-generation South
Asian young adults participate in this scene upon arrival at university or college. "Bhangra remix" demonstrates how individuals can be passionately committed to a specific phenomenon at one point in time and at the next relinquish any allegiance to it. Many second-generation South Asians recognize the need to make a statement about themselves that is not underpinned by any fixed pledges. By acknowledging that their commitment to a specific element of South Asian culture is not an infinite one, they are aware that the full stop is provisional, as the next sentence will most likely contradict what they just uttered.

Another way to view "the self" is to look at the concept as a fixed entity. Many first-generation South Asian immigrants may take this stance and view the various masks and identity negotiations in which second-generation South Asians participate, as digressions or deviations from an essentialized idea of South Asian culture (Gilroy, 1997, p. 310). In this sense the first-generation's notion of being South Asian can be thought of as what I refer to as the "maximum self", in which identity negotiations are viewed as straying from an essentialized view of South Asian culture. The fixity of the maximum self appears to be a direct contradiction to the idea of the minimal self as provisional. The shift from the minimal self to the maximum self can be understood in terms of, what Paul Gilroy calls the "primordial being" (Gilroy, p. 310).

The idea of the primordial being suggests that identity predates history and culture as "part of our fixed, essential being, persisting from time immemorial without significant change or alteration" (Gilroy, p. 310). It is the idea of a primitive, primordial being which many first-generation South Asians recognize as the axiom upon which to define South Asian culture within the diaspora. By locating and defining the primordial being,
identity is viewed as immutable, and government and politics appear as irrelevant and superficial elements (Gilroy, p. 310). The fundamental elements that would regulate human conduct in relation to the primordial self would be forces of, "homeland, kinship, and biological or cultural inheritance" (Gilroy, p. 310). Gilroy stresses that, if identity and difference are viewed as essential and fixed, free from political influence, then individuals may never get to the heart of various identity negotiations. Political strategies may never be developed because social and political factors such as racism are viewed as irrelevant to the primordial self. In this sense, "difference is viewed as living in jeopardy, for difference is a threat that corrupts and compromises identity" (Gilroy, p. 310). Thus one can see how a phenomenon such as Western courtship rituals and dating can cause conflict between first-generation and second-generation South Asians. First-generation South Asians may view South Asian identity as a fixed and essential entity from which any deviation is seen as debased and therefore "un-Indian". Conversely, second-generation South Asians may have notions of minimal selves acknowledging that their minimal sense of "self" is constantly being negotiated and that their present identity is not permanent but subject to change. In this case, the second-generation view of identity is not fixed and stands in contrast to the primordial being.

Gilroy contrasts the primordial being to "individual identity", which like Hall's "minimal self" is constantly being negotiated. Individual identity is infinitely flexible as even mundane factors such as neighbourhoods and schools contribute not only to an individual's minimal sense of "self" but to their overall notion of identity (Gilroy, p. 312). Individual identity thus corresponds to the notion of minimal selves as Gilroy stresses that identity supplies an anchor, in which:
discovering, possessing and then taking pride in an exclusive identity seems to afford a means to acquire certainty about who one is and where one fits, about the claims of community and the limits of social obligation, in conditions of rapid and bewildering change (Gilroy, p. 312).

Individual identity and minimal selves are similar because both concepts reject the fixity of identity, placing more emphasis on its constant flux. The notion of individual identity supplying an anchor can be compared to minimal selves. The anchor is like a full stop so that at any point during a journey or when scripting a sentence (following the analogy of identity supplying an anchor and minimal selves as the construction of sentences) one must come to a full stop or anchor oneself in order to make an utterance about one’s cultural self-perception. In the same sense the next sentence will lead to another full stop, the anchor may be weighed and the journey continue until the next full stop is reached or the anchor is dropped, when another utterance can be made. Examples of different anchors might include identification with religious traditions, Bollywood films, and Bhangra remix, among other things.

Gilroy suggests that individual identity provides a sense of belonging that presents an individual as a tourist, anchoring various cultural identifications until he or she has finished a journey. The end of the journey signifies a declaration of Indian or South Asian culture. The individual is not free to entirely choose their cultural identification, as the various primordial characteristics which provide anchors are dictated by first-generation individuals and parental figures. Unlike individual identity, however, the notion of minimal selves presents a contradictory view of identity and is perhaps more useful. Gilroy limits individual identity to weighing a specific anchor and continuing a specific journey, while Hall’s minimal selves signifies the contradictory and
complex nature of identity, as an utterance at a specific moment in time that will most likely contradict the previous utterance.

Within the diaspora, these potential expressions of individual identity and minimal selves contradict first-generation South Asians’ fixed concepts of South Asian culture. First-generation ideals of a community that no longer exists take precedence over any negotiated identities within the present community. In “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy” Arjun Appadurai explores how “imagined worlds” have become an imperative element of the global economy (Appadurai, 1990, p. 26). He applies Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983, p. 6), a term used to define ‘the nation’, to a new global culture, which he calls imagined worlds. Appadurai highlights how factors such as migration, trade, and invasion gave birth to complex colonial orders, expanding around European capitals and consequently spreading throughout the non-European world (Appadurai, p. 26). Appadurai goes on to say:

This complex and overlapping set of Euro-colonial worlds (first Spanish and Portuguese, later principally English, French, and Dutch) set the basis for a permanent traffic in ideas of peoplehood and selfhood which created the imagined communities (Anderson 1983) of recent nationalisms throughout the world. (Appadurai, p. 27)

Imagined worlds form the basis for many first-generation South Asians’ conception of what it is to be truly South Asian. As South Asian communities are dispersed across Canada, the fixed image of the homeland, among some first-generation South Asians remains constant even though the same ideals and beliefs of the homeland may have changed, been adapted, or evolved at their place of origin. In this case, some first-generation South Asians may view the identity negotiations of their children as
direct defiance against the very beliefs and morals of the South Asian community. From their perspective, second-generation South Asians should be focusing on academia and religion rather than taking part in activities which divert attention from the core beliefs of the South Asian community.

India is a vast country incorporating many languages, religions, and rituals. Defining a specific cultural phenomenon as “true Indian” culture imposes a false belief structure that excludes identity negotiation within the South Asian culture as alien or deviant. The provisional aspect of the “minimal self” is not recognized. The “maximum self” and “true Indian” culture are similar expressions of the primordial being. Locating South Asian core beliefs is difficult when the local lifestyles of a specific community come to represent the primordial essence of South Asian Identity. Arjun Appadurai resists this construction of a common Indian national identity:

In general, separatist transnational movements, including those which have included terror in their methods, exemplify nations in search of states: Sikhs, Tamils, Sri Lankans, Basques, Moros, Quebecois, each of these represent imagined communities which seek to create states of their own or carve pieces out of existing states. (Appadurai, p. 37)

Appadurai’s observation of “nations in search of states” represents imagined communities, as many cultural groups attempt to create a uniform identity and “states of their own”. “Nations in search of states” is a geopolitical contradiction of uniform South Asian or Indian identity, as the Sikhs, Tamils, and Sri Lankans, each attempt to create their own versions of imagined communities and form “nation-states”; each claiming their own definition of South Asian identity and “true Indian” culture.

If one begins to examine the definition of “true Indian” culture, one begins to see why the primordial being or an essentialized view of Indian culture is not valid. Sunaina
Maira in *Desis in the House*, a study of Indian American youth culture in New York City, notes:

For many of the youth I spoke to, the notion of being ‘truly’ or ‘really’ Indian involved possession of certain knowledge or participation in certain activities, and these criteria differentiated those who were more essentially ethnic from those who were not. (Maira, p. 88)

The specific criteria such as religious rituals, food, and dance that Maira alludes to are those that create an essentialized view of South Asian culture. In many cases an individual may be referred to as “white-washed” or “corrupted” if they do not possess the specific traits preserved by the first-generation as “truly” Indian characteristics. If an individual fails to adhere to any of the criteria then most likely they will be considered “tarnished” or “un-Indian”.

The idea of “true Indian” culture itself is a myth. The elements that constitute “true Indian” culture within the diaspora are those rudiments which have been imported and internalized by the first-generation to represent a “nation-state”. While the Indian “nation” is imagined differently in India than in the diasporic communities, both tend to objectify Indian tradition and culture. The Punjab or the Bengal, for example, that a first-generation left behind in India is museumized and used as the benchmark for Indian culture. An inherent contradiction between two different representations of the homeland used to represent an essential “true Indian” culture becomes apparent. The individual from Punjab and the individual from Bengal both have competing sets of criteria for “true Indian” culture. Appadurai notes:

States, are everywhere seeking to monopolize the moral resources of community, either by flatly claiming perfect coevality between nation and the state, or by systematically museumizing and representing all the groups within them in a variety of heritage politics that seems remarkably uniform throughout the world. (Appadurai, p. 37)
Popular cultural phenomenon such as film stars, musical styles such as Bhangra, and regional cooking dishes, among others, vary between states and the criteria that constitute "true Indian" culture most often vary between communities. To speak of "true Indian" culture is a gross generalization applied to a specific country (i.e.: "To be Indian one must act a specific way") just as to speak of "true Punjabi" culture makes the same generalization, which fails to recognize the regional differences between cities such as Ludhiana, Patalia, and Amritsar. Each individual in the diaspora whose roots may be traced to a specific community in a specific state will have their own criteria for what constitutes "true Indian" culture.

R. Radhakrishnan, in his essay "Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora", cautions against an essentialized view of South Asian culture where knowledge of India, for example would be gauged by the length of time an individual spent in India (Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 119). In this case the individual who has spent more time in India will always be honored or considered to be closer to "true Indian" culture than the non-resident tourist, visitor, or guest. Those who are born in India lay claim to the country through birthright, compared to their second-generation counterparts who are often viewed as straying from a static notion of South Asian culture.

Nostalgia often contributes to an essentialized view of the homeland. Most often homesickness, a yearning to return back to a specific time and place, is the catalyst for this essentialized view. Jigna Desai in Beyond Bollywood considers how postcolonial scholars such as Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty reject the notion that nineteenth-century Indian nationalism was a denunciation of the West. These scholars claim that Indian nationalism was a means to produce Indian modernity by adapting
specific elements of European modernity, “marked by cultural and spiritual distinction” (Desai, 2004, p. 141). This ‘cultural and spiritual distinction’ produces nostalgia. As Desai suggests, a male/female binary was constructed to reflect the different spheres of tradition and modernity: “The spiritual, home, and Indian were gendered feminine, and the material, public, and Western as (an unmarked) masculine” (Desai, p. 141). Those things that could be associated with the West and materialism defined modernity and were masculine. Consequently, tradition and culture were located in the female realm as being Indian, creating a distinct cultural divide or what Desai calls a “space of cultural difference”. This space created a void where nostalgia marked a longing for the spiritual and home, and thus a rejection of or coping mechanism for modernity. (Desai, p. 141).

Nostalgia permits a disjuncture in time, producing a romanticized bliss in which the homeland functions as a framework to regulate our transplanted identities in the diaspora (Radhakrishnan, p. 123). Through nostalgia, the homeland is constructed or invented in response to an individual or group’s present location. Location here is considered as both the physical proximity to the homeland and the economic and social status of the individual or group in the diaspora. Nostalgia is not exclusive to one immigrant community but is common to all groups in the diaspora, more often occurring in the first-generation. Nostalgia is a product of frustration and estrangement occurring within immigrant communities in response to the alienation and economic and social aggravation of the diaspora (ie: dislocation). When individuals encounter the stresses of working within a capitalist system as immigrants, and the harsh realities of prejudice and racism, and a general alienation from the means of production, an essentialized view of
the homeland is constructed with fossilized rituals and popular cultural phenomena to create a land of “milk and honey”. Sunaina Maira notes:

Cultural fossilization creates the paradox of a community that is socially and ideologically more conservative than the community of origin, clinging to mores and beliefs that have remained static, albeit contested by children. (Maira, p. 85)

In this sense, the India that is created in the diaspora appears to be more “Indian” than India itself.

The first-generation’s longing to defend against corruption and preserve an authentic notion of South Asian culture is projected upon their second-generation children whom they attempt to sculpt and shape as authentically Indian: “Being Indian becomes a cultural ideology used to calibrate the authenticity, even goodness, of self and others” (Maira, p. 43). Sunaina Maira’s study of Indian American youth culture in New York city and Marie Gillespie’s examination of how television and video are utilized to recreate notions of South Asian identity and culture in Southall both explore the tendency toward cultural fossilization by the first-generation to instill South Asian culture in the second-generation.

As previously noted in the discussion of nostalgia, Indianness was written in the female realm and produced a cultural divide. This void was not only a gap between East and West, but was also a fissure between female and male gender roles. Desai notes that family, motherhood, and purity were marked as tradition by anti-colonial nationalism while Western notions of love and romance represented the modern. Sexuality was constructed upon the denunciation of women’s interests (Desai, p.141). Desai states:

...women’s interests were collapsed with the interests of the heteronormative family and the home...within the colonial and national context, national independence marked bourgeois women as home, nation, and spirituality (Desai, p. 141).
Sunaina Maira and Marie Gillespie both note that the aggressive advances of young South Asian men at local discos and "desi parties" and the association of promiscuity with women who participate in club culture generates contradictions and double standards relating to gender within the diaspora: "The behaviour of Indian men, however, is not read as a marker of ethnic authenticity" (Maira, p. 49). Maira states that while the actions of these males often attract the labels 'untrustworthy' and 'deceitful', this behaviour does not act as a marker of South Asian identity. The advances of young Indian men in club culture do not make males more or less "Indian", but the purity of tradition is gauged by the actions of females. Maira notes:

The heterosexual rituals of the dance floor and the emphasis on body image are charged issues for young women, because they face the binaristic ideals of Indian American femininity: either virginally Indian or immodestly American. (Maira, p. 361)

An example of fossilized beliefs and inherent gender contradictions within the diaspora can be seen in the concept of izzat. *Izzat* encompasses "a variety of religious, moral, and social connotations, izzat refers to family honour, pride and respectability" (Gillespie, 1995, p. 38). *Izzat* is closely connected to gender, as the corporate, moral, and public standing of a specific South Asian family rests mainly on the conduct of females. Gender must be viewed from the vantage point of immigrant families who deem women the keepers of cultural tradition and sanctity, requiring that they negotiate between notions of authentic purity and mainstream society (Maira, p. 49). If females are deemed the keepers of tradition, it becomes evident that they must be controlled in order to uphold and preserve fossilized beliefs. Chastity is of extreme importance if daughters are to be married into an honourable and respectable family (Gillespie, p. 38). Chastity is
not only symbolic of a family's reputation but also represents purity of tradition and ethnic identity. Chastity is a defense against promiscuity, where promiscuity is emblematic of Western influences and corruptedness. Heterosexual gender relations, such as Western concepts of courtship are closely regulated by first-generation or immigrant adults in the public realm as the slightest deviance is viewed as detrimental to family izzat (Gillespie, p. 38). The same may apply to second-generation South Asian female “clubbers” whose identity may rest on the binary opposition of ‘pure tradition’ and ‘corrupted hybridity’. At various clubs and parties, females slip out of the garments of a “good Indian girl” and into those of a “popular clubber,” scantily clad and highly sexualized (Maira, p. 362).

Communication and trust become key between first- and second-generation individuals. In the diaspora many families may view a slight deviation in behaviour as a catalyst for family breakdown and destruction. For example, many South Asian youth, especially girls, do not openly communicate with parents about issues such as courtship and relationships for fear of closer scrutiny and regulation in the public sphere. If a daughter is discovered to have romantic relations with a male, family izzat is at stake for the daughter and her family and consequently the son and his, with the daughter feeling the brunt of ridicule and rejection. At the opposite end of the spectrum, open communication may also lead to the same outcome, as parents may tighten surveillance of their children and regulate their association with friends (Gillespie, p. 169). Marie Gillespie notes another reason for tight-lipped communication between South Asian daughters and parents in the diaspora: “In some cases, the discovery of a romantic liaison may lead parents to quickly arrange a marriage without involving their daughter in the
decision-making” (Gillespie, p. 170). This phenomenon has recently increased in the male cohort also, but not to the degree to which it occurs among females.

The dichotomization of identities and cultural fields stemmed from two principal factors. The first was the assimilationist attitude that many first-generation South Asian immigrants adopted as they scattered across the globe, especially where South Asian immigrants lived, and subsequently where their children grew up, in towns with little or no South Asian population (Maira, p. 103). In some cases, wealthier families sent their children to private or Catholic school, where the South Asian population was isolated even more (Maira, p. 103). In school, for fear of ridicule, mockery, and curriculum limitations, South Asian children were seldom given a chance to express or identify with their South Asian heritage. The second factor was the partitioning of South Asian culture, where traditional and religious activities often occurred on the weekends in complete isolation from everyday neighborhoods and the individuals who lived there (Maira, p. 100). First-generation parents and immigrants also felt the same angst and embarrassment about South Asian traditions as their children. The weekend “get together”, whether Sunday afternoon Bhajans at an individual’s home or Diwali celebrations at local halls, served as a forum in which both first- and second-generation South Asian individuals could educate themselves, identify with, and express their South Asian heritage. The main point here is that the “daily/school lives” and “weekend lives” seldom ever merged. Events occurring on the weekend were never mentioned or merely dismissed as “parties” to school friends and rarely did the South Asian friends on the weekends ever associate with school cohorts during the weekdays. One can see the two lives taking shape with a primordial notion of “Indianness” being expressed on the
weekends and "Western ideology" and identification, for example in North America, being constructed on the weekdays or in their daily lives.

Elements such as nostalgia and izzat contribute to the isolation of second-generation South Asian individuals in the diaspora. As previously discussed, communication or lack thereof can often result in heavy regulation in the public and private sphere by first-generation immigrants of second-generation youth; and consequently rejection and resentment by second-generation youth directed towards first-generation parents. Many second-generation individuals in the diaspora consider themselves living two different lives. Second-generation South Asian individuals experience a dichotomy between "true" Indian values, as defined by their parents, and mainstream Western influences. In relation to the idea of the primordial being, the dichotomy symbolizes two distinct lives in which individuals can isolate the exact moment of identification with "Indian" origins or with Western-influences. Sunaina Maira cautions against a "best of both worlds" analysis based on dualism, polarity, and bi-culturalism:

Shifting from an emphasis on duality and so-called bi-culturalism to a picture of multilayered identifications and social locations leads to a more complex understanding of the ideologies of ethnicity that are available to and reshaped by second-generation youth, and of the strategies they use to manage these cultural political fields (Maira, p. 102).

The multilayered identifications that Maira refers to are extremely important when considering identity in the diaspora because many second-generation South Asians have the experience of minimal selves and of hybrid identities. The compartmentalization of social worlds is not a duality but far more complex, as notions of "Indian" identity are multiple and subdivided (Maira, p. 94). To better understand the
concept of hybridity and how most second-generation South Asians negotiate their
identity within the diaspora, one must acknowledge Homi Bhabha’s views on cultural
difference and the “Third Space”.

Bhabha asserts that there are two models of culture which are in direct
competition with each other. In the first, culture is viewed as something that individuals
know about, and second, culture is seen as a way of knowing (Bhabha, 1994, p. 32). Bhabha uses these two models and creates an opposition between cultural diversity and
cultural difference. Bhabha rejects the model of ‘cultural diversity’ since it presents a
fixed idea of culture as “pre-given cultural contents and customs held in a time-frame of
relativism” (Bhabha, p. 34). The model of cultural diversity is similar to the “maximum
self”. Bhabha’s model of cultural diversity can also be compared to Gilroy’s concept of
the primordial being. From both positions identity and culture are viewed as fixed and
static entities. Cultural diversity represents culture as an object of empirical knowledge,
“a set of artifacts in a gallery or museum, of typologies or catalogues, ethnographies,
descriptions and theories, contents and customs, product of will to knowledge” (Bredin,
2005, p. 5). For Bhabha, ‘cultural difference’ constitutes a more critical way of
understanding cultures as a process of signification where, “the problem of cultural
interaction emerges only at the significatory boundaries of cultures, where meanings and
values are (mis)read or signs are misappropriated” (Bhabha, p. 34). Bhabha goes on to
argue that culture should not be looked at as an object, but as a continuous process that
“emerges as a problem, or a problematic, at the point at which there is loss of meaning in
the contestation and articulation of everyday life, between classes, races, nations”
(Bhabha, p. 34).
Bhabha suggests that culture is like a language, a process of making meaning in which individuals make sense of culture through differences (Bhabha, p. 35). Translation is always necessary, therefore to speak of a pure culture or a primordial being is inaccurate. According to Bhabha the act of enunciation or of speaking and the place of utterance can never fully convey fixed meanings. What one speaker encodes can never be transparently decoded by the respondent (Bhabha, p. 35). Meaning, according to Bhabha, is produced somewhere between the communicators in the exchange of language (Bhabha, p. 34). Two individuals may choose to speak of pure culture, but since meaning is produced at the edges or boundaries of cultures and through translation, the meaning of cultures cannot be fixed. What one individual enunciates in the place of utterance and what another individual understands are constantly in flux.

Bhabha defines the place of utterance, where meaning is created, as the “Third Space”. He argues that the negotiation which occurs in the Third Space “challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People” (Bhabha, p. 37). Bhabha promotes an intersubjective approach; cultural meaning is constructed in a location that promotes a fluid notion of culture. Cultures are negotiated in the Third Space at “the moment of their exchange” and at “the moment of contact” between communicators (Bredin, p. 6). Bhabha rejects the fixed and unchanging concept of culture claiming it is “safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity” (Bhabha, p. 34). According to Bhabha, cultures and identity are ongoing negotiations between the past and the present. Traditions of the past are never fixed or constant, but must be interpreted or translated into present day contexts. The concept of
hybridity emerges from this since cultures and identities are not uniform concepts but are in constant flux as individuals make sense of and communicate about the world (Bhabha, p. 37). Bhabha purposefully emphasizes the act of ‘identification’, over the more common noun form, ‘identity’. His model focuses on an individual’s identification with particular cultural and traditional phenomena, while ‘identity’ suggests a fixed concept of cultural fields.

Bhabha claims that three factors underlie the process of identification. The first is that for one to exist they must do so in relation to an otherness (Bhabha, p. 44). The pressure second-generation South Asians often feel while performing in situational scenarios is not merely a case of individual identities and case-sensitive selectivity, rather “ethnic identification is the result of both self-ascription and identification by others” (Maira, p. 98). Many schoolteachers, guidance counselors, and sports coaches, among others, are unaware of the practices and traditions of second-generation South Asian youth. This reinforces South Asian youth’s reluctance to express their “Indian lives” to their non-Indian, notably White, peers for fear of being singled out as different or misrepresented. Sunaina Maira notes:

A common anecdote among the youth I spoke to was that other children made fun of Indian Americans in the schoolyard or playground by yelling ‘Wha-wha-wha’, in a mockery of a Native American war cry, not only drawing attention to the supposed primitiveness of their Indian playmates but confusing the origins as well (Maira, p. 98).

Second, Bhabha states that the site of identification is a space of splitting, caught in the tension of demand and desire (Bhabha, p. 44). Bhabha claims that this is not a neat division but a ‘doubling; in which the colonized or immigrant individual may be seen as in two places at once. The intention of the colonized is to occupy the colonizer’s place
while keeping his/her place among the colonized (Bhabha, p. 44). The notion of “being in two places at once” is extremely important in relation to second-generation South Asians as it relates to the concepts of hybridity and the primordial being. In one case one can be Indian, for example, at home and Canadian at school or in the other case, one can have hybrid identities; a splitting of identification. It is the extent to which this splitting occurs between demand and desire that determines the subject’s sense of having two primordial identities or a hybrid identity.

The third factor is that “the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy-it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject assuming the image.” (Bhabha, p. 45) Bhabha rejects the notion of the primordial being, claiming that identity as object should be replaced with identification constructed in relation to an otherness and caught in the tension between demand and desire. Bhabha also notes that an important feature of colonial discourse is in fact its dependence on static and unchanging constructions of otherness (Bhabha, p. 66). Fixity, according to Bhabha, is crucial in the study of colonial discourse because it is a contradictory approach to representation: “It connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition” (Bhabha, p. 66). Identification is always the production of an image, produced in relation to fixed (i.e.: stereotypes) and negotiated constructions.

Bhabha states that fixed representations and identifications such as stereotypes and typecasts are fundamentally very complex entities that not only demand that we broaden our conceptualizations, but also that we change the object of analysis itself (Bhabha, p. 70). The stereotype, for instance, can imply a secure and constant point of
identification, but may also be read differently and misinterpreted in other instances and spaces (Bhabha, p. 70). Bhabha posits: “colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (Bhabha, p. 71). Fixity is a point of construction stressing the politics of interpretation and identification.

Jigna Desai and Sunaina Maira, among other scholars, are critical of Bhabha’s theory of Third Space and hybridity. Arguing that Bhabha’s view is often celebratory, romanticized, and totalizing and exempts political elements such as racial discrimination and intolerance, critics feel that Bhabha’s offerings are largely ungrounded (Maira, p. 147). Jigna Desai makes a division between postcolonial critiques and postmodernist critiques claiming that the latter challenge many concepts of modernity such as the nation-state and national identity and the former critique concepts of modernity by factoring in and foregrounding historical intricacies such as imperialism, racism, slavery, and forced (im)migration in the analysis (Desai, p. 13). In this case the concept of the Third Space becomes problematic as it does not consider racial and religious politics within the secular West and within South Asian culture itself. The Third Space may be a site of domination and forced compliance, so that it becomes problematic to think of an equal or non-hierarchical splitting within it. Factors such as assimilation, chromatism (privileging of lighter skin), and hegemony are absent from Bhabha’s analysis. Sunaina Maira notes that the notion of the Third Space is conditional and cannot be divorced from the specific, historical, and local conditions that produced it (Maira, p. 147).

Similarly, Desai states:

Bhabha’s scholarship in its sweeping gesture does not distinguish between the subaltern nonelite, displaced diasporic, or migrant females in his postcolonial
critique of modernity. Instead his critique seeks heterogeneous sites, including postcolonial diasporas, that produced multiple cultural strategies (such as hybridity and mimicry) that critique nationalism, nativism, and modernity. (Desai, p. 12)

Desai goes on to say that although some of Bhabha’s writings consider subaltern studies, they place less importance on migration and transnationality. Desai claims that migration and diasporas must not be viewed as independent entities, because the historical presence of colonialism and consequently postcolonialism created the conditions for South Asians’ dispersal across territories (the diaspora), under various forms of migration (Desai, p. 12).

In closing, I will return to the idea of diaspora. Sunaina Maira notes, through second-generation youth, one can begin to theorize the relationships between first-generation individuals to the homeland they live in and the one they left behind (Maira, p. 21). Maira explores the range of theorizing diaspora from regimented definitions fixed on revisiting the homeland to less rigid concepts revolving around assimilation and integration. Jigna Desai cites William Safran’s understanding of diaspora and its focus on a true ideal home to which one will eventually return when conditions are deemed acceptable; and Khachig Tololyan’s view of diaspora as a “re-turn, a repeated turning to the concept and/or relation of the homeland and other diasporan kin” (Desai, p. 19). Maira posits that the social and material relationships imperative to diasporic experiences are created in the context of migration, displacement, and relocation (Maira, p. 21). Desai echoes these sentiments in her conceptualization of diaspora as the “Brown Atlantic” defined by “the contours of global capital, migration, colonialism, and empire in the global cites of New York, London, Toronto, and Bombay” (Desai, p. 3). The Brown Atlantic, borrowed from Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic”, links South Asian displacement with historical processes of colonization, forced migration, and religious persecution. Desai
stresses that her concept of the Brown Atlantic is a theoretical space in which the idea of a totalizing construction may be challenged and critiqued:

Rather than seeking to define the significance of diaspora through tracing its etymology in cultural studies, that is seeking a linguistic origin, the project here is to understand when and why, and how it is employed in cultural politics and knowledge production. (Desai, p. 18).

Desai makes a distinct contrast between her concept of the Brown Atlantic and Gilroy's notion of the "Black Atlantic" by stressing that South Asian diasporas often represent greater political and economic power. Although elements such as forced migration and indentured servitude are prominent factors in South Asian diasporas, Gilroy's Black Atlantic historically links African displacement to slavery (Desai, p. 21). The South Asian diasporas include many educated individuals and oppression does not arise from slavery. South Asian diasporas must be theorized differently as they represent different "geopolitical positionings in their negotiations of the nation-state, capital, and modernity" (Desai, p. 22). The African and South Asian diasporas may contain overlapping stories, but vary in transnational formations and thus the frameworks for theorizing them must also differ. Desai claims that an exact definition of diaspora is not the goal, but a conceptual framework that permits analysis of the politics of transnational migration and movement is:

...I am less interested in offering a definitive understanding of diaspora that is applicable universally than I am in forging a fractured and flawed methodology of theorizing transnational cultural politics through differences. (Desai, p. 22)

Desai stresses that diaspora provides a means to speak about the homeland, but also serves as a means to question the construction of the adopted country. R. Radhakrishnann in "Ethnicity in an Age if Diaspora" states:
...both the home country and the country of residence could become mere ‘ghostly’ locations, and the result can only be a double depoliticalization. The home country is not ‘real’ in its own terms and yet it is real enough to impede Americanization, and the ‘present home’ is materially real and yet not real enough to feel authentic. Whereas at home one could be just Indian or Chinese, here one is constrained to become Chinese-, Indian-, or Asian-American. (Radhakrishnann, p. 123)

Radhakrishnann argues that the diaspora is also a construction of an imagined world. The Indian immigrant’s assimilation into American culture, for example, ultimately labels the immigrant a minority. Upon leaving the homeland, he or she is already labeled as a minority by the term “immigrant”. Thus by shifting territorial boundaries, the immigrant is inevitably minoritized. In the homeland they are considered Indian, but upon landing in the “adopted country” they are now Indian-, with the hyphen representing a disjuncture in identity. Radhakrishnan asks:

To what extend does the ‘old country’ function as a framework and regulate our transplanted identities within the diaspora? Should the old country be revered as a pre-given absolute, or is it all right to invent the old country itself in response to our contemporary location? Furthermore, whose interpretation of India is correct: The older generation’s or that of the younger; the insider’s version or the diasporan? (Radhakrishnan, p. 123)

Jigna Desai, in her analysis of diaspora, offers her own answer to Radhakrishnan’s questions. Desai stresses that the homeland, just like diaspora, is constructed through “the material practices and cultural discourses of diasporic displacement and imaginings” (Desai, p. 20). The diaspora is an imagined community that can serve to critique not only the spatialized and territorialized identities of the “migrant” but also interrogate the construction of the “native” as well (Desai, p. 18). Desai views the relationship between diasporas and the homeland as a dialectical one: “diasporas, rather than being derivatives of, often are mutually constituted with the homeland nation. In other words, diaspora and nations produce each other” (Desai, p. 20).
...
The concept of diaspora creates rich possibilities of understanding different histories; more specifically relating to this study, understanding how South Asian diasporic film represents and reproduces South Asian identity in the diaspora in relation to race, class, gender, and nationalism (Radhakrishnan, p. 126; Maira, p. 23). Multiple definitions of identity and diaspora are important because they help frame a close critical reading of specific South Asian diasporic films. Theoretical tools will be applied to the analysis of how viewers respond to the films and will be tested or grounded in the audience study.
Chapter 2: Narrative, Genre and the Diasporic Film

In order to understand how South Asian diasporic film reproduces notions of South Asian identity in the South Asian diasporic audience, it is first imperative to analyze the representation of South Asian identity in the films themselves. This chapter undertakes a comparative analysis of *American Desi*, *Bollywood/Hollywood*, and *East Is East*, to see how South Asian diasporic film represents South Asian identity, with careful consideration of the films in their specific diasporic contexts. A description of classic Hollywood family drama and romantic comedy genres is presented to show how they are inflected by the South Asian experience in the formation of South Asian diasporic film. A study of genre tells us what audiences expect within a text, but it also suggests that audiences have a role in determining the conventions of a specific genre. Theoretical perspectives from Chapter 1, along with new concepts such as the 'model minority myth', camp, and mimicry, are applied to a close reading of *American Desi*, to show how South Asian diasporic audiences are developing their own expectations of South Asian diasporic film. The representation of identity in South Asian diasporic film coincides with the reproduction of South Asian identity in the audience in the everyday use and interpretation of popular culture.

Concepts of genre have been subject to close scrutiny within studies of popular culture. Individuals identify a specific genre/category based on the relational elements that they are familiar with. For example, audiences are very aware that they are viewing an action film or drama simply by identifying the aspects that are prominent in films, such as car crashes in action genres. This simplistic view becomes problematic as genres are continually hybridized. One must ask, for example, if car crashes are exclusive to the
action genre. The obvious answer is no, as car crashes can occur in other genres such as the comedy or melodrama. The birth of genres such as sci-fi horror and the romantic comedy clearly indicates the blurring of generic categories.

This chapter will map out the elements of South Asian diasporic film as a generic category. Defining this category entails that we consider first the generic elements which place these films within classical genres and second the commonalities that make these films South Asian diasporic films. *American Desi, Bollywood/Hollywood,* and *East Is East* will be discussed in detail as they represent films from and about areas with high South Asian diasporic migration patterns (United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom). These films reflect Jigna Desai’s concept of the Brown Atlantic as they deal with recent South Asian migration to the West, specifically to the United States, Britain, and Canada (Desai, p. 6). Desai’s analysis of the Brown Atlantic is based on “the tension between similar and overlapping historical and material conditions of postcoloniality and migration leading to migration” (Desai, p. 6). The transnational migration patterns that constitute the Brown Atlantic are personified by the various characters in these three films, suggesting that diaspora, as a static and homogeneous site should be substituted by a more heterogeneous understanding of local communities and histories (Desai, p. 6). Other films such as *ABCD* (Patel, 1999) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002) will also be considered in the formulation of the genre.

South Asian diasporic films are not “popular” in the same ways as mass circulation Hollywood (or Bollywood) blockbusters. They are viewed by and circulate among a very specific South Asian audience, with the exception of films such as *East Is East* and *Bend It Like Beckham* which have managed to gain some mainstream attention.
But for the purposes of this analysis, South Asian diasporic films may be seen as forms of popular culture because they are inflections of popular film genres, like romantic comedy, family drama, and melodrama. The films being considered all follow the classical paradigm. *American Desi* and *Bollywood/Hollywood* are romantic comedies and *East Is East* is a family drama or melodrama with strong elements of comedy. *Bollywood/Hollywood, American Desi, and East Is East* make use of the classical paradigm, as they all contain narrative elements of ‘exposition’, ‘climax’, and ‘closure’ in some manner (Giannetti and Leach, 1998, p. 202).

*Bollywood/Hollywood* revolves around the protagonist Rahul and the pressure he endures from his family to marry a woman who is of Indian descent. Added to this, his sister, who is pregnant, cannot be married unless he is first engaged, so the situation is urgent. Rahul is caught between the expectations of his family, including his melodramatic mother, the strict views of his grandmother, and his dead father whose wishes are echoed through paranormal activity throughout the film; and his own internal strife. Rahul seeks the service of Sue, whom he meets in a singles club, to pose as his fiancée. Upon discovering that Sue is a prostitute/call girl, the maximum tension is reached in the climax, when Rahul and Sue clash overtly (Giannetti and Leach, p. 202).

*American Desi* focuses on Krishna, a college aged young man who wants to be known as Kris, and his disdain for all aspects of Indian/South Asian culture. With his first taste of freedom - free from parental supervision and consequently Indian/South Asian culture - the film revolves around Kris’s experience with Indian/South Asian culture on a university campus. Despite his attempt to distance himself from his Indian/South Asian roots he is attracted to Nina, who is very much in tune with her
Indian heritage. She speaks Hindi, practices religious rituals and ceremonies, watches Hindi films, and listens to Bhangra as well as Hindi film songs. With his three roommates, Jagjit Singh (a Sikh man whose desire is to become a painter and thwart his father’s expectations of his becoming an engineer), Salim Ali-Kahn (a devout Muslim who claims that all Western-influenced South Asian females are corrupt and damaged), and Ajay (who strongly identifies with African-American and Afro-Caribbean culture), Kris begins to question his (mis)identification with Indian/South Asian culture.

_East Is East_, like _American Desi_ and _Bollywood/Hollywood_, also represents a cultural “tug-of-war” as the Khan family is the product of an interracial and interfaith marriage. George is a Pakistani immigrant and Ella, a white Anglo. Their children exhibit various degrees of cultural tension as they constantly negotiate between the social and religious fundamental views of their father and the modern attraction of secular English life such as consuming meat, Western concepts of courtship (which are in direct contrast with those of the Muslim religion), and attending discos. The film reaches its climax when George, without their consent, promises his two sons, Tariq and Abdul, to the daughters of Mr. Shah, at a secret meeting in Bradford.

Jigna Desai in _Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film_, defines South Asian diasporic film, “as an interstitial cinema located between Hollywood and Bollywood” (Desai, p. ix). Desai goes on to say that the term “beyond” presents “hybrid possibilities forged out of the shifting sands of Hollywood and Bollywood” (Desai, p. ix). The term South Asian diasporic film must acknowledge different cultural contexts for different diasporic communities and account for differences
between the British and the North American contexts of cinema production and reception.

The Films in Their Diasporic Contexts

Before South Asian diasporic film can be considered as a generic category, the different cultural conditions in which South Asian diasporic film is consumed must be explored. A close reading of Bollywood/Hollywood, American Desi, and East Is East, will expose differing historical, economic, and cultural practices between North American and British film production and reception.

Directed by Deepa Mehta and distributed by Mongrel Media, Bollywood/Hollywood was released in theaters on October 5 2003. Shown on 18 screens, it grossed $1,480,192 in its opening week in the United States (Internet Movie Database, March 9 2005, http://www.imdb.com). It remained in theaters for one more week, shown on seven screens where it grossed an additional $10,891 (Internet Movie Database, March 9 2005, http://www.imdb.com). Bollywood/Hollywood was distributed internationally, showing in countries such as Israel, South Korea, Greece, and Turkey.

Deepa Mehta, born in India and raised in Toronto, could be situated within the art house tradition of cinema, exemplified by her films Fire (Mehta, 1997) and Earth (Mehta, 1998). Jigna Desai stresses that Mehta’s status as a Canadian is questionable as she often moves from India to Canada, relying on Canadian government support as well as “the networks she (has) established through her collaborative work with her former white Canadian husband” (Desai, p. 47). Despite this ambiguity it is generally agreed
upon that she is a Canadian director. Guy Maddin in “Bully for Bollywood’s Musical Melodramas” writes of Bollywood/Hollywood:

From the title alone, we are told that Mehta - who was born in India and raised in Toronto - has set out to create a tension between the American and Indian storytelling styles, but, god bless her, Mehta is more Canadian than American, and the stuff that ain’t Bollywood feels unmistakably Canuck (Maddin, 2002, p. 22).

Bollywood/Hollywood’s international popularity can be attributed to Mehta’s movement away from the art house tradition, and her focus on comedy and humour. After receiving death threats over her film Water, which shut down production in India after just two days of shooting, Mehta came back from New Dehli and three months later produced the script for Bollywood/Hollywood (Wise, 2002, p. 32). Mehta states, “After Water, I just wanted to make a happy film about my hometown” (Wise, p. 34). Guy Maddin writes that Mehta’s most financially successful film to date can be attributed to her use “of melodramatic conventions of the world’s two filmic superpowers (Bollywood and Hollywood)” (Maddin, p. 21). Maddin goes on to argue that melodrama, and more specifically Bollywood melodrama with its “over-the-top” plots, is the catalyst for South Asian diasporic film and Hollywood pictures as “all good stories contain at least traces of melodrama” (Maddin, p. 21). American Desi, Bollywood/Hollywood, and East Is East, all contain elements of melodrama, reinforcing Maddin’s view that:

Raised on Hollywood pictures, you crave melodrama without knowing. You live it, you sleep and dream it, and you unwittingly watch it at your cineplexes already. Only you can’t recognize it until it’s imported (Maddin, p. 21).

East Is East, based on the autobiographical screenplay by Ayub Khan Din, was directed by Damien O’Donnell and distributed by Miramax films in the United States. It was released in the United Kingdom on November 7 1999, and in the United States on April 16 2000. Jigna Desai notes that East Is East was “one of the top-grossing films

To understand the film’s success in the United Kingdom, the British context of cinema production and reception, or British-Asian and “black” British filmmaking, must be considered. Anne Cieko, in “Representing the Spaces of Diaspora in Contemporary British Film by Women Directors”, states that the term “black” in the United Kingdom “came to represent, in the 1980s, a hegemonic and unified (though not uncontested) oppositional political identity in the struggles against racism” (Cieko, 1999, p. 67). Cary Rajinder Sawhney in “‘Another Kind Of British’: An exploration of British Asian Films” goes on to say that in the United Kingdom, Asian (people originating from Indian, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sir Lanka) and African Caribbean culture were “melded together through their common experience as racial minorities with the U.K., often living under the threat of poverty and social exclusion” (Sawhney, 2001, p. 58). Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s reflected this experience as filmmakers created documentaries focusing on racial segregation on “both sides of the Atlantic” (Sawhney, p. 58).

The 1980s saw an increased awareness of feminism, Asian, and black lesbian and gay politics, as the movements “increasingly found a voice in the arts and queer black politics” (Sawhney, p. 58). Out of these movements, South Asian filmmakers such as

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Pratibha Parmar and Gurinder Chadha created politically charged shorts, documentaries, and feature films dealing with racism and prejudice in the United Kingdom (Sawhney, p. 58). 1986 marked the year when Stephen Frears’s *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Frears, 1986) was released, claiming a mainstream market and demonstrating “that films with (South) Asians in them could make money” (Sawhney, p. 58). It became evident that, “if films with Asian themes share common characteristics with Black British film, they can also be considered as a part of mainstream British cinema” (Sawhney, p. 59). It is no coincidence that British-Asian films such as *Bhaji On The Beach* (Chadha, 1993), *East Is East*, *Bend It Like Beckham*, and *Bride & Prejudice* (Chadha, 2004), all focus on interracial relationships.

*East Is East*, compared to *Bollywood/Hollywood* and *American Desi*, is distinctive because the director is non-Indian. Damien O’Donnell was hired because the producer loved his short film, *35 Aside* (O’Donnell, 1995), a story about a young boy who is ostracized by his classmates because of his distaste for English football (indieWire, March 8 2004, http://indiewire.com). Cary Sawhney notes that non-Indian directors often lean toward the “western way” of directing and thus are able to attract a larger audience (Sawhney, p. 60). Similarly, Mehta’s *Bollywood/Hollywood* garnered box office success because of its inclination towards the “western way” as Mehta states, “The film is not about Indian family values; it could be any family values that are passed down from the father to son. Of course, it ends happily ever after. It has to. It’s a romantic musical comedy! (Wise, p. 83)

Both *Bollywood/Hollywood* and *East Is East* hinge their success on ‘crossing over’ with the non-Indian audience. According to Desai, “‘cross-over’ in relation to
discussion of black British cultural productions usually signifies the success of texts with white audiences" (Desai, p. 66). Films that have cross-over success must appeal to white demographic markets and other non-Indian audiences interested in “multicultural fare” (Desai, p. 66). Cross-over assumes that mainstream audiences can relate to the South Asian experience on some level. Cary Sawhney notes that the success of *East Is East*:

appropriates the North’s association with assorted stereotypes and fits snugly alongside a number of successful non-Asian, working-class depictions of Yorkshire and Lancashire, such as *The Full Monty* (1997) and *Little Voice* (1998) (Sawhney, p. 59).

Damien O’Donnell claims that *East Is East*’s cross-over appeal was directly intended because not only was it told through the eyes of Ella, emphasizing Ella’s interracial and interfaith marriage, but a test screening reinforced cross over success:

> We knew *East Is East* would be a cross over because we actually did a test screening. The audience for which was about 15 percent Asian and the rest White. When we looked at the scorecards both groups like it equally as much (indieWire, March 8 2004, http://www.indiewire.com).

Direct marketing and posters for *East Is East* created the cross-over appeal for the film. Damien O’Donnell claims that mainstream success and the ability to attract a non-Indian audience can rest on the marketing and promotion of a film. O’Donnell emphasizes that movie posters often present messages and frame a film to cater to a specific audience:

> I hate the posters here (in the States) and I hated the posters in England. Here (the States) the poster is of one of the white girls blowing a bubble...But I know what they (Miramax) are trying to do is get the poster to appeal to a young, general audience that might go see teenage movies. They want to dupe them into getting into the theater and hope they stay and like it...It (the poster in England) was equally as bad. It was a picture of the little white dog copulating with the letter ‘E’ in *East Is East*. A month later they came out with a picture of the kids standing in a Fully Monty-like tableau. It’s not like I know so much about movie posters. But I do know that those posters don’t represent the film (indieWire, March 8 2004, http://indiewire.com).
Bollywood/Hollywood uses some of the same marketing tactics, as the original movie poster featured Lisa Ray and Rahual Khanna embracing in Bollywood-fashion. Upon its release in theaters and subsequently on the cover of the DVD, Rahual Khanna was omitted, leaving Lisa Ray unaccompanied, hands on hips with seductive gaze. The logic was that Lisa Ray would appeal to a broader audience, and a non-Indian audience, because of her mixed-race background that presents her as racially ambiguous. Rahual Khanna plus the signifier “Bollywood” narrows the audience and does not appeal to a broader non-Indian demographic, making “Nothing is what it appears to be” an appropriate tag-line for the Bollywood/Hollywood poster.

Up until this point, mainstream interest in South Asian diasporic film rests on the assumption that “‘there’s a space for different stories to be told and that these stories can be universal and appreciated by everyone’” (Cieko, p. 84). American Desi represents South Asian expectations for South Asian diasporic film and “offers a connection with (South) Asian cinematic identity” (Sawhney, p.59). Gurinder Chadha offers her explanation of South Asian diasporic film intended for mainstream audiences: “Ninety-nine percent of the audience will never get the references or the joke. But I get them and my sister gets them, and I know a few other people get them as well (Sawhney, p. 59). South Asian diasporic film targeted at the South Asian diaspora will inevitably exclude the non-Indian audience, with the exception of those individuals who have experience with the South Asian diaspora.

American Desi, an autobiographical look at director Piyush Dinker Pandya’s experience with South Asian culture at Rutgers University, was distributed by Eros Entertainment and released on March 18 2001 on 38 screens in the United States (Internet

*American Desi*, had little access to mainstream theaters and instead played at venues in major metropolitan locations with South Asian communities that regularly feature Bollywood films (Desai, p.42).

In contrast to *Bollywood/Hollywood* and *East Is East*, *American Desi* is a smaller U.S. independent production that, along with *Chutney Popcorn* (Ganatra, 1999), has gained the most access to distribution (Desai, p. 51). Desai observes that *American Desi*’s access to distribution and popularity relied heavily on the diasporic channels of distribution that circulate Bollywood films as:

On video *American Desi* was primarily rented and sold (both legal and bootleg version) through the many South Asian video stores distributed throughout the United States (Desai, p. 42).

Although no critical literature has been published on *American Desi*, its popularity among South Asians in the diaspora shows that it is a significant site where first- and second-generation notions of South Asian identity can be theorized and examined. This relevance is evident in the fact that a total of six out of the eight participants in this study had previously seen *American Desi*, and only three had previously seen *Bollywood/Hollywood*, and only one had seen *East Is East*.
Now that South Asian diasporic film has been examined in its different cultural contexts, commonalities between the films can be considered to establish the broader generic category, South Asian diasporic film.

South Asian Inflections

This section will discuss how the traditional Hollywood genres, romantic comedy and family drama, are inflected by the South Asian experience to create South Asian diasporic film. A close consideration of intergenerational conflict in Bollywood/Hollywood, East Is East, and American Desi, will show that cultural tension between first- and second-generation South Asians is the main motivating force for romance and family conflict.

The Romantic Comedy

South Asian diasporic film inflects the popular genre, romantic comedy, as first- and second-generation South Asian experiences appear in the classic romantic comedy narrative. Cultural association or detachment is the main advantage or obstacle to the progression of the romance. American Desi and Bollywood/Hollywood are romantic comedies as they first and foremost revolve around the notions of heterosexual love and courtship (Shumway, 1991, p. 381). Love is the driving force that dictates the actions in a romantic comedy (Shumway, p. 382). The most conventional element of the romantic comedy is the “love triangle”, a triad between two subjects and an excluded party. The object of desire is at the apex and the two other subjects represent the points at the base, vying for a place at the top (Shumway, p. 384). This triadic state can come in several
different variations. In some cases, the character at the apex is aware of the rivalry that is being displayed by the two base-points, as for example in the romantic comedy Brown Sugar (Famuyiwa, 2002). In other cases, the triangle is actually formed through random occurrences, as in the film Pearl Harbour (Bay, 2001), which is not a romantic comedy, but a prime example of the “love triangle”. In South Asian diasporic film, the triangle is formed by identification and disassociation with the South Asian experience. This indicates that the cultural context is one of the elements /obstacles to the progression of the romance.

The triangular nature of relationships is often complicated and in most cases the revolutions on the triangle must be considered (Shumway, p. 384). The competition displayed by the base-points for the affection of the apex is not always clear and in many cases there may be numerous cycles or revolutions on the triangle. In many instances, as “the triangle” progresses throughout a film, characters will be included and excluded by the various actions that occur to advance the story. The outcome of the relationships is not only affected by the actions of the characters themselves, but also by the actions of others.

In American Desi, one is first made aware of Krishna’s love interest when he notices Nina in his Engineering class. The rules of opposition are set, as later that night Rakesh is introduced at the freshman party. During the first encounter it appears that Krishna has completed his “mission” (a term he employs as he attempts to win over Nina), but this is very short-lived, as Rakesh clearly poses a threat to Krishna. When Krishna falters by failing to acknowledge Nina’s Indian heritage, Rakesh is cued to reinforce Krishna’s alienation, not only from Nina, but also from the South Asian cultural
...
experience. Rakesh represents the Indian identity that Krishna has grown to loathe. Rakesh’s disrespect toward Krishna is clearly evident as, flanked by Hemant and Chadu, he speaks Hindi in a mocking and condescending manner, with full knowledge that Krishna does not understand nor speak the language. This not only shows his objectification of Nina when he states, “Kya maal he” (“What goods”), but also his distaste for Krishna, someone who he views as having invaded his territory. Rakesh is established as the “villain”. This scene exemplifies how the triangle is in constant flux. When it appears that Krishna is excluded and Rakesh is included, another revolution quickly occurs as Krishna pokes fun at Rakesh’s tailored jacket, belittling his bourgeois nature. With a deep look into Krishna’s eyes and a soft smile from Nina, Krishna is no longer excluded. Another revolution on the triangle occurs revealing how inclusion of one party at the apex, inevitably excludes the third (Shumway, p. 384). Throughout the film, sequential revolutions on the triangle occur that displace both Krishna and Rakesh in turn, but the apex always remains constant.

Shumway’s model of the “love triangle” is too narrow to apply to all romantic comedies. Variations of the triadic relationship are evident in romantic comedies even though they are not framed in a triangular state. In films such as Bollywood/Hollywood, the “love triangle” is horizontally flattened to produce a “push and pull” continuum. The protagonist is centered on the field negotiating between the two end points. In Bollywood/Hollywood, Rahul is caught between his family’s expectations and those of the assimilationists. On numerous occasions in the film, Rahul states, “I’m not interested”, in that he is not interested in pursuing a relationship with a woman of Indian descent nor is he interested in any advice and guidance from his mother and grandmother.
concerning his romantic life. In *Bollywood/Hollywood* the same "push and pull" scenario also applies to Sunita. She is caught between her family's diasporic allegiance to the homeland, encompassed by her father's romanticized vision of his "precious Punjab" and his rejection of Western values corrupting his daughter; and the roles of the Western woman, which in Sunita's case allow her to become an escort/prostitute to spite her father as an expression of sexual/cultural and economic independence. Through cultural conflict, *Bollywood/Hollywood* shows how diasporic displacement and the first-generation longing to preserve the cultural and religious practices of the homeland are integral to the progression of the romance. This phenomenon is also evident in *American Desi* as characters such as Krishna and Jagjit negotiate between mainstream ideals and parental constructions of South Asian culture.

Both *American Desi* and *Bollywood/Hollywood* reveal how the romantic comedy can be presented from the perspective of the excluded individual (Shumway, p. 384). That is, "like the odd person in a narrative triangle, the viewer experiences a lack, and resulting desire motivates and structures his or her attention" (Shumway, p. 385). Krishna in *American Desi*, finds himself the excluded individual in many instances. Krishna's exclusion culminates shortly after the climax, in a shower scene symbolizing reflection, contemplation, and most importantly isolation. This, juxtaposed with Nina and Rakesh practicing the *Leela-Raas* for the Gharba, emphasizes that Krishna is alone. It is at this point that Krishna more than ever is the excluded individual, excluded from the romantic relationship but also excluded from the South Asian cultural experience. The excluded individual can also be seen in *Bollywood/Hollywood*, as throughout the film, Rahul and Sunita often distance themselves from each other and their respective
families. In Bollywood/Hollywood as in American Desi, the excluded individual becomes clearly evident shortly after the climax. Rahul discovers that Sunita is more than a simple call girl, but a well-known prostitute in the Lakeshore area of Toronto. Both are framed as excluded individuals, from each other and from their respective families as they both negotiate between the ideals of western society and those of their families’ fixed notion of the homeland.

South Asian diasporic film inflects the conventional romantic comedy with these references to cultural contexts. Obstacles to romance arise from within the South Asian experience and culture. American Desi and Bollywood/Hollywood demonstrate how cultural identification and disassociation dictate the progression of the romance. Elements of family, community, and diasporic displacement become obstacles to the successful resolution of the relationship.

The Family Drama

East Is East is similar to Bollywood/Hollywood and American Desi because its focus is on intergenerational conflict between first- and second-generation South Asians. Although American Desi lacks the active presence of first-generation individuals, some characters are still presented as parental figures and therefore represent first-generation desires. East Is East inflects the traditional family drama or melodrama because the film focuses on the emotional conflict within one family. The conflict is structured around the South Asian experience as community, diaspora, and family are the main contributing factors of conflict and resolution. The family drama differs from the romantic comedy
because of its emphasis on the familial unit and the conflicts within it. Romance, in some cases can be an important factor, but is not the main driving force in the family drama.

As a family drama, *East Is East* focuses more explicitly upon the order of the nuclear family (Kolker, 1999, p. 100). *East is East* revolves around the father, George and the conflict between his traditional Islamic views and those of the secular West, in this case England circa 1971. The family drama overlaps with the conventions of the romantic comedy as the triadic relationship of the characters develops with the same narrative formula as the romantic comedy. *East is East* explores problems of courtship and love in a South Asian context similar to *American Desi* and *Bollywood/Hollywood*.

The “push and pull” actions of the relationships are evident throughout the film. Tariq and Abdul, two of George’s five boys, are the most obvious examples, as they are promised by their father as husbands for two daughters of a prominent Muslim family, the Shahs. The arrangement takes place between Mr. Shah and George without the sons’ knowledge, and Tariq and Abdul are made aware of the marriage just prior to the daughters’ arrival at the Khans’ home. Tariq negotiates between his idea of English life, which includes going to discos and meeting white women, and his father’s, which revolves around the acceptance of the Islamic community. George’s interpretation of tradition demands that children wed individuals of Muslim descent as a measure to preserve cultural heritage and thwart Western corruption. As Tariq repeatedly states, “I’ll never marry a pakí”, and with the absence of Afro-Caribbean or Asian women in his life, one can assume that his romantic ideas and notions of beauty revolve around white women, although he does not treat Stella, his white girlfriend, seriously either. Tariq ignores Stella when he departs for “Le Beau Chapeau” to visit his brother, and in the end
agrees to marry Mr. Shah's daughter. Tariq rejects both a traditional Muslim relationship and Western conventions of monogamy, showing how internal conflict is also a contributing factor to the progression of the family drama.

George also maneuvers within the "push and pull" continuum as he negotiates between his fundamental Islamic ideals and those of secular England. In this regard, the family drama overlaps with the romantic comedy as Bollywood/Hollywood and East Is East share the commonality of cultural conflict and family tension. Tariq and Abdul experience the same cultural tensions as Rahul. Although Rahul comes to accept his fate and submits to the possibility of an Indian wife, Tariq and Abdul are forced into marriage arrangements, a key contrast between East Is East and Bollywood/Hollywood. While Bollywood/Hollywood satirizes and lampoons elements of South Asian culture as comedic elements, East Is East focuses on the harsh reality of immigrant families in the diaspora. The films explore similar themes, but fundamental differences are apparent; Bollywood/Hollywood inflects the classic romantic comedy and East Is East uses the formula of the family drama. These different genres are used to frame the same issues of nostalgia, cultural authenticity, and tradition in the diaspora.

In the family drama, the excluded individual is apparent, as George often finds himself alienated from his family for striking and belittling his wife and children. The climax is reached when George hits Ella after the family has chased off the potential brides for Tariq and Abdul. George is asked to leave the house by Ella and his family, and just like Krishna in American Desi, and Sunita and Rahul in Bollywood/Hollywood, George is again the excluded individual. The dynamics of exclusion are reversed in the
case of George and Krishna. Krishna is excluded for not being Indian enough while George is excluded for clinging too intensely to the fossilized beliefs of the homeland.

The cultural tension driving the narrative in Bollywood/Hollywood and East Is East is also explored in American Desi. The active presence of parental control, predominant in East Is East and Bollywood/Hollywood is not as pronounced in American Desi. Nevertheless the psychological control and construction of authentic Indian culture is strongly represented in the film. Even though parents are not central characters in American Desi, there are sill forces exhibited by the various characters that uphold parental expectations. Salim is a parental substitute, as he symbolizes first-generation sentiments about Western corruption and authentic Indian tradition. He views all Western-influenced-South Asian females as corrupt and feels the need to focus on his studies, rather than partake in the extracurricular activities on campus. Rakesh also serves as a figure of parental control when he claims that Krishna is confused and not Indian enough. In key instances in the film, Krishna measures his notions of South Asian/Indian identity and authenticity against individuals who are substitutes for parental authority. American Desi, in this way also exhibits elements of the family drama, by focusing on family dynamics and inter-generational conflict.

In addition to the “love triangle” and the “push and pull” continuum, another element of the romantic comedy and the family drama is binary opposition. Binary opposition is a characteristic of all genres. In order to know who or what is ‘good’, we must know who or what is ‘bad’. Just as one can identify the protagonist in a specific film, one can also identify the antagonist. The binary opposition of ‘good/bad’ and ‘protagonist/antagonist’ is imperative for plot and character development. Without
binary opposition, the actions of the characters and the development of the plot might be viewed as random occurrences within a discourse. Without context, which is given its significance through binary opposition, the meaning of a specific romantic comedy or family drama is lost.

In culturally inflected romantic comedies and family dramas, such as *Coming To America* (Landis, 1988), binary opposition defines characters. The relationship between the Eddy Murphy and Eriq LaSalle characters is defined by the binary opposition between the two. Darryl (LaSalle) with his conceited, bourgeois rhetoric, and his "Soul-Glow'd" jerry-curl, works in opposition to the clean-cut, friendly nature of Prince Akeem (Murphy). The triadic competition between Murphy and LaSalle for Shari Headly locates the film as a romantic comedy, while it also exhibits elements of the family drama. Inner tensions within the respective American and African families and between the male and female lead trouble the order of the nuclear family. It is made clear very early in the film which of the male protagonists the audience is to favour and which they are to dislike. In a similar way, binary oppositions are created in *American Desi* – one can see that Rakesh (evil) and Krishna (good) are the reincarnations of Darryl Jenkins (LaSalle) and Prince Akeem (Murphy). The oppositions created in *East Is East* are not as easily fixed as in *American Desi*, as in many instances, the excluded individual, George finds himself straddling the line between 'good' and 'bad'. This battle not only can be viewed through his interaction with his children and his wife, but it is also an internal battle in which George must come to the realization that he is no longer living in the Pakistan that he left behind.
The classic romantic comedy and family drama are inflected by South Asian experiences in the creation of South Asian diasporic film. Elements such as the “love triangle”, “push and pull” continuum, excluded individual, and binary opposition make *East Is East* a family drama, and *American Desi* and *Bollywood/Hollywood*, romantic comedies. These films are considered South Asian diasporic films because the classic genres are inflected by different cultural contexts. Family conflict and traditional expectations, along with pressures of the diasporic community, are key narrative elements in the progression of romance and family relationships. These same elements become obstacles to the successful resolution of the relationships.

**South Asian Diasporic Film as Genre**

Two distinct aspects of genre will be considered in the further formulation of South Asian diasporic film as a generic category. The first aspect is the industrial and production conditions which shape South Asian diasporic film. These include diasporic channels of circulation, new media such as satellite television and DVDs, Bollywood’s influence, and the global hegemony of Hollywood. The second aspect is the narrative core and thematic tropes which tie South Asian diasporic film together. A consideration of ‘place’, iconography, camp, mimicry, and the ‘model minority myth’, will emphasize the thematic elements of cultural tension and inter-generational conflict that characterize the commonality of the films.
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Industry and Production

South Asian diasporic film can trace its emergence in relation to the global hegemony of Hollywood and the influence of Bollywood cinema. Consideration of DVDs and satellite television will show how new media intensified the diasporic channels of distribution. South Asian diasporic film uses many of the same distribution channels as Bollywood cinema.

Desai maps out the emergence of South Asian diasporic film in relation to Hollywood productions. South Asian diasporic film cannot be divorced from the shadow of capitalistic "means" and "modes of production" (Desai, p. 38). Under the global hegemony of Hollywood, South Asian diasporic filmmakers in general not only attempt to validate the cultural worth of diasporic and transnational content, but they also attempt to exploit the means of production by gaining access to conglomerate film industries: "Hollywood (and its postindustrial mode of production) overly determines not only U.S. filmic production but also the circulation and consumption of diasporic films" (Desai, p. 38). Diasporic filmmakers may find funding from private and government sources, but they are fully aware that commercial success rests on a particular director and his or her production team's ability to enter into the film industry's integrated system of transnational distribution and circulation (Desai, p. 38). It becomes clear that South Asian diasporic film is embedded and linked to a very intricate system of transnationality, investment, and culture (Desai, p. 39). Thus, as Desai argues, South Asian diasporic films lie at the intersection between Hollywood and Bollywood.

If South Asian diasporic film submits to the global hegemony of Hollywood, then it is also evident that Bollywood shapes the formation and rising popularity of South
Asian diasporic film. Bollywood cinema has long been viewed all over the world in places such as Japan, Russia, and Brazil (Desai, p. 40). Only in the past two or three decades has Bollywood cinema been prominent in the Western world, other than England. Bollywood has risen as a global and not simply a local alternative to Hollywood. It has challenged Hollywood by positioning Bollywood cinema not just as national cinema but as global cinema (Desai, p. 40). “Increasingly, many non-Western audiences cite Indian cinema as appealing because it is seen as an alternative to the Americanness of Hollywood in its Third World or postcolonial sensibilities and structures of feeling” (Desai, p. 40).

The rising popularity of Bollywood cinema can also be attributed to the introduction of new media. DVDs, VCDs, and satellite television are catalysts for South Asian media’s consumption within diasporic communities and greater audiences. New distribution regions were formed for the Indian film industry (Desai, p. 40). The emergence of South Asian diasporic film coincides with the Indian film industry’s designation of diasporas as spaces where profits could be made. The diaspora, always a space in which Indian identity and culture was performed through popular cultural elements such as song, dance, and film, was deemed a lucrative market in which diasporic experiences of first- and second-generation South Asians could be the driving force of new diasporic and Bollywood films.

Bollywood’s influence on the emergence and rising popularity of South Asian diasporic film is widespread. The best examples are the direct references to Bollywood films within South Asian diasporic films (Desai, p. 42). American Desi features a scene where Krishna, Nina, and Rakesh watch Tare Mara Sapane (Augustine, 1996) while

South Asian diasporic filmmakers have harnessed the success of Bollywood and used its distribution channels to circulate their films. Jigna Desai identifies *American Desi* as an independent diasporic film that had little access to mainstream screens but was screened in venues that featured Bollywood films. On DVD and video, *American Desi*’s success was not dictated by rental and purchasing trends of Blockbuster and Wal-Mart, but was mainly sold and rented (both pirated and endorsed versions) via “mom and pop” South Asian video and clothing stores (Desai, p. 42). Films such as *Bollywood/Hollywood* situate South Asian diasporic film within the realm of North American national cinema and Indian national cinema. These films stand the greatest chance at mainstream success by appealing to multiple audiences. While Bollywood positions itself as global cinema and an oppositional alternative to Hollywood, the global hegemony of Hollywood plays a huge factor in the commercial and financial success of South Asian diasporic films by controlling access to production. Consequently,
cinematic references to Bollywood forms “signify not only alternatives to dominant Western cinematic practices but also a self-reflective claim to the cinematic apparatus itself in the name of the non-Western” (Desai, p. 42).

The industrial and production aspect was considered in the formulation of South Asian diasporic film as a generic category. Careful consideration was given to diasporic channels of circulation to show how diasporic directors use the same channels of distribution as Bollywood, new media such as satellite television and DVDs as catalysts for South Asian media’s consumption within diasporic communities and greater audiences, the global hegemony of Hollywood, and Bollywood’s influence on South Asian diasporic film.

**Thematic Elements: Hollywood and Beyond**

South Asian diasporic film has appropriated traditional Hollywood genres but also has its own codes of signification and narrative development. Thematic elements and narrative structures (‘exposition’, ‘climax’, ‘closure’), focus on second-generation South Asian youth experiences, the significance of ‘place’, distinctive iconography, the use of camp and mimicry, and the incorporation of ‘model minority myth’, unite these films in their exploration of identity in the South Asian diaspora.

Rick Altman in *Film/Genre* writes:

> Whether through sparsely used specific generic terms or the more common strategy of broad generic implication, Hollywood’s stock-in-trade is the romantic combination of genres, not the classical practice of generic purity. (Altman, 1999, p. 59)

Altman’s passage implies that genre performs numerous functions as the lines between genres are often blurred. A specific film needs not be exclusive to one classification and
can belong to more than one genre. Altman goes on to say, “Only slightly short of magical in its versatility, genre endures within film theory because of its ability to perform multiple operations simultaneously” (Altman, p. 14). Altman stresses that when a specific genre has reached its saturation point, studios/directors have three options: dispose of it, limit the filmmaking to “B” productions, or find new ways to handle it (Altman, p. 63). Films such as American Desi, East Is East, and Bollywood/Hollywood, have emerged from the popularity of, and subsequent familiarity with, conventional romantic comedies and family dramas. Through films such as Bollywood/Hollywood and East Is East, studios have found new ways to handle the genres. Independent and B filmmakers have capitalized on this saturation by inflecting the generic elements of the romantic comedy and the family drama to create South Asian diasporic film. South Asian diasporic film and more specifically the films discussed above, are considered popular films because they have found new ways to handle the conventions of the romantic comedy and the family drama, filtering them through first- and second-generation experiences of South Asian identity and authenticity in the diaspora. South Asian diasporic film appropriates popular Hollywood genres and inflects them with cultural knowledge and narratives of South Asian diasporic experiences.

Altman writes:

Once a genre is recognized and practiced throughout the industry, individual studios have no further economic interest in practicing it as such (especially in their prestige productions); instead, they seek to create new cycles by associating a new type of material or approach with an existing genre, thus initiating a new round of genreification. (Altman, p. 62)

So while, American Desi is a romantic comedy, it can also fall under the classification of South Asian diasporic film, as it has appropriated a popular Hollywood genre and
inflected its elements, dictated by cultural knowledge and narrative structures of South Asian experiences.

Jigna Desai in *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* indicates that although South Asian diasporic films may be interpreted through popular generic and national cinematic categories, their disjuncture, heterogeneity, and hybridity contradict the tendency to define these films through popular generic elements (Desai, p. 36). For this study, the films will not be considered exclusive to one genre but may be included in more than one generic classification. This study will outline the category of South Asian diasporic film without relying upon underlying notions of generic purity. Desai uses the term “Masala films” to illustrate a greater tendency toward generic hybridity. Masala films contain the familiar structures of Bollywood films (alienated protagonists and females marking cultural tradition, among others) but develop differently from their Bollywood counterparts through elements such as satire and lampoon. Desai adds that South Asian diasporic film in English is more likely to achieve greater commercial success due to the global hegemony of English and of Hollywood (Desai, p. 45). South Asian diasporic films that employ the skeletal structures of popular Hollywood genres, ‘exposition’, ‘climax’, and ‘closure’, will most likely circulate transnationally (Desai, p. 45).

The term South Asian diasporic film, is already ambiguous. Desai notes that charting the territory for South Asian diasporic film becomes problematic, as one must begin to think outside the hegemonic forces of cultural nationalism and essentialism (Desai, p. 36). She points out, that basing criteria for these films on the racial identity of the director would eliminate important films such as *East Is East*. Films directed by
South Asians such as M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Village* (Shyamalan, 2004) would be misplaced in the generic classification. Under a genre based on ethnicity and race, it is quite possible that films such as *Antitrust* (Howitt, 2001) or *Original Sin* (Cristofer, 2001) could be considered South Asian diasporic films based on the fact they were produced by Ashok Amritraj.

This thesis considers South Asian diasporic films that are set in South Asian diasporas and explore second-generation youth experiences of authenticity, cultural negotiation, and nostalgia. The following analysis is influenced by Desai’s emphasis on displacement and the institutional impacts of racism on the lives of migrants but focuses on ‘Desi’ films dealing with teen/youth orientated themes (Desai, p. 45).

South Asian diasporic film emphasizes ‘place’ as one of the elements/obstacles that may generate inter-generational conflict and resolve relationships. In South Asian diasporic film, “the place plays a critical role in the progression of the narrative, consequently the place ‘motivates’ the progression of the plot” (Mitra, 1999, p. 50). These films do not take place in India and the surrounding South Asian countries. This is a critical factor as the place motivates the plot. The tensions exhibited in films such as *American Desi* are different from or absent entirely from films set in India. For these films to fit into the genre, the characters share diasporic experiences, while the protagonists themselves must be South Asian. Films such as *Fire, Earth, Monsoon Wedding* (Nair, 2002), and *Such a Long Journey* (Gunnarsson, 1998) are not included in this analysis because, although they may share common thematic elements, they do not fit the criteria of the genre, as they do not focus on the second-generation South Asian youth experience in the diaspora.
American Desi, Bollywood/Hollywood, and East Is East share characteristics of South Asian diasporic film in relation to their thematic elements. The subjects of the films revolve around issues of internal strife and intergenerational conflict that the various South Asian characters experience between adopting Western values or remaining true to their parents' construction of the homeland. The films deal with cultural tension within the South Asian diaspora. This internal "battle" and intergenerational conflict occurs in the characters from American Desi (Krishna, Salim, Ajay, Jagjit, Rakesh, Farrah, and Nina), Bollywood/Hollywood (Rahul, Sunita, Rahul's mother, Rahul's grandmother), and East Is East (George, Ella, and their children). This phenomenon also occurs with Nina and Raj from ABCD, and Jesminder from Bend It Like Beckham. The films revolve around the struggle between parental figures, who hold true to South Asian cultural values that transcend space and time, and their children or oppositional characters, who attend Westernized schools and adopt Westernized values in relationships, and who wish, at the most extreme, to live an assimilated life (Kaplan, 1997, p. 174).

There are also similarities among American Desi, Bollywood/Hollywood, and East Is East at the level of iconography. Dress is an important iconic symbol, as it connotes acceptance and rejection of South Asian experiences. The main characters in the films mentioned above, for instance, all dress in typical Westernized clothing. Krishna, wears a backwards Penn State baseball cap and Denver Broncos, Terrell Davis, jersey. Baseball and football are representations of American ideals. Krishna adopts these to the point of wearing the Superbowl MVP's jersey. In East Is East, Tariq is also always framed as wearing typical Westernized clothing. In one scene he rips apart the "marriage-topee"
(head piece) that he finds in his father’s chest, symbolizing his disgust with the marriage his father has arranged for him, and rejection of his South Asian heritage. Finally, Rahul for most of Bollywood/Hollywood and Nina from ABCD wear mainstream Western clothing. Nina wears a formal black dress to an Indian wedding and ends the movie in a white wedding dress. Conversely, parental figures adopt traditional clothing to further intensify a character’s rejection of South Asian culture. In American Desi, Rakesh brags about how his jacket is imported from Bombay, in Bollywood/Hollywood, Rahul’s mother is always wearing a traditional sari or langa, and in East Is East, George wears his “topee” along with his woolen suit. Icons of Western and traditional clothing are significant in youth experiences because they symbolize identification and/or rejection of South Asian experiences.

Iconic symbols link specific moments in diasporic experience with what Desai refers to as representations of historical processes (Desai, p. 120). Iconic symbols are employed to illustrate the lack or loss of the homeland encountered by many first-generation/immigrant parents. Representing factors such as diasporic displacement, cultural nationalism, and nostalgia within the first-generation, iconic symbols signify the first-generation’s desire to preserve an authentic notion of South Asian culture within their second-generation children. In the case of South Asian diasporic film, the iconic symbols of ‘the house’ and ‘the parents’ will be considered.

South Asian diasporic films explore various definitions of ‘the diasporic house’, examining the tensions between first- and second-generation South Asians and framing diasporic displacement (Desai, p. 124). American Desi, East Is East, and Bollywood/Hollywood take place in the internal domestic spaces of ‘the house’ in which
living spaces or structural closures become sites where identities are performed and identification occurs. Jigna Desai notes that ‘the house’ can serve as a site of refuge from diasporic displacement, but in the case of the aforementioned films, it can also become a location of disjuncture symbolizing chaos and disorder, as in *East Is East*.

In *East is East*, the Khan residence serves as refuge for George from the racist attitudes of repatriation and anti-immigration signified by Enoch Powell and Mr. Moorehouse. The contradictory nature of ‘the house’ can be observed, as although George’s house may serve as a sanctuary or haven from racist attitudes and corrupt Western influences, it also reinforces George’s diasporic displacement and his desire to preserve an authentic and unscathed belief in Islam within his children. George’s chip shop also is another site in which George’s diasporic displacement and detachment are conveyed. It must be noted that the chip shop must be closed in order to convey this message, just as the front door to the Khan residence must also be closed. The closed space, both physically and theoretically, reflects the tradition of British soap operas where melodrama is enacted in domestic spaces. The contradictory views that George displays must be exercised in closures that are free from Western influences (at least in George’s head). If the chip shop is open then George cannot express his views and feelings of diasporic angst even though it is a traditional English institution/icon that undermines George’s claim to be preserving authentic Muslim culture. The closure must be shut-off from the influences of Salford and the wider British society, as at any moment in time English customers/acquaintances may stroll in. In the same sense, the marriage arrangement of Tariq and Abdul with Mr. Shah’s daughters must take place in ‘the house’ to signify a space in which cultural fossilization is practiced and performed.
Enclosures such as George’s home are sites where George performs the role of the excluded individual.

Similarly 345 Raritan Hall, Krishna’s dorm-room in *American Desi*, also is a site in which identities are performed. Krishna’s entrance into the room marks his (dis)identification with South Asian culture. The musical score switches with a quick juxtaposition between Girlfriend’s “Tremendous” and Lata Mangeshkar’s “Ye Kia Jaga Hai Dosto”, signifying a closure from the “outside world” and an entrance to ‘the house’, which in *American Desi* is the dorm-room where Jagjit, Salim, and Ajay represent parental control and signify cultural tradition. Complete with popular cultural specimens such as food (chicken tikka masala) and dance (Rehka performing in a Bollywood film), Krishna’s desire for cultural abnegation is halted, displaying the unpredictability and uncontrollability of diasporic movement (Desai, p. 121). The contradictory nature of ‘the house’ is evident, only this time 345 Raritan becomes a Third Space in which varying concepts of South Asian identification are negotiated and exchanged as opposed to a closure in which fixed and static identities are performed.

‘Food’ is a subset of ‘the house’, as traditional South Asian dishes mark association with South Asian values. In *American Desi*, Krishna and his roommates attempt to cook a traditional South Asian meal for Nina, in an attempt to win back her affection after he insults her favourite Bollywood films. Rituals surrounding food are performed and represent South Asian culture as Krishna must stop “thinking like an American” by buying pizza and taking Nina out to eat, and start “thinking like an Indian” by cooking an Indian meal and employing a “go between” to deliver the invite to Nina. In this sequence, Western food marks the rejection of South Asian values. In a scene in
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[Text content not legible due to image quality]
*East Is East*, George’s children eat plates of sausages and bacon when George leaves the house. This not only represents his children’s rejection of Islam’s vegetarian practices but also symbolizes his children’s denunciation of the South Asian experience as they defy George in the very space where he enacts cultural fossilization.

In *American Desi*, the ‘desi party’ represented by the “Bhangra night” and the “Navaratari Gaarba” signify the ‘the house’ as they occur in structural closures. Although this site is a public space in which South Asian identification occurs and identity is performed, the elements of ‘the house’ and cultural authenticity are still implied through the performance of the *Leela-Raas* and traditional Bhangra dance moves. Like “food”, “dance” is also a subset of ‘the house’, as South Asian identity is performed in structural closures. The ‘desi party’ as ‘the house’ is reconstructed to promote a hybrid approach to identity and identification. In *American Desi*, the ‘desi party’ as a site signifying diasporic displacement and cultural fossilization is substituted for ‘the house’, a site that promotes hybridity and blurs the lines between the family home and independent space. The ‘desi party’ marks a site in which Black, Brown, and White come together through the popular cultural performance of Bhangra, rejecting the primordial being (i.e.: acting a fixed way at home and a fixed way at school, for example) and promoting the Third Space, where identification occurs and identities are negotiated.

This distinction between ‘the house’ and the ‘independent space’ is signified through the control of ‘the parents’. ‘The parents’ can be divided into two distinct categories. ‘The father’ represents nationalism and patriotism, and ‘the mother’ symbolizes cultural and religious practices. Both represent diasporic displacement, nostalgia, and the relationship between the nation-state and transnational movement.
Through ‘the parents’, South Asian diasporic film creates cultural tension and intergenerational conflict between first- and second-generation South Asians in the diaspora. Characters such as George in *East Is East* and Mr. Singh from *Bollywood/Hollywood* create imagined worlds through nostalgic constructions of the homeland. Rahul’s father, Daddy-ji, also represents diasporic dislocation as he attempts, even post-mortem, to instill the nationalistic views of South Asian patriarchy within his son.

Like ‘the father’, ‘the mother’ revolves around notions of diasporic displacement, but emphasizes religion and tradition. The most notable is Mommy-ji in *Bollywood/Hollywood*, who insists that her oldest son first be married in order to keep family reputation intact. Mommy-ji, although satirized, represents the most extreme case of *izzat*, as she is willing at least to accept Rahul’s “white girlfriend”, although not with the best intentions, but will not accept the fact that Rahul’s sister would be married before him. This action in Mommy-ji’s view would tarnish their family *izzat* and thus leave them as outcasts in the South Asian community.

In *American Desi*, Krishna’s mother represents religion and tradition, but as previously noted, the active parental figures are absent. In their place, Krishna’s South Asian cohorts represent parental control, as they dictate Krishna’s identification with South Asian culture. Salim and Rakesh represent parental forces of primordial and static identities in regard to South Asian culture. Both identify specific criteria that make a certain individual “Indian”. Ajay, Jagjit, Nina, and Farrah represent a hybrid version of ‘the parents’, exhibiting traits of both ‘the mother’ and ‘the father’. These characters appear to negotiate between the masculine iconic symbol of nationalism and the feminine
symbol of tradition, perhaps thwarting Desai’s assumption about normative gender roles in *American Desi*.

South Asian diasporic film explores several images of ‘the house’ and ‘the parents’. Although each film considers them in their own specific settings, these iconic symbols represent different articulations of diasporic displacement, the homeland, and cultural authenticity. A discussion of iconic symbols in South Asian diasporic film leads to an analysis of camp and mimicry. South Asian diasporic film attempts to challenge dominant constructions of diaspora and the identities performed within them by referring to stereotypes, jokes, and myths. Ethnic camp, as it is employed in South Asian diasporic film, serves a dual purpose: representing a coded critique of values of South Asian culture, and providing a forum for challenging the values of mainstream society. Camp has been discussed by Larry Gross primarily in relation to white-homosexual males through the phenomenon of transsexual drag:

Camp offers a subversive response to mainstream culture, and provides both in-group solidarity and an opportunity to express distance from and disdain for the roles most gay people play most of the time. Exchanged in private settings, camp is a mechanism of oppositional solidarity which repairs the damage inflicted by the majority and prepares is for further onslaughts (Gross, 1989, p. 142).

Male cross-dressers articulate homosexual and transsexual identity, while subverting hegemonic notions of white-heterosexual-patriarchal-society. Gross notes: “The classic gay (male) strategy of subversion is camp - an ironic stance toward the straight world rooted in a gay sensibility” (Gross, p. 143). Comedy and irony serve the same subversive purpose in *Bollywood/Hollywood, American Desi*, and *East Is East*. Like Gross’s definition of camp, ethnic camp provides a comedic critique of dominant stereotypes and racist ideologies while challenging traditional religious and cultural
practices within specific diasporas. The distinction between Gross's version of camp and ethnic camp is that characters in South Asian diasporic film are unaware of their camp performances. Ethnic camp is ideologically structured in the narrative of South Asian diasporic film where characters such as Rakesh in American Desi, George in East Is East, and Mommy-ji in Bollywood/Hollywood perform articulations of the "maximum self", appearing excessively Indian. Jigna Desai posits that camp is a historically and geopolitically located cultural strategy that can evoke racial as well as gay and feminist politics:

camp can be seen as parodying the dominant construction of the relationship between the homeland and the diaspora and as questioning the authenticity and authority of the 'original'. Therefore the relationship between diaspora and homeland is not one of a copy to the original but one of a copy to a copy. (Desai, p. 107)

For example, George Khan's insistent orders that his pre-teen son, Sajid be circumcised represent George's struggle to maintain his cultural identity as a follower of Islam in relation to the ethnic and racial politics of 1971 Salford, questioning the traditions and connection to the homeland. George's order that Sajid rid himself of his "tickle-tackle" has two sources. George's intense devotion to the customs and traditions of Islam are viewed as a product of the Salford environment, fostered by the racist attitudes of characters such as Mr. Moorehouse and Enoch Powell; while at the same time signifying the tensions many first-generation immigrants experience when attempting to fit into their respective cultural communities and the fanaticism sometimes attached to them.

Another character who performs ethnic camp is Salim Ali-Khan in American Desi. Salim is critical of Western women whom he views as brash and highly sexualized,
but he also objectifies South Asian women as pure and traditional. The irony of Salim’s generalizations is represented by his obsession with Bollywood actress, Rekha. Rekha marks a disjuncture in Salim’s ideology of femininity as she represents both the chaste South Asian female and the eroticized South Asian “other”, as Jagjit demonstrates with references to her roles as prostitutes in Bollywood and mainstream films such as Umrao Jaan (Ali, 1981) and Kama Sutra (Nair, 1997). Salim takes up an “ironic stance” rejecting “American” women, yet still challenging traditional South Asian femininity as pure and unscathed.

Mimicry, or the notion of “a copy”, is another central characteristic of South Asian diasporic film. Mimicry, as it is applied by Homi Bhabha, “is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, p. 86). Bhabha, citing Lacan, stresses that mimicry should not be thought of as a totalizing transformation of the identity of the colonized to the colonizer. Rather it can be thought of as ‘camouflage’ by which the Other attempts to pass as the dominant while appropriating and critiquing colonial power (Bhabha, p. 86). Jigna Desai stresses that: “Camp and postcolonial diasporic mimicry become strategies to contest racial, gendered, sexual, and class politics within a specific film” (Desai, p. 107).

Camp and mimicry are closely related in the analysis of South Asian diasporic film. Just like camp, mimicry challenges dominant ideologies and hegemonic forces while serving as a complex strategy of cultural critique and analysis. Bhabha states that in order to be truly effective, mimicry must continue to produce leakage as it never conceals the identity of the Other behind its camouflage (Bhabha, p. 89). Bhabha’s theory of mimicry revolves around the notion that the mimicry in question can never resemble
its original, it will always be deemed "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, 90). Thus according to Bhabha, mimicry is a model, presenting a double-vision, and producing an ironic compromise. Bhabha writes, "the desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry - through a process of writing and repetition - is the final irony of partial representation" (Bhabha, p. 88).

This irony can be seen through the characters of Krishna in American Desi and George in East Is East. George presents a critique of the colonizers' values. As previously outlined, iconography shapes the specific structure of a film. In the case of South Asian diasporic film, Western dress represents the mimicry of mainstream expectations. Other than during his son's wedding, George always wears a Western dress shirt and tie, and often a sweater vest and/or suit-jacket. George's typical Western business wear is almost always accompanied by his traditional topee as an icon of his devotion to Islam. The inclusion of the topee in George's wardrobe represents a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite (Bhabha, p. 85). Bhabha notes:

it is from the area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double that my instances of colonial imitation come." (Bhabha, p. 86).

This is clearly evident in George's accent when he is speaking English. The pitch and enunciation that George employs with Mullah and his fellow Islamic acquaintances at the Mosque and in Bradford is quite different than his accent when conversing with his wife, sister-in-law, and local priest. George's slippage, his excess and his difference, reinforce Bhabha's point that the discourse of mimicry revolves around an ambivalence. George's use of different accents in different contexts shows that mimicry must be systemic in order to be truly effective. But the slippage must be made evident in order to critique the
coded values of South Asian individuals and those of Western society. Ultimately mimicry remains concealed; what Bhabha describes as “a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them” (Bhabha, p. 89). Mimicry must have some sort of flaw to be truly effective but cannot be made to appear palpable.

Krishna in *American Desi* is another prominent example of the ironic compromise of mimicry. In *American Desi* it becomes very difficult to determine whether Krishna is mimicking the colonized or the colonizer. Krishna expresses too much disgust and disdain towards his South Asian heritage and lacks the cultural capital to ever be labeled ‘authentic’. Yet by demonstrating so much negativity towards his cultural traditions and heritage, he is simply more American than mainstream America. Krishna’s white friend Eric shows more enthusiasm for Indian culture by consuming documentaries on The Discovery Channel. By the end of the film the viewers are left wondering if Krishna is a South Asian man mimicking the expectations of the mainstream society or if he is an American man mimicking the expectations of South Asian identity.

Mimicry is important to South Asian diasporic film because it challenges dominant ideologies and hegemonic forces while serving as a complex strategy of cultural critique and analysis. Camp is also vital through the use of comedy, because it provides a critique of dominant stereotypes and racist ideologies while challenging traditional religious and cultural practices. If South Asian diasporic film inflects the traditional Hollywood genres of romantic comedy and family drama, then camp and mimicry inflect youth experiences and we not only question what it means to be South Asian or any ethnic subject, but we also question what it means to be “American”. Camp
and mimicry are like inflection because we start to question traditional roles and see that youth/teen films can be sites where identity can be discussed.

Mimicry is an ambivalent response to mainstream culture. Sunaina Maira citing, Helweg and Hossain, posits that the “Indian immigrant elite strives to ally itself with ‘White middle-class America’ (Maira, p. 73). According to this ‘model minority myth’, South Asian immigrants are seen as the ‘model minorities’ for their willingness to promote hegemonic forces of social and economic status, assimilation, and anti-black prejudices. The model minority represents the double-edged sword of racism and assimilation, as immigrants may be able to practice and instill the values of their community, but they are cautioned not to stray too far from the dominant ideology. The minority group member is encouraged to assimilate but excluded by racist discourses nonetheless. The model minority is not subversive because it includes its own form of racism. In relation to Bhabha’s notion of mimicry, the model minority is not merely a case of ‘almost the same but not quite’, but ‘almost the same but not white’ (Bhabha, p. 90). Three main criteria constitute the model minority myth: assimilation, promotion of capitalistic ideologies, and anti-black prejudices.

The first criterion of the model minority is willingness to assimilate. Sunaina Maira notes that often pressures in the homeland create desires to live the “western-way”. A contradictory tactic or reinforcing ideology, assimilation demands that an immigrant adopt the dominant ideology of the adopted country. Discourses of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘mosaic’ work as hegemonic forces to suggest that individuals are free to convey and practice their own cultural beliefs. At the same time, transnational movement back and forth to and from India serves to expose second-generation individuals to the hardships of
India. Stripped of the diasporic construction of nostalgia, the harsh realities of a poor and destitute country become evident and generate a disconnection from the homeland. The effect of this disconnection is to push the second-generation toward a stronger identification with Western values. This view can be seen, for example, when Krishna in *American Desi* expresses his disgust towards India's sanitary habits to Nina. Krishna, like Rahul in *Bollywood/Hollywood* constructs White (North) America as the preferred source of identification.

The second aspect of the model minority is voluntary participation in and promotion of capitalistic ideologies (Maira, p. 76). As previously stated, status consciousness and *izzat* or honour are very important factors in the South Asian diaspora. Income dictates the reputation of a specific family within a community and the interests of children must be sacrificed in order to reinforce the hegemony of social and economic status. In *Bollywood/Hollywood*, Rahul rejects the hegemony of social and economic status, claiming that he is not interested in his current cyberoptics profession, but is a poet at heart. Adherence to model minority expectations have led him away from poetry, and directed him towards Internet programming, a profession that provides wealth and high economic status. In *American Desi*, the model minority is satirized, as the six main Indian characters; Krishna, Jagjit, Salim, Ajay, Nina, and Farrah, are all engineering majors who have South Asian and Korean teaching assistants. The stereotypical association of South Asian youth with professional education is an implicit critique of the notion of the Asian model minority. The film also generates a systemic critique of racism, as the university administration rooms Krishna, Ajay, Jagjit, and Salim together not only because they are all aspiring engineers but also because they appear to accept the
model minority’s adherence to capitalistic values. As the viewer becomes aware of the youths’ different motivations and aspirations the model minority myth is eroded. These characters are no longer a homogeneous collection of South Asian men, they are individuals with unique histories and narratives. *American Desi* creates a version of mainstream perceptions of South Asians (“Put them in the same room because they’re all the same”), while subverting South Asian self-perception at the same time.

The final factor in the model minority myth is anti-Black prejudices of immigrants. Sunaina Maira notes that the anti-Black prejudices of first-generation South Asians stem from the racial binary of Black/White in (North) America (Maira, p. 72). Maira stresses that mainstream views of race situate blacks as the most extreme case of the Other. African Americans are understood as the adversary of all existing immigrants and subsequently second-generation children. Mainstream acceptance and success is gauged by racial politics, which historically frames African Americans as scapegoats for White-America and new immigrants.

Ajay’s character in *American Desi* counteracts this element of the model minority myth. Ajay exhibits some traits of the model minority myth, he is still required to adhere to South Asian community expectations of social and economic status by becoming an engineer. Ajay, in opposition to Krishna, represents the immigrant who does not fully accept White (North) America as the preferred source of identification for South Asians. Ajay’s character is located in Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space. Ajay negotiates several sources of identification within the film: South Asian culture through various religious rituals (he knows how to do the *Leela-Raas* and even wears a shirt with Lord Krishna silk-screened on the front), Afro-American/Afro Caribbean culture with his
knowledge of and appreciation for various popular cultural and political figures such as Spike Lee, Malcolm X, and Bob Marley, and mainstream society as he strives to excel within the same economic system and racial stratification that many visible minorities attempt to rebel against. He sleeps with a stuffed elephant that wears a black knitted shirt with a large white “X” on the chest, representing a hybrid relation between African-American and South Asian culture, signified by the religious and political icons of Lord Ganesh and Malcolm X. All the while Ajay is dreaming of a Bollywood film in which he along with popular Bollywood star Shridevi dance in the rain. Ajay’s character reinforces Bhabha’s emphasis on the act of ‘identification’ in place of the common noun form, ‘identity’. The Third Space represents the complexity of identity and identification. Primordial notions of self as a fixed location must be rejected for a set of contradictory narratives of hybridity in the second-generation (Maira, p. 87). Ajay’s reference to plate tectonics represents a form self-Orientalism, as he draws comparisons between South Asian and African dance rituals, sports preferences, and even biological anatomies. His reference to Pangea (‘One Land’) also signifies landmasses as spaces of hybridity. Ajay’s notions of Africa and India as both physical landmasses and cultural perspectives speak from the Third Space where cultures are negotiated and identities are formed.

Ajay is framed in opposition to the model minority represented by Krishna, promoting a more hybrid approach that rejects the primordial construction of African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans by new immigrants and mainstream society. Maira notes that the price of the model minority myth for second-generation South Asian youth is often self-denial, guilt, and frustration, which is clearly exemplified in Krishna’s outbursts towards Nina and Rakesh thus resulting in his recurring ‘excluded individual’
status throughout the film (Maira, p. 76). The model minority myth is not a subversive response to mainstream culture. In the face of racism, the minority is always excluded. Mimicry allows a minority to “pass”, but differentiation is always present, as the individual is always designated a “minority”.

Identity in *American Desi*

So far this chapter has considered genre as a hybrid classification. The tropes of ‘place’, iconography, camp and mimicry, and the model minority myth, were analyzed to emphasize common thematic elements of cultural tension and inter-generational conflict in South Asian diasporic film. We now move away from analyzing the group of films in this genre to focusing on *American Desi*. As previously noted, *American Desi* is a popular film among South Asian individuals. Six out of the eight participants in this study had previously seen *American Desi*, three had previously seen *Bollywood/Hollywood*, and only one had seen *East Is East*. *American Desi* is an excellent site for an in-depth analysis of identity. Its broad range of South Asian characters speak to the problem of identity within the diaspora. Identity as contradictory and not static resonates within diasporic communities. *East Is East* does not have well developed characters, other than George, who in most cases is too extreme. It is clearly evident in *East Is East* that George is presented as a villain. Also *East Is East* emphasizes tensions resulting from an interracial and interfaith marriage. *Bollywood/Hollywood* lacks substantive character development as it is a light-hearted comedy. *American Desi* is a youth film, and more importantly, does not focus on the internal struggles of the nuclear family like *Bollywood/Hollywood* and *East Is East*. 
American Desi lacks parental figures but clearly explores the coming of age narrative of youth. This allows for the theoretical concepts of Gilroy’s primordial being, Hall’s minimal selves, and Bhabha’s Third Space, to be tested with a sample of second-generation South Asian viewers.

Krishna’s behaviour can be seen in relation to Hall’s concept of minimal selves. He constructs sentences about his identity with utterances that are not underpinned by any fixed assurances. At the beginning of the film, Krishna constructs his utterance as a counter-narrative to his Indian heritage. By the end, he places a period at the end of his sentence and begins to identify with South Asian culture. Throughout the film, Krishna’s utterances move between identification with and rejection of Indian identity and culture. When Krishna meets Nina at the party and is made aware of her Indian heritage, he begins to grow closer to placing his period at the end of his sentence. The period is placed at the moment when Krishna must choose between the Beta Beta Beta fraternity event and the Indian Club meeting. When Nina teaches Krishna to perform the Leela-Raas, one sees a second example of minimal selves. Nina rejects Krishna, thus ending his sentence and producing his next utterance of rejection and denunciation of Indian culture.

Krishna’s identification with and rejection of South Asian identity revolves around his relationship with Nina. Similarly, Salim’s attitudes toward American-born or American-influenced South Asian women are also dictated by his relationship with Farrah. Jigna Desai notes:

Cinematically, the distinction between the corrupt Western and pure traditional woman has usually appeared in the oppositional characters of the vamp and the heroine identifying formative transgressive gender roles. The vamp figure in Hindi cinema often represented the corrupt Westernization and modernization of
the Indian woman whose sexual impropriety, greedy consumption, and immodest clothing (such as jeans) mark her as the counterpoint to the chaste selfless, sariclad woman of tradition. (Desai, p. 171)

The characters of Nina and Farrah refuse the oppositional stereotypes of the vamp and the heroine. Through Nina and Farrah the purely traditional and corrupted Western binary is blurred, as they both contain elements of traditional South Asian women and the vamp. Nina and Farrah represent a rejection of the idealist primordial being. The primordial being negates political, racial, and gendered factors in place of an immutable totalizing fixed and genetically given identity. In American Desi, Nina and Farrah demonstrate Hall’s minimal selves, as the women make variable pledges free from fixed allegiances.

The females in American Desi are seen as hybrid characters. An example of hybridity can be found in the scene where Salim witnesses Farrah praying in traditional bourqa at the local mosque. Until this point, Salim has evoked the concept of the primordial being marking South Asian women as chaste, pure, and traditional. Conversely, he designates Westernized women as corrupt, tarnished, and un-Indian. To Salim, Farrah is a disgrace, until he observes her in the mosque. Farrah, in her expression of hybridity, has chosen to negotiate between the notions of South Asian culture and mainstream society. She feels comfortable as both the vamp, scantily clad and high sexualized, and as the heroine, bourqa clad and traditionally pure. There is nothing victim-like about Nina and Farrah, as they represent a rejection of static South Asian identities. The modern South Asian wife should be educated, smart, and intelligent, enjoying romantic love and equal partnership (Desai, p. 184). The new South Asian woman is depicted in American Desi, as she negotiates between good tradition and good modernity (Desai, p. 184).
Several examples of hybridity representing tarnished identities and tradition signifying pure culture are evident in South Asian diasporic film. Cases of mistaken identity in American Desi and Bollywood/Hollywood represent a critique of South Asian women and an assessment of Western female ideals. Both Krishna and Rahul express disdain towards Indian culture and expect uniform submissiveness and passivity among all Indian females. Both Krishna and Rahul view Indian females as primordially authentically Indian, which is why they mistake Indian women who do not fit their expectations for non-Indian women. In Bollywood/Hollywood, because Sue is aggressive, outgoing, and into salsa dancing, Rahul simply cannot fathom the idea that she is of South Asian heritage, and believes that she must be Spanish. Only at his sister’s sangeet does Rahul discover that Sue, or Sunita, is in fact South Asian. This example demonstrates Rahul’s allegiances to notions of primordial being and static identity. In American Desi Krishna also displays the same allegiances, as Nina’s confident and outspoken manner leads Krishna to think that she is not Indian. Nina in American Desi represents South Asian identity as hybrid. Hybridity is not viewed as tarnished, but as a negotiation between tradition and modernity. We turn our attention to Homi Bhabha and his intersubjective approach to the Third Space to better understand hybridity in American Desi.

Bhabha describes the Third Space as a place of utterance where meaning is created. He shifts the emphasis from dualism and bi-culturalism to a multilayered approach that unearths heterogeneous identifications to present a more complex understanding of identity and difference. In American Desi, the Third Space begins to take shape upon Krishna’s entry into his new dormitory room. Accompanied by dream
sequence chimes from the Hindi film that Salim is viewing, Krishna enters a space in which different South Asian and specific Indian cultures come together. The dormitory in which the four South Asian males dwell serves as the Third Space, where both South Asian and non-South Asian viewers are made aware of the richness and diversity within the diaspora. The dormitory room does not simply pass South Asian identification off as being “caught between two words” or evoking instances of a totalizing and fixed primordial being, but it signifies identity as an ongoing negotiation between and within diasporic communities.

The scene in *American Desi* that best exemplifies the Third Space is when Ajay is instructing Krishna on the intricacies of the *Leela-Raas*. As they are performing the dance, Jagjit and Salim both come to assist. As Bhabha notes, the very place of identification is a space of splitting, caught in the tension of demand and desire (Bhabha, p. 44). The ritual of dance evokes a space of splitting for the males in *American Desi*. In this scene four South Asian men of different backgrounds come together through the *Leela-Rass* to identify with their common heritage. The film suggests that splitting is not a neat division nor is it a binary partitioning of identification. Krishna, Jagjit, Salim, and Ajay each have their own experience of South Asian culture and throughout the film they engage in many negotiations between and within South Asian identification. Through the *Leela-Ras*, Jagjit, Ajay, Krishna, and Salim all find a common ground in conveying this identification. The space of splitting is not a neat division, as Ajay, Salim, and Jagjit occupy more space than Krishna because of their knowledge of South Asian traditions, but nonetheless it is a Third Space of splitting.
What I propose is that *American Desi* is located in the Third Space. The negotiation between producers and the audience; and Hollywood and Bollywood, speak from the Third Space. The Third Space is the diaspora, which is *American Desi*’s main focus. The film is suitable to test the reading of second-generation South Asians between the ages of 18-25 because it takes place at a moment in time when the problem of identity begins to surface. Sunaina Maira notes:

Most of the second-generation Indian American youth I spoke to had not been drawn to articulations of Indian Americanness until they arrived at college and found a sizable community of ethnic peers and a racially segregated campus social life, created in the context of the ethnic student organization and identity politics preveland in US colleges and universities (Maira, p. 67)

*American Desi* is a critical site to examine South identity because it contains complex articulations of identity in many characters
Chapter 3: Watching American Desi

Centrally, this project set out to examine South Asian diasporic film's ability to represent and reproduce South Asian identity in the diaspora. More specifically, it was designed to investigate three different questions:

1. What is the nature of South Asian identity in the diaspora?
2. What are the characteristics of South Asian Diasporic film?
3. How are expressions of American Desi understood and interpreted by the audience?

This study is heavily influenced by the work of David Morley's Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure and Janice Radway's Reading The Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature. Both books, although dealing with different popular media (Morley studies how television is used within different families and Radway's analysis revolves audience reception to romance novels), are considered definitive studies in the realm of popular culture not simply because of the texts they chose to examine, but for the methodology they chose to employ.

Both Morley and Radway acknowledge an underlying debate in cultural studies; the dynamics of the mass audience. Morley and Radway both posit that traditional models of research have presented audiences as passive entities with uniform interpretations of and responses to specific texts. From this perspective Radway stresses that because readers are framed as "purely receptive individuals who can only consume the meanings embodied within cultural texts, they are understood to be powerless in the face of ideology" (Radway, 1987, p. 6). Similarly, Morley posits that his body of work helped to thwart and tear down the popular misconception that mass audiences are
simple-minded viewers, free from individual interpretations framed within a singular, objective text (Morley, 1986, p. 7; Radway, p. 5). According to Radway, the true embedded meaning of a particular text is then reserved for those literary academics who have been trained and schooled to unearth the hidden meaning of particular texts. The audience, in this case, are merely passive "cultural dupes" reinforcing a capitalistic system in which popular literary texts serve as hegemonic forces to reinforce and subdue those to the dominant ideology, all the while ignoring the intricacies of semiology and sign production (Radway, p. 8).

What Morley and Radway sought to do was reveal the possibility of active participation, individual interpretation, and semiotic decoding by audiences, analyzing the uses and gratifications of popular culture through ethnographic accounts. Subsequently Morley and Radway, among others, influenced the definitive ethnographic studies of South Asian youth: Marie Gillespie's (1995) Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change and Sunaina Maira's (2002) Desis In The House. Gillespie also stresses that traditional models of research have faltered in that they have failed to convey the "lived experiences" of those consuming popular cultural texts (Gillespie, p. 54). Gillespie and Maira both note that in order to convey the "lived experiences" of a specific audience or cohort, "ethnography can deliver empirically grounded knowledge of media audiences in a way that other less socially encompassing methods cannot" (Gillespie, p. 54).

The methodology selected for this thesis falls under the classification of mixed methodology. The prefix "mixed" is employed to denote a methodology or set of methodologies that utilizes aspects of specific research techniques. The techniques
utilized for this study were narrative and genre analysis and ethnography. In addressing the first research question in Chapter 1, theoretical perspectives were considered to explain the nature of South Asian identity in the diaspora. Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Homi Bhabha were all selected because of their expertise in the field of cultural studies, and their theoretical perspectives on cultural and racial identity and identification. These three theorists acknowledge identity as racial and cultural identifications spoken through marginality. All three examine identity within diasporic communities and therefore contribute to a post-colonial analysis.

Consideration of the second research question in Chapter 2 entailed the use of narrative and genre analysis to reveal the characteristics of South Asian diasporic film. The purpose of the second research question was to help identify and classify the object of study. It is evident that South Asian diasporic film is a new classification and this chapter explored the characteristics that constitute the genre. The three films *American Desi*, *Bollywood/Hollywood*, and *East Is East*, were selected because they represented fairly heavy populated diasporic sectors, the United States of America, Canada, and the United Kingdom. More specifically each takes place in locations with a heavy concentration of South Asian immigrants and their second-generation offspring, Toronto, New Jersey/New York, and Manchester. An analysis of form and text showed the popular genres of family drama and romantic comedy were inflected by the South Asian experience to create South Asian diasporic film. The final part of Chapter 2 made a link between the first and second research questions, as the theoretical perspectives acknowledged in Chapter 1 were applied to the characteristics outlined in Chapter 2 to
examine how South Asian diasporic film represented and reproduced South Asian identity in the diaspora.

Jigna Desai's *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* is the only full-length study to document the emergence of South Asian diasporic film. Desai's study employs a semiotic as well as a discursive and narrative analysis to argue that "it is possible to seek complex and contradictory understandings of culture in relation to dominant institutions, ideologies, and aesthetics as well global economics" (Desai, p. 3). Desai's study stands in stark contrast to the model of ethnographic research that Morley and Radway developed and which consequently served as the basis for Gillespie and Maira in their studies of desi youth culture. Desai's textual analysis of the films stops at the politics of sign production. This thesis attempts to move one step further beyond an analysis of text and its social construction. The ethnographic component of this thesis builds on Desai's analysis to locate South Asian diasporic film as a popular cultural phenomenon consumed and interpreted in everyday use. Similar to Morley's study, this thesis highlights the union of two streams of critical inquiry which historically have served as points of disjuncture, "the questions of interpretation and questions of use" (Hall from Morley, p. 9).

The third method utilized in this stage of the research is an ethnographic analysis of the audience. Debates revolve around the validity of and the criteria for an ethnographic study. While many purists feel that proper ethnographic studies must be based on intense participant observation "in the field" or covert penetration of a specific sub-culture, Gillespie posits that fieldwork need not be a necessity, as the in-depth interview is adequate (Gillespie, p. 54). Gillespie goes on to say that the term
ethnography has come to be synonymous with one method, the in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview (Gillespie, p. 55).

Janice Radway cautions against a surface analysis that presents human behaviour as monolithic and mechanical. She promotes a semiotic approach that seeks to understand how human behaviour is understood not only by those who are consuming but also by those who are producing the specific texts (Radway, p. 8). With this in mind, I oscillate between a textual analysis of the films and an ethnographic study of audience perceptions, making an effort to include the underlying cultural arguments and "set of assumptions upon which they stand" (Radway, p. 10).

The in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview was the final method utilized to understand South Asian diasporic film as popular culture. Ethnographic analysis allowed for detailed research of the lives of second-generation South Asian youth in the diaspora and to document their reading of American Desi. The term "semi-structured" denotes a certain rigidity with regards to the questions being posed to the participants. The questions were structured and an agenda was established for describing second-generation South Asian youth experiences and how they are represented in South Asian diasporic film. Participants were however free from the constraints of closed-ended questions that often constitute the structured interview or 'survey' method. The participants had free reign to elaborate upon the line of questioning posed to them. Tangents and asides were acceptable, if not promoted, making the in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview a powerful tool to unearth the richness of second-generation South Asian youth and first-generation immigrant experiences in the diaspora.
The principal investigator verbally recruited eight participants from the Brock University campus who were identified by the researcher or identified themselves as second-generation South Asian being born in Canada. Methods of recruitment were in-person recruitment and attending a SAAB (South Asian Association of Brock) meeting. SAAB provided an e-mail list and potential participants responded to an initial contact e-mail. Participants who majored in communication studies or had film backgrounds were not considered for the study to control for the problem of bias and 'insider knowledge'. All participants came from either the business or mathematics programs at Brock University. The eight participants were required to attend a screening of the film *American Desi* and take part in one interview session (no longer than 1.5 hours) within three days of the screening. The time frame of three days was selected to provide the participants with the best retention period. Participants were encouraged to ponder the film for at least “a night” to give the most accurate responses to the questions being proposed.

The term ‘second-generation’ refers to those children or family members of immigrants who arrived and were submerged into diasporic communities at or before the age of eight (Maira, p. 17). The logic here is that second-generation individuals ‘come of age’ in these diasporic communities by sharing “the rites of passage of American high school” (Maira, p. 17). Although Maira’s study focuses on second-generation youth in New York, the rationale is that the socialization experiences of second-generation children are very different from those who enter diasporic communities as young adults (Maira, p. 17). Sunaina Maira notes that cut-off ages are arbitrary and do not reflect the subjective nature of cultural identification. But what Maira does stress is that “exposure
to multiple spheres of socialization in childhood (e.g., in American schools and in the home), coupled with a recent family history of immigration, is a defining feature of second-generation identity” (Maira, p. 211 n.6).

Two screenings of *American Desi* took place, the first with 11 viewers, on Monday March 8 2004, and the second with two viewers, on Monday, March 15 2004. Both screenings took place in the same screening classroom on the Brock campus. The interviews for the first viewing took place during the period of March 9-10 2004 with the completion of six interviews ranging from 20 minutes to 110 minutes in time. The interviews for the second screening both took place on Wednesday March 17 2004, with the first lasting 45 minutes and the second lasting 24 minutes.

Eight participants were selected because, as McCracken notes, “it is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more specifically with many of them” (McCracken, 1988, p.17). Eight participants also represent a point where saturation could occur. Kirby and McKenna note that saturation is a point where information becomes repetitive and thus trends and commonalities can be identified (Kirby and McKenna, 1989, p. 138). A participant level lower than eight, such as two would not give a particular researcher an accurate sample for saturation. Conversely, a participant level higher than eight would stray from the intentions of the in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview as closed-ended interviews or questionnaires may be more appropriate for this number of participants. The reason for selecting this group was to produce a comparative analysis of South Asian diasporic film based on the perceptions and insights of second-generation South Asian youth in the diaspora. The intent of the
interviews was to connect different diasporic experiences to the notions of hybridity and cultural authenticity implied in *American Desi*.

This thesis strays from the classic ethnographic model as it created a contrived viewing experience. Unlike Morley’s and Gillespie’s studies, and to some extent Radway’s, I do not focus on the ‘how’ of South Asian diasporic film. These studies focus on readers and viewers in their everyday domestic environment, rather than in a scheduled classroom viewing context. But unlike these larger studies, I do not intend to examine how second-generation South Asian youth obtain and view South Asian diasporic film. What this project does suggest is that cinema provides a significant site of investigation for the representation and reproduction of South Asian identity in the diaspora. The screening context itself was not the main object of analysis, so the fact that 11 individuals (there was an open invitation for both screenings at which any individual was free to view the film) were present for the first screening, for example, becomes irrelevant. In effect, the consumption and interpretation of South Asian diasporic films are at the heart of this study and not the viewing habits and tendencies of the audience.

It must be acknowledged that factors such as noise and disruption during viewing experiences may inhibit an individual’s ability to fully interpret and understand a specific text, but in the case of this study all but two viewers had previously viewed the film. This serves not only to demonstrate the popularity of *American Desi* in South Asian diasporic communities but also suggests that factors such as noise may contribute to a positive viewing experience. In fact many of the participants sang the songs throughout the film and quoted lines before the actors performed them on the screen. In many cases
the individuals who had not previously viewed *American Desi*, still danced in their seats and nodded in approval to specific scenes and situations they may have identified with.

The relationship between texts and participants and the problem of subjectivity may be approached through a variety of perspectives. Sunaina Maira notes that, “what are produced in this subculture are not only forms of music and dance but ways of being, female or male, and Indian American subject” (Maira, p. 37). Maira’s study highlights the different perspectives that a researcher can employ to study the nature of identification in the diaspora; gender and class being two that Maira privileges. I have chosen to privilege race and cultural identification as the point of departure for exploring the problematic and often ambiguous relationship between texts and participants. Related concepts such as minimal selves, the model minority myth, and authentic-primordial notions of South Asian culture are not only the main themes of South Asian diasporic films but are also at the heart of identity negotiations in the diaspora.

Maira’s study posits that Bhangra remix:

is a critical site for understanding how second-generation youth are positioning themselves in the landscape of ethnic and racial politics because it showcases performances of ethnic authenticity, cultural hybridity, gender ideologies, and class contradictions (Maira, p. 38).

South Asian diasporic film also is a critical location for understanding the representation and reproduction of South Asian identity in the diaspora, as performances of identity are executed by the filmmaker and actors, and viewers are required to produce meaning. This thesis attempts to move beyond a simple ‘direct effects’ consideration of film and audiences to highlight the complex dialectical relationship between texts and participants or subjects.
South Asian diasporic film’s popularity can be attributed to its ability to represent “real life” for many South Asians in the diaspora. These films are popular because audiences can identify with the characters in these films and may have family members or friends who exhibit the same traits. But South Asian diasporic film can also reproduce identity. Terms like ‘desi’ and ‘ABCD’ (American Born Confused Desi) were popularized by South Asian diasporic film and have been absorbed into popular culture. They have now become everyday terms used in both the South Asian diaspora and the greater population. Rejecting the common assumption that the media are the sole constructing forces of identity, the focus instead is on understanding how first- and second-generation South Asian individuals make meaning of the popular cultural phenomenon they have co-constructed (Maira p. 37). This thesis considers the association between subjects and texts with a close consideration of the dialectical relationship between representation and reproduction.

I intentionally focus upon the experiences of second-generation South Asian individuals, and their understanding of conflicts between tradition and hybridity in the lives of youth. South Asian diasporic film, as examined for the purposes of this study, does not equally represent generations. Youth experiences are highlighted “in order to move away from the often pathologized focus on ‘intergenerational conflict’ in immigrant families and popular psychology” (Maira, p. 18). This thesis focuses on a detailed analysis of the audience responses to South Asian diasporic film and the co-production of meaning from the text among second-generation South Asian youth.
Chapter 4: *American Desi in the Flesh*

This project suggests that film and its reception provide an important site to ground theoretical concepts of identity in the diaspora. This study moves away from the analysis of media products as isolated texts and instead focuses on understanding how second-generation youth co-construct complex and contradictory meanings of culture, identity, and identification. This approach works by grounding theoretical concepts in participants’ interpretation of the text (Desai, p. 3). Participants’ responses also indicate the importance of media representations of South Asian culture in forming South Asian identity. Interview data also point to audience expectations of generic categories and how audience members form generic classifications and co-construct meaning along with media producers. Specific questions were asked of participants in order to elicit particular readings of *American Desi* (see Appendix A for interview script). Participants were asked questions about how they understood the film. Participants’ responses show how South Asian identity is represented at the level of the text and reproduced in the everyday lives of second-generation South Asian youth. In this chapter, theoretical concepts are juxtaposed with interview data to show how second-generation South Asian youth understand the notion of identity. Interview data is framed through the theoretical concepts to test the validity of the model minority myth, cultural fossilization, Hall’s minimal selves, Gilroy’s primordial being, and Bhabha’s notions of the Third Space and hybridity. Theoretical concepts are tested against potential readings of *American Desi.* Participants are identified entirely by pseudonyms in the following discussion.

South Asian diasporic film is a critical site where the motivations of South Asian youth and their position within the arena of racial and ethnic politics can be unearthed.
Cinematic depictions represent and reproduce notions of primordial authenticity, cultural hybridity, gender roles, and cultural fossilization (Maira, p. 38). South Asian diasporic film generates not only filmic and generic classifications, but also various scripts for female and male South Asian youth in the diaspora (Maira, p. 37).

Throughout interviews conducted for this study, participants stressed the importance of media representations of South Asian youth as a determinant of cultural identification. In many cases an individual’s ability to identify with or disassociate from South Asian culture and traditions was based on depictions of South Asian youth in popular television programs and films. “White influence” or “Western influence” was often cited as a primordial category, where “White” and “Western” connoted a fixed and static notion of mainstream society and values. Terms such as “White” and “Western” were used interchangeably, just as were “Brown” and “South Asian” or “Indian”. References to “Western” or “South Asian” influence and society often replaced “White” or “Brown” identification. The racial category of “White” was often replaced by the regional category of “Western”, suggesting racial stratification as an important factor of nationalistic identification in the diaspora. Vikas reinforces this idea when asked why South Asian youth may disassociate themselves from South Asian culture:

Vikas: Because of white influence on... well not even white influence, just western influence of today’s society, our generation. I mean, we’ve got so much influence off TV and stuff, you know, and we don’t see so much brown culture in television, so that puts a negative on us saying that, okay there’s not too much brown on television say maybe its not cool to be brown. Maybe it’s not cool to keep our culture, white people’s culture is better. Like you grow up, I mean, I grew up with TV or whatever and it’s just like in all the shows, like “Saved By The Bell”, all those old shows, I mean that’s where you get your influence from, like MTV and stuff like that and you don’t see too many brown people on that stuff, so I mean when you go through that, it’s just like, you know, you know
that there's no brown influence, so it, I guess, people that aren't so in tune with their culture will abandon it.

South Asian Diasporic film, and more specifically American Desi, is an important site to analyze the negotiations of South Asian individuals in early adulthood. Sunaina Maira notes that second-generation South Asian youth often experience an acute shift from the desire to assimilate or “fit in” to a strong identification as a minority subject in late high school and early college years (Maira, p. 99). Comparing this shift to “coming out”, Maira states that this change occurs in South Asian youth in early adulthood. The transition is due to development of cognitive capacities based on experiences as ethnic subjects and the dynamics of post-secondary campuses, which often expose individuals to diverse cultural and ethnic groups. Sima echoes this sentiment in her reflection upon Krishna and his desire to reconnect with his South Asian roots in American Desi:

Sima: So I think... that character would reflect maybe how a lot of people feel maybe sort of when they're younger. I think when you’re in your later teens you sort of grasp your roots and kind of want to figure out more about your culture and who you are, your religion, and stuff like that. I mean, maybe when like, late-teen-teenager-area you’re like “who am I”, growing up in a North American society.

Geeta figures that her strong identification with South Asian culture is accredited to more diversity and increased exposure to second-generation South Asian individuals in high school and in University:

Geeta: If your area is full of East Asian people and everything like that then maybe you’d want to go that way. But if not, like I grew up...Toronto is obviously very multi-cultural but...I live in the suburbs, so in Markham where I’m from, I was from the North-end of Markham so when I was in elementary school it was predominately Caucasian people and whatnot but I mean after I got in high school and then University I met so many more Indian people. And it wasn’t like they were family friends. They were my own friends as opposed to my parent’s friends whose children I
became friends with. So I think I sort of grasped my own roots during high school as well.

Many second-generation South Asian youth are subject to articulations of South Asian identification when they commence their university careers. Campus life often exposes cultural differences among and between ethnicities, and presents a wider community of ethnic peers in the context of campus clubs and ethnic student organizations (Maira, p. 67). Commenting on *American Desi*'s conclusion, Sima stresses the importance of ethnic student organizations in increasing identification among South Asian youth.

Sima: I think the end was a little cheesey but I mean, that’s how a lot of Universities are nowadays. They have various clubs, South Asian clubs that bring together people of East Indian descent and there’s even people that have totally different clubs. Like there’s an MSA, a Muslim Students’ Association and Indian Students Association, they even do that.

Sima goes on to verify *American Desi*'s accuracy in portraying the experiences of South Asian youth in early adulthood.

Sima: I think the movie is accurate. I think a lot of people do go away for university, some stay home, but me personally I’ve gone away for university and you’re just faced with different situations, it’s just how you get through them really.

These participants' observations suggest processes of cultural identification but also point to the ongoing production of meaning between the text and the audience, which is the overarching theme of the study. In analyzing the data from the interviews, a distinction between representation and reproduction can be used to understand the process of identity construction. Both representation and reproduction contribute to the construction of meaning where ‘representation’ is textual and ‘reproduction’ is social.
This analytical distinction suggests how the audience views a specific text and then reproduces meaning from within the context of their daily lives. Representation and reproduction of meaning is universal in all films. Representation and reproduction of identity is specific to South Asian diasporic film. South Asian diasporic film contributes to the construction of identity because it represents South Asian identity in the text and then South Asian identity is reproduced from within the context of South Asians' daily lives. The term representation is reserved for those observations made about the text itself, in this case South Asian diasporic film. An example of representation is exhibited in Ketan's examination of Krishna's upbringing and parental influence:

Ketan: Well, Krishna’s father was the only one talking, his mother wasn’t. They never showed the background, like how he’s raised or something so you can’t actually tell if they did spend time with him or not. Probably he spent most of his time with his friends, that’s why he didn’t really relate with them (his parents).

Ketan’s observations in this example are restricted to an analysis of the film and therefore constitute ‘representation’, as he has not drawn from his own experiences and has chosen not to relate this specific depiction to his daily life. Ketan’s comments can be considered reproduction when he interjects scenarios and comparisons from his own experiences. Theoretical concepts key to the earlier discussion of identity, such as the primordial being, minimal selves, and Third Space, can be grounded in the participants’ reflection and reproduction of these ideas in their responses.

In his analysis of Jagit, Sunjay reflects upon how this character in American Desi conveys the reality of second-generation South Asian youth throughout the film. Sunjay moves one step further and relates the character of Jagjit to his own experiences as a second-generation South Asian male, thus reproducing his identity as an ethnic subject:
Sunjay: I guess yeah, it sort of makes you aware maybe of how your friends might be. Maybe how I see myself as well. Like when you see that, going back to Jagjit, you’re like “Oh wow I remember maybe being in that situation” or knowing people that are in that situation and then going back to Krishna and knowing people like him so you sort of just look at it and be like people are actually like this.

Vikas also demonstrates processes of representation and reproduction when he states that viewing American Desi, and especially the character of Nina influenced his self-perception. Many participants cited American Desi as a film that contextualized second-generation South Asian experiences and the tension that occurs between primordial authenticity and corrupted hybridity. Vikas claims that the issues raised in American Desi were already evident to him, but the film and other South Asian Diasporic films act as catalysts for public discussion of cultural disassociation and “cultural barriers”.

Vikas: Well I’d say, some of the characters I can relate to. Like I can relate to Nina in the sense that she holds on to her culture, so it did kind of influence my self-perception in the fact that, yeah I’m more like this character than this character. And I’m more, I don’t know... it just made me realize that... like this movie is sort of... I was already aware of it but it puts it in your face... the whole culture barriers and the culture and how we are getting out of tune with our culture. Yeah it did, it did sort of influence.

In some cases participants explicitly stated that the film did not influence their self-perception. Sima was adamant that the film was merely a comedy that did not reproduce any notions of South Asian identification and identity in the diaspora:

Sima: I don’t think it affects my self-perception, like I kind of know who I am. A lot of people can’t say that that they know who they are but I’ve been pretty strong for a few good years now. I have a pretty good understanding of my culture and everything as well. I see things in the movie, it’s just humorous to me because it geared to second-generation Indians. I don’t think it really alters my self-perception of who I am. I think it’s more of just comedy to me.
Even with Sima’s claims that *American Desi* was “just a comedy”, one can see how representation and reproduction are still evident. The humour of the film depends on some connection to Sima’s reality. The viewer must be able to relate to the specific characters and actions in order for a specific film to be considered accurate. If *American Desi* did not represent Sima’s experiences as a second-generation South Asian individual and the characters were not believable, then in all likelihood she would not find the film humorous. Sima can engage with the film on a textual basis and claim that it did not influence her self-perception but still take part in the reproduction of identity. In order to state that the film did not influence her self-perception, she must have prior knowledge of the societal expectations within her specific South Asian community and the greater South Asian diaspora. South Asian diasporic film creates a context or forum in which societal expectations and first- and second-generation scripts can be critiqued and analyzed. Sima reproduces notions of South Asian identification and identity by first engaging with the film on a textual basis and then reevaluating her status as an ethnic subject by implying that the film confirms her notions of what constitutes “a pretty good understanding” of and a “strong identification” with South Asian culture. Sima responds to *American Desi* as a romantic comedy. She is less interested in or aware of the processes of cultural inflection. Sima’s comments imply that *American Desi* succeeds as a romantic comedy, true to its generic origin.

Participants cited films such as *Bollywood/Hollywood, Bend It Like Beckham*, and *East Is East*, as influences upon their self-perception as second-generation South Asian youth. Although not considered for this study, *Monsoon Wedding* was also very popular among the participants for the way it captures the intergenerational conflict within South
Asian families. Vikas sympathized with a character like Tariq from *East Is East* as his own uncle married a “white girl” and had two children of mixed-cultural background:

Vikas: My uncle on my mom’s side married a white girl and their kids are really messed up and I mean... they get looked down upon in both communities. They get looked down upon in the white community and the brown community, so I mean it’s hard for them. But, yeah I can draw parallels throughout all of those movies.

Participants’ observations of the aforementioned films display that intergenerational and intercultural conflict are common themes of South Asian diasporic film. South Asian diasporic films emphasize cultural identification and detachment as the main motivating force for romance and family conflict.

The most common source of representation and reproduction occurred at the beginning of *American Desi*. As Krishna and Eric are leaving for university, Krishna’s mother and father bless them by performing a *puja*. The *Puja* entails that Krishna and Eric pray to a *havan kund* (container of fire), receive *tikka* (red ash in the middle of the forehead) from Krishna’s mother, eat *prashad* (blessed sweets), and touch Krishna’s parents’ feet. After the *puja* Krishna’s entire family sends off Krishna and Eric as they leave for university. Participants unanimously agreed that Krishna’s departure for university was the scene that most accurately evoked their experience as second-generation South Asians. Participants’ observations reflected upon ‘the mother’ as representing religion and tradition. As previously noted, the physical presence of ‘the parents’ is all but omitted from *American Desi* with the exception of Jagjit’s father and Krishna’s mother and father at the beginning of the film. The opening scene of *American Desi* displays the contradictory dynamics of audience reception however, as participants had varied interpretations of the scene.
Sushma, although frustrated by the custom of puja, confirms that 'the mother' links moments in time to representations of historical processes in the diaspora. Sushma understands 'the mother' as a primordial given complete with fixed and static religious practices:

Sushma: It was pretty much the truth, like if someone's leaving the house my mom does a little puja thing and the whole goddamn family's there. It's pretty much cool.

Arun figures that 'the mother' signified the lack or loss of the homeland displayed by many first-generation/immigrant parents and their desire to preserve an authentic notion of South Asian culture within their second-generation children. Arun views Krishna's physical and cultural movement away from South Asian identification as an "escape" and a positive step toward independence:

Arun: In the beginning... when Krishna left home like your mom always does, cries, like they're gonna miss you blah blah blah because you're leaving home. But he's saying it's freedom, it great. Well I felt the same thing like "Oh My God. Thank God it's about friggin time". But a lot of them are like "Oh, I miss my parents" or "Oh, he's home sick", or it's like an escape from their parents or doing what you want to do.

Finally, Sima does not see anything in the scene that occurred exclusively within the South Asian community. Sima presents a scenario in which 'the parents' signified a primordial relationship where love, and subsequently worry and concern were fixed positions of 'the parents'. Sima’s observations indicate that one need not only be South Asian to engage in the representation and reproduction of identity. According to Sima, the opening scene is indicative of the experiences of many youth who are departing for university after high school:

Sima: Yeah. My mom, she didn’t cry when she dropped me off but my brother told me that they went, when they were going back home after they dropped me off, they were in Mississauga and my little
cousin who's like four lives there, she took her to the park because she wanted to play so my mom was pushing her on the swing and she started bawling because she's "Oh my god my little baby" because I'm the youngest child as well. So like I was just laughing at that part. But obviously it's just, you know, she's my mother so she's gonna feel like that.

Sima's reflection upon Krishna's parents displays the universality of youth 'parting' from 'the parents'. Parting is a thematic element of the family drama/teen genre with universal appeal. South Asian diasporic film inflects the notion of 'parting', focusing on the diasporic contexts.

In the analysis of interviews, Gilroy's notion of the primordial being emerges as an essential characteristic upon which South Asian identity and identification is built. The primordial being defines the essentialized South Asian both to South Asians and the dominant society. The primordial being applies best to those who claim the Indian sub-continent as their birthplace and/or location of upbringing. Those who are considered first-generation are viewed as authentically Indian, suggesting an immutable identity compared to the corrupted hybridity of their second-generation peers. Participants agreed that Rakesh clearly represented the primordial South Asian. Sushma stated that her friend, like Rakesh, favoured those born and brought up in India as more authentically Indian:

Sushma: Yeah, like my friend. He's pretty, he has an accent but he's a cool guy. He always tells me that I'm not Indian and that I'm more "Canadian-Indian". And I always like, "What are you talking about?" I know everything you know, he just knows more stuff because he grew up in India and he came here 11 years ago. He always...constantly picks on me and I always like, whatever.

Sushma's reference to the term "stuff" implies that not only must an individual be able to trace their roots back to the Indian sub-continent, but they must also possess
specific traits that serve as markers of primordial South Asian identity. These traits or "stuff" are mainly religious and popular cultural phenomena such as regional cooking dishes and Bhangra dance and music that have been imported and museumized by first- and second-generation South Asians. These markers create a benchmark and imply that a failure to possess any of the specific traits or "stuff" results in a tarnished and un-Indian South Asian subject. In her analysis of the conclusion of American Desi, Sunita sees the idea of the primordial being and the subsequent possession of specific traits (Indian) as a negative, unrealistic, and simplistic view of identity that ignores the lived experience of South Asian youth:

Sunita: I thought it was a really dumb film. I thought it was really negative. Like, it began with the guy going... he doesn’t want to be a part of the Indian culture or identify himself as anything being Indian. He sees a pretty girl, he has to impress her and then what happens? He has to learn how to dance Bhangra and he gets her. That’s how I saw it. That’s pretty pathetic. So, if you want to or a guy wants to impress a girl who’s Indian, he has to learn how to do Bhangra and she’ll be his forever? I was just like, okay... no.

Arun presents a contradictory view in his interpretation of Krishna. He rejects the visible traits and markers of South Asian identity but sees South Asian identity as static and given by referencing the inner essence of the primordial being:

Arun: He got bantered so much because of what his beliefs were. Like, he didn’t care about doing religion, that didn’t matter to him, which it shouldn’t, I think. It’s not "alls all and ends all" because people will judge him different because he doesn’t do his religious practices or he doesn’t know the religion or he doesn’t know the music, or can’t speak the language. It’s not a big deal... you don’t have to put an OM sign on your shirt to prove that you’re Indian. You’re Indian because you are. You don’t have to define it by telling everyone else that.

Arun’s observations indicate the problematic nature of the primordial being. Claiming that an individual need not be concerned with religious practices and popular cultural
phenomena that constitute the primordial being, Arun says, “It’s no big deal”. Yet then he claims, “You’re Indian because you are”, implying a pregiven subjectivity and set of invisible criteria that comprise South Asian identity. Arun’s contradictory position shows how the evocation of the primordial being appeals to a fixed notion of South Asian identity. While the lived experience of individuals is multi-layered, all forms of negotiation and consequently disassociation are dictated by reference to the primordial being. Individuals may appeal to the primordial being, but it is a fictitious entity constructed transhistorically to create a definition of “authenticity” and validity.

The definition of “authentic” varies between individuals and groups since the regional differences of the Indian sub-continent are substantial. The contradiction between present geopolitical diversity and the transhistorical primordial being is resolved by the concept of minimal selves. When individuals summon the primordial being to explain their lived experience, they appeal to notions of cultural fossilization, assimilation, and the model minority myth. When individuals see identity as a concept that is not static they invoke a sense of minimal selves. As Hall suggests, identity is viewed as an utterance made at a specific point in time with no underlying guarantees, as the next utterance may contradict the previous. In analyzing the interviews, participants’ reference to cultural fossilization, assimilation, and the model minority myth can be seen as resting upon an implicit appeal to the primordial being. Yet the same subjects recognize provisional utterances of minimal selves in their lived experiences. This apparent contradiction indicates that the primordial being is a necessary fiction. Arun’s previous comment exhibits that the primordial being is strategically used to define South Asian identity. Participants’ responses demonstrate that subjects are not comfortable
with minimal selves and must refer back to the primordial being. Interview material suggests that the primordial being cannot be transhistorical because it is defined differently.

Sushma, in her observations about Farrah evoked the idea of minimal selves claiming that she also had many friends who were like Farrah:

Sushma: I actually have a friend named Farrah and she’s Muslim and she’s pretty religious. Like, she does the whole Ramadan or whatever. But yet, she smokes, goes out and does her own thing. She doesn’t care and her parents don’t care either. But I do have another friend, she’s Muslim too, from Hamilton. She will not go out in Hamilton, Burlington...anywhere. She has to go to Toronto to have a good time. She thinks if someone sees her, because she wears the hijab with the scarf. She thinks that if someone sees her without her scarf it’s gonna give her a bad name.

Sushma’s second friend appears to be partaking in a ‘double life’, since in her hometown she adheres to the primordial notions of the Muslim female and her only escape from the regimented criteria is to travel to surrounding cities, physically removing herself from parental authority. But one can also think of Sushma’s second friend as making utterances in specific moments in time, declaring her identification with and disassociation from South Asian, and more specifically Muslim, religion and culture. This friend attempts to write and rewrite her identification by making different utterances at specific moments, even though her utterances may contain inherent contradictions between her version of traditional Muslim values and North American female expectations. The fluidity of minimal selves is displayed when she is in her hometown dressed in the traditional hijab, making an utterance that associates her with Muslim traditions and customs. The utterance is provisional in the sense that her next utterance contradicts the previous, as she physically removes herself from the site of Muslim tradition and travels to Toronto to “have a good time”.

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Sushma’s analysis shows the impact of parental authority on the construction of primordial being and more fluid articulations of minimal selves. Sushma’s friend Farrah does not seem to be partaking in the contradictory utterances of minimal selves to the same extent as Sushma’s second friend. Parents and parental authority within specific communities and religious institutions in the diaspora contribute to the writing and rewriting of cultural identification. Sushma’s friend Farrah demonstrates a more hybrid identity shaped by the influence, or lack thereof, of parental authority: “But yet, she smokes, goes out and does her own thing. She doesn’t care and her parents don’t care either”. This is in stark contrast to Farrah in American Desi who cannot share this hybridity. When her parents visit her apartment the conversation focuses on parental expectations about education and cooking, all the while ensuring she “covered up” with a bathrobe before her parents entered the room.

Sunita expresses discomfort with the character Farrah’s perceived disrespect towards Islam:

Sunita: I didn’t understand her…it has a lot to do with being Muslim so, when I see someone being like that I think they’re such hypocrites to the religion and the culture…like the clothes she wore, this is really bad, I don’t know, I don’t feel good saying it but you can’t portray, like you can’t judge someone by the clothes they wear but it has a lot to do with who they are and how they’re showing themselves to be to others. Like, how she was dressed. She was wearing the shorts and the little tops and whatnot and that’s fine if that’s what she wants to do. But you can’t put her in a scene where she’s wearing the burkah and she’s all covered and she’s a good Muslim too. Like, I know it’s possible and…just, I don’t know, I didn’t like it because I’m not like that. I’ll wear certain things but I’ll be respectful to my body and to my religion.

Sunita views Farrah’s utterances of minimal selves as contradictory. While Hall suggests that a specific utterance will inevitably contradict the previous utterance, Sunita see the contradictions of minimal selves as a negative and hypocritical expression of identity and
identification. Sunita’s perception of Farrah as disrespectful towards Islam is a rejection of hybridity she does not view positively or condone. When Sunita says, “She was wearing the shorts and the little tops and whatnot and that’s fine if that’s what she wants to do”, she does not view the sexualization of females as inherently negative, but in opposition to her version of the primordial Muslim women. While acknowledging Farrah’s expression of minimal selves with “it’s possible”, Sunita sees Farrah as a negative and detrimental image of Muslim women. Later though, she expresses her frustration with limited depictions of Muslim women as either “the perfect Muslim who wears the ‘hijab’” or the one “who wears the horrible clothes”. Sunita’s frustration lies in the fact the Muslim females are stereotypically presented as “either good or really bad...there’s no in between”. This contradicts her previous observation about Farrah, and is an implicit recognition of multiplicity and provisional nature of lived experience.

Sunita’s and Sushma’s observations about Farrah in American Desi hint at the essentialist view of women as fossilized keepers of tradition. When individuals evoke the primordial being in reference to their lived experiences, they appeal to cultural fossilization as the means of capturing authenticity. Geeta states that a double standard exists for South Asian males and females: “The guys are allowed to do what they want pretty much. Girls, we have to work our way through it.” In her discussion of why females are treated differently from males, Geeta suggests that first-generation South Asians express a desire to preserve an authentic notion of South Asian culture in second-generation females:

Geeta: I think they think they have to pay more attention to us because, I don’t know, we’re girls. They think something’s gonna happen. They think we can’t get up and do things ourselves, you know what I mean? They’re very protective.
Geeta’s observation, “They think something’s gonna happen” signifies the assumption that chastity is a marker of tradition. This echoes the traditional definition of izzat, the reputation of a woman and of her family as a whole depends on her chastity. If a female is to marry into a respectable family then izzat must be of the highest caliber. Geeta’s reference to a potentially harmful “something” connotes the threat to izzat. Sunjay also recognizes first-generation construction of primordial woman as the keeper of tradition and the reputation of herself and her family. Women are responsible for upholding the traditions and beliefs of the culture:

Sunjay: I think females are criticized more just because males can like, it just sort of dawns on males. For women it’s like if they don’t then they’re frowned upon. Then they’re like “you don’t respect your culture who’s gonna wanna marry you?” Whereas men are just like I’ll find a girl, no big deal.

Vikas notes that women as signifiers of purity and tradition are not exclusive to the South Asian diaspora. A double standard exists in many communities:

Vikas: There’s a double standard not only in the Indian community, it’s in every community, even in the Western community. Like guys can do things, guys can have sex with like five girls in a week. If a girl has sex with five guys in a week, you know, there’s the double standard right there- she’s considered a “slut”, the guy’s considered a “pimp”.

Several participants cited Salim in American Desi as the character who best represented the fossilized construction of women as keepers of tradition. Arun observes that Salim is a caricature of male demands on South Asian females as keepers of tradition, but that this also critiques Western or mainstream ideals of femininity:

Arun: I thought he was a funny character because he played on roles what he sees in an American women. How she is, she has to go through all this crap of “You’re so well-spoken, you’re always voicing your opinion”, rather than being passive and making roti and this is your role and this is what you’re supposed to do, you’re supposed to be in this mould – he doesn’t want to come home and have a
nagging woman. You’re supposed to have your meal cooked and be bare naked or whatever.

Arun’s observation shows how the appeal to the primordial being is made through the notion of cultural fossilization. Arun recognizes stereotypical characteristics of the South Asian female in his observations that South Asian women are required to be passive and serve the male at all times, but he also acknowledges expectations of Western femininity connoted by the observations: “You’re so well-spoken, you’re always voicing your opinion” and “he doesn’t want to come home and have a nagging woman”. The traditional South Asian woman is framed in direct opposition to the mainstream female, implying that if a South Asian female possesses any traits of Western women then she will most likely be viewed as tarnished, corrupted, or inauthentic. Salim articulates this dichotomy several times in American Desi.

Sunita reflects on this opposition with reference to her family in India:

Sunita: Okay, when I go back to India they think I have like ten boyfriends...So it becomes, it’s so different... and then they ask you stupid questions like: “Do you dress like this?”, “Do you wear min-skirts?” Who cares, right?

Sunita’s family in India assumes that Western femininity and mainstream ideals automatically corrupt and tarnish the authentic South Asian female. Their attitude toward wearing a mini-skirt and having “ten boyfriends” is a critique of Western femininity and promiscuity that first-generation South Asians view as detrimental to family izzat and cultural purity. If a female is to be viewed as an authentic South Asian female then she must not exhibit any traits of the Western woman.

In her observations about Salim, Sushma offers a counterargument to Sunita’s, suggesting that the construction of the pure South Asian woman is more prevalent in the diaspora than in India itself.
Sushma: I think he thinks...well girls back home, like he was relating from girls back home to girls here right? So, I go out and have a good time but I know how to do cooking and stuff like that. But he just thinks girls from India are better. I don’t think that, because India is pretty modern now. There’s girls out there that are worse than I am, you know what I mean? They go out and do shit and I was just like “whoa!” Like I heard about my cousins and was just like, wow. I think he’s a loser.

Sushma’s irritation with Salim points to the notion of the imagined community. Cultural fossilization and the appeal to the primordial being create a community whose geographical referent no longer exists. Sushma notes that “India is pretty modern” and the girls are “worse than (she is)”, implying that fossilized beliefs in South Asian women’s tradition no longer hold the same relevance, if any at all in the homeland.

Interview subjects recognized how camp was used to critique fossilized notions of women as keepers of tradition, but they also identified caricatures of the model minority. Participants cited ‘the parents’ as the depiction and reinforcement of the model minority in *American Desi*. Sunjay sees ‘the parents’ as an accurate portrayal:

**NJ:** Were the parents accurately portrayed?

**Sunjay:** Jagjit’s father, yes... in how strict they can be. Krishna’s mother and father...yeah because...yeah mother was very religious, you see that a lot and the father was, I think he was an engineer. I’m pretty sure he was an engineer, he sounded like he was an engineer.

Sunjay divides ‘the parents’ into gendered categories: ‘the mother’ reinforces cultural and religious practices, while ‘the father’ represents notions of the model minority, emphasizing class and status.

Ketan observes that the model minority myth stems from expectations in the homeland:

**Ketan:** I think they are like that. They...want to tell their kids what to do, like go into medical or law. They don’t let the kids choose what
they want to do because... anything that has a good name, so they can go back home and tell them what they do. They won’t be ashamed.

Ketan, like Sunjay, notes South Asian parents’ desire that their children’s occupation has a “high rank”. This hints at the notion of izzat since one of the main determinants of family reputation and status is the occupation of family members. If a particular family member has a less desirable job then family izzat is compromised. Parents must “go back home”, either to communities in the diaspora or to the Indian sub-continent, and “tell them what they (the children) do”.

Participants saw Jagjit’s character in American Desi as a focus for the critique of the ‘model minority’. Since for the most part of it ‘the parents’ are physically absent in American Desi, characters such as Salim, Rakesh, and Jagjit signified parental control. In his observation of Jagjit, Ketan recognizes how he stands in for ‘the parents’:

Ketan: That mostly represents the parents. I think he was mostly talking about the parents. How Indian parents are. I think they are like that.

Arun takes a more negative view of Jagjit’s implication in familial status and izzat. He observes Jagjit’s desire to meet the expectations of his father, critiquing the expectations of South Asian parents:

Arun: He was classic. I think, just because he played on to the roles of what his parents want for him. So he was just a puppet of his parents and what his parents expected of him...

Jagjit thus represents a critique of the ‘model minority’. As an utterance of minimal selves, the ‘model minority’ differs from cultural fossilization, since it represents an attempt to negotiate identity by assimilation into the dominant ideology of white (North) America, the appropriate destination for immigrants and visible minorities.
Where cultural fossilization is a direct appeal to the primordial being, the model minority myth implies that one can still maintain authenticity while assimilating into the dominant power structure.

Sunita suggests that Jagjit represents the voluntary promotion of capitalistic ideologies. Since financial status and income dictate the reputation of a family within a community, the interests of children must be sacrificed in order to reinforce the hegemony of wealth and status:

Sunita:  

Jagjit’s father was the typical, like my dad loved art too but he wasn’t allowed either because his dad was like, “No, you have to be the engineer, the doctor”. You know, the things that are put on the Indian kids to become the white-collar job person. So, my dad liked art too but he wasn’t allowed either...

Vikas and Sushma both identified acquaintances who wanted to become artists but who gave in to pressures from parents and family to major in fields such as business or mathematics. According to the “model minority” myth, such disciplines are the only sources of wealth, financial security, and respectability.

Sunjay sees Jagjit’s confusion about his father’s wish that he become an engineer as a product of intergenerational conflict over income and occupation. When Jagjit’s father finally accepts that a union between engineering and art could exist, Sunjay sees this as a rejection of the model minority:

Sunjay:  

I guess you can say he’s the… he was probably confused. Having a strong father influence wanting him to be an engineer. Wanting him to be successful. And not being able to stand-up to your father. A lot of back-in-the-day-children couldn’t stand-up to their parents so they’d do whatever their parents tell them to do and that was probably carried through towards his father so now it’s carried through to Jagit. So he’s afraid to tell his dad that art is what I am. This is all I want to do. And his father can’t… couldn’t take that art and engineering could mix and he finally realized that at the end.
Arun presents a counter argument to Sunjay’s claiming that the film reinforced the notion of the model minority:

Arun: And then, it’s, in the end I think...in the last scene he totally designed the whole Garba scene, like he designed it and his father says, “Was it the pulley-system or was it the lever-system?” Like are you serious? Not the fact that it was great but he brought it back to the engineering point of view. Like that wasn’t necessary. Well, I’m proud of you, this is what you’re done...no...it brought it back to engineering. Well, this what you’ve done but you still used engineering tactics of getting to want you wanted to do. It just played back on to the stereotype of every son should be an engineer even though he didn’t build a bridge he built Krishna with moving hands with pulleys and levers. Like what was that?

Arun’s observation suggests the model minority still makes an appeal to the primordial being. According to Arun, Jagjit attempts to negotiate between the model minority values of his father and his own desires to become an artist, but in the end he still succumbs to the wishes and expectations of his father. Arun insists that American Desi does nothing to thwart the model minority myth nor does it promote any hybrid approach to identity. For him, American Desi promotes the primordial Indian identity as he sees the film as “just a spin of what Canadians as non-desis and Indians would perceive Indians to be.” Rather than challenging stereotypes, Arun sees the characters as reinforcing them.

Thus far, participants’ observations have made frequent appeals to the primordial being. Participants have also displayed an inherent understanding of minimal selves by appealing to cultural fossilization and the model minority myth. Participants have acknowledged the fluidity of identity while strategically appealing to the static notion of identity. Homi Bhabha states that colonial discourse is dependent on static constructions of identity because it is a contradictory approach to representation (Bhabha, p. 66).
Fixity is important to identity because it represents rigidity as well as disorder (p. 66). Hall’s notion of minimal selves can be extended to various expressions of identity in the film and by interview subjects. Articulations of cultural fossilization, assimilation, and the model minority myth can each be identified as distinct utterances of the “minimal self”. A distinction between personal experience and the articulation of South Asian culture as socially and historically defined can also be found in the interview material. An understanding of South Asians as historically and socially produced allows us to move beyond personal appeal, towards an analysis of Homi Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space and hybridity.

The Third Space is used as a means of understanding diasporic change and the reproduction of identity in the diaspora. The hyphen in Canadian-South Asian, for example, acts as a point of disjuncture for the South Asian immigrant. The hyphen transforms the individual from a member of the majority into an ethnic subject or minority upon arrival in a new country. Bhabha’s concepts of cultural identification and the Third Space provide theoretical frames for talking about identity and the production of an image. Bhabha rejects the idea of the primordial being as a transhistorical notion which fails to acknowledge how culture is transactional, and therefore constantly in production and reproduction. Bhabha sees identity as an ongoing negotiation between the past and the present. In this view, identity is better thought of as identification, as the active movement between modernity and the traditional past of historically defined groups. According to Bhabha, three factors underlie the process of identification: (1) For one to exist one must do so in relation to an otherness, (2) The site of identification is a space of splitting, caught in the tension of demand and desire, and (3) “The question of
identification...is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject assuming the image” (Bhabha, p. 44)

Participants’ reference to F.O.B.s (“Fresh Off The Boat” individuals) is one example that can be understood in terms of the Third Space and process of identification. While Rakesh in American Desi can be seen as referring to the primordial being through forms of cultural fossilization, upon further analysis one can see that Rakesh also speaks from the Third Space. This character personifies elements of the process of identification, as Sunita notes of Rakesh:

Sunita: He was a FOB. It was like, “Go away, you’re a FOB”. He was like “fresh off the boat”. His accent, his hair, his clothes, everything was like “Go home”, just stop. Stop trying... I think they, it’s their own certain style. I don’t know, I don’t know if I remember seeing any people like that in India so maybe they just might be bringing their style from there to here and just be like, “Yeah, I’m cool” or they just might be mixing up the two cultures like how they dress and they want to be cool.

Sunita recognizes that the F.O.B. is a negotiation between historical definitions of culture in the homeland and the diaspora. If we see Rakesh as speaking from the Third Space, he is making a transaction between his perceptions of South Asian tradition and of Western ideals. Sunita notes that F.O.B.s “might be mixing up the two cultures”, suggesting that in the Third Space the process of “identification” occurs. According to Bhabha, identity is always the production of an image of identity and never the affirmation of a pre-given identity (Bhabha, p. 45). Sunita states, “it’s their own certain style”, suggesting how the character of Rakesh produces an image of identity and transforms himself in assuming the image (Bhabha, p. 44). Sunita’s observations also suggest that the very place of identification is a space of splitting: “they just might be bringing their style from there to here”. Bhabha notes that this splitting is not a neat
division but a doubling in which an individual is said to be in two places at once (Bhabha, p. 44). Sunita sees F.O.B.s as occupying two places at once, as "they" (F.O.B.s) bring their style from "there" (Indian sub-continent) to "here" (diasporic communities). Sunita suggests that the space of splitting is not a neat division, as Rakesh overstates his South Asian identification. Sunita's repulsion toward Rakesh may stem from his strong identification with South Asian aesthetics. Sunita questions the purpose of identification. The character of Rakesh overstates the markers of South Asianness as a means to corroborate authenticity and exclude those less Asian than him. Those individuals who do not possess the specific markers of South Asianness are seen as confused, "whitewashed", and ABCDs. Sunita sees Rakesh's intensity about South Asian identification as a means to exclude Krishna. In American Desi Krishna occupies the role of excluded individual, showing how cultural tension and intergenerational conflict are the main motivating forces for conflict and resolution in the South Asian romantic comedy and family drama.

Ketan also expresses some confusion about Rakesh's identity:

Ketan: There are people like that [Rakesh] but I didn't understand his character that well. He seemed like he was born and raised in North America but he still acted like he was from India because Nina said she grew up with him, so I don't know why he would act like that.

Bhabha's use of the term identification can help to explain Ketan's confusion about Rakesh's identity. Ketan observes that Rakesh "seemed like he was born and raised in North America but still acted like he was from India", that he has chosen to identify strongly with what he thinks constitutes South Asian culture, despite his location in the diaspora. The character of Rakesh and other F.O.B.s evoke rigid cultural distinctions to create their own image of Western culture and South Asian culture. Ketan's observation
about Rakesh suggests Bhabha’s notion that identity is always the production of an image and never the affirmation of a pre-given identity (Bhabha, p. 45). Although, Rakesh “seemed like he was born and raised in North America... he still acted like he was from India”. Ketan’s response to Rakesh suggests that identification is a more critical model of identity. Ketan sees that though Rakesh was born and raised in North America, he chooses to overstate his South Asianness, displaying identity as a process of signification and the production of an image.

The character of Ajay in *American Desi* best represents the Third Space and the process of cultural identification. Sunjay notes:

Sunjay: They [people like Ajay] adapt to both cultures. Because they’re used to listening to Indian music and everything. But then with all the Hip-Hop and everything, they sort of adapt to both which is... it’s not a bad thing. He didn’t do anything bad... with the portrayal. There’s a lot of Indian people that are like that. He was played well. I like him... He sort of portrays himself as the ghetto image and sort of plays... his Indian culture down in public but when he’s around all Indian people he acts Indian.

Sunjay observes, “They [people like Ajay] adapt to both cultures” suggesting a partitioning of cultural fields. Ajay’s navigation between Afro-Caribbean and South Asian cultures reinforces Bhabha process of “identification”. Sunjay suggests that Ajay and individuals like him can be thought of as being in two places at one time. Sunjay’s comments echo Bhabha’s notion that the site of identification is space of splitting caught in the tension of demand and desire (Bhabha, p. 44). Sunjay sees Ajay taking on a hybrid identity represented by his “ghetto image” in public but “when he’s around Indian people he acts Indian”. Sunjay’s observations suggest that the place of splitting is not an even partition. At different moments in time, Ajay will shift the intensity of his identification with Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, or Western cultures. Sunjay’s comments reinforce
Bhabha’s claim that identity is never the pronouncement of a static identity but the
production of an image of identity (Bhabha, p. 45). Sunjay sees Ajay as speaking from
the Third Space, as later he notes that Ajay balances “both images”. Sunjay’s response to
Ajay, just like Arun’s previous observation of Krishna, displays how the primordial being
is a necessary fiction. Sunjay states, “...he acts Indian”, exhibiting that the primordial
being is strategically used to define South Asian identity. Sunjay’s reading of this
caracter demonstrates that interview subjects acknowledge hybridity, but are more
comfortable referring to the primordial being.

Sunita’s discussion of Nina can also be connected to the Third Space and exhibits
the process of identification:

Sunita: She [Nina]...could play two parts. She can be the American girl
and the perfect Indian girl. She knows her background, she knows
how to speak the language but she can dress...and he didn’t think
she was Indian. So obviously she can dress and portray herself as
someone who can be both.

Sunita sees Nina playing “two parts”, suggesting that Nina could be thought of as being
in two places at one time. Sunita also notes that, “she [Nina] can dress and portray
herself as someone who can be both”. In this example Nina personifies the process of
“identification”, as she occupies the space of splitting (playing two parts) and produces
an image (part) of identity. Nina can “portray as herself someone who can be both”, a
hybrid individual.

In closing, participants’ observations locate South Asian diasporic film in the
Third Space. Sima’s observations locate the negotiation between Hollywood and
Bollywood in the creation of South Asian diasporic film:

Sima: Like in typical Bollywood movies that’s not your life, they’re just
airy-fairy and it’s just like song and dance every 10 minutes.
Throw in a tree and there you go you have an Indian movie. And
in English movies and movies from Hollywood, the Teenager movies aren’t typically how Indian teenagers would act most of the time. Well, from my own experiences. Some of them sure, little scenes from certain movies you can relate to but not so much. This [American Desi] is just unique because they are from an Indian background and they are teenagers growing up and you just feel you can relate more to them.

Sushma suggests that American Desi is a site where negotiations between first- and second-generation constructions of identity can occur:

Sushma: Because I watched it [American Desi] with both of them [her parents] and it was just our whole family watching it. My dad...because he’s sick he doesn’t really talk, but my mom after watching Bend It Like Beckham and that movie [American Desi] she was like “We know you guys are brought up in a different world than we are”. So, after that one...mom was like, you don’t have to lie and stuff and she was like, “I already know”. I was like “Oh shit”! But, you know, if I go out now it’s just “Mom I’m going out now” and she’s like “Yeah, fine”. Buy I know where limits are too.

Sushma sees South Asian diasporic film as a site enabling cultural transformation. She suggests that watching the films as a family locates American Desi and other South Asian diasporic films such as Bend It Like Beckham in the Third Space, a place in which ongoing negotiations between the past and the present occur. Sushma’s observations suggest that South Asian diasporic film is a site where the tendency toward cultural fossilization can be reduced. Her reading of American Desi indicates how representation and reproduction can influence change and increase tolerance of Western values. Sushma sees South Asian diasporic film as opening up dialogue between first- and second-generation South Asians. As viewers, her parents’ reproduction of South Asian identity is transformed since they become more tolerant of their daughter’s negotiations between South Asian culture and mainstream values. Representation and reproduction as transformation reinforces Bhabha’s notion that traditions of the past are never fixed or
constant, but must be interpreted or translated into present day contexts.

For this study participants' responses are limited to the reading of the film. Interview data indicate the representation of South Asian identity at the level of the text and the reproduction of identity in the everyday lives of interview subjects. Participants' reading of the film provides evidence for the validity of theoretical concepts. Analysis of the interview data shows that theoretical concepts are represented in *American Desi*. Participants are able to identify articulations of cultural fossilization, the model minority myth, Hall's minimal selves, Gilroy's primordial being, and Bhabha's notion of the Third Space and hybridity in their own readings of the film. Participants' responses also illustrate important connections between the theoretical concepts and their lived experience. Interview data shed light upon the processes of reproduction of South Asian identity in the lives of second-generation South Asian youth. Participants measure the believability of the characters against their own experiences as second-generation South Asian subjects. Their readings of the film show that theoretical concepts have validity at the level of the text but that viewers are not comfortable with hybridity in their lived experience. Participants make strategic reference to the primordial being and "authentic" South Asian culture, in both the film and in their own lives, as a way of alleviating the uncertain and often provisional expression of identity.
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Chapter 5: Conclusion

The aim of this project was to learn how South Asian diasporic film represented and reproduced identity in the diaspora. The questions asked were: What is the nature of South Asian identity in the diaspora? What are the characteristics of South Asian diasporic film? How are expressions of South Asian diasporic film understood and interpreted by the audience? South Asian diasporic film as popular culture and its consumption and interpretation in everyday use is the main focus of this study. This study analyzed the three-way relationship between films, audiences’ reading of films, and theoretical concepts of identity. The validity of the theoretical concepts was tested against potential readings of the film and how they resonated in the lived experiences of audience members. South Asian diasporic film is a site where South Asian identity is represented in the text and reproduced by South Asian youth viewers in their everyday lives.

The preceding chapters built on one another, analyzing the nature of identity in the diaspora, the characteristics of South Asian diasporic film, the methodology undertaken to study audience responses to American Desi, and the validity of theoretical concepts tested against the audience’s reading of American Desi. This study emphasized how second-generation South Asian youth negotiation of the politics of cultural and racial identity using the resource of South Asian diasporic film in their everyday lives.

Interview data showed that articulations of minimal selves and hybridity were acknowledged by participants’ reading of the film. Participants displayed an inherent understanding of minimal selves by appealing to cultural fossilization and the model minority myth. While acknowledging the fluidity of identity, they strategically appealed
to the primordial notion of identity, indicating that participants’ experience of hybridity is not always comfortable. Participants had an important use for the primordial being, as it was strategically summoned for a stable location of identity. The strategic reference to the “authentic” has not been considered by Hall in his notion of minimal selves. The notion of the “maximum self” better describes the experience of hybridity by interview subjects. Interview data revealed that the reproduction of South Asian culture was framed through digressions or deviations from an essentialized idea of South Asian culture in the everyday lives of South Asian youth.

Maira’s and Desai’s critique of Bhabha’s tendency to celebrate the Third Space as totalizing and romanticized seems valid in the analysis of participants’ reading of the film. Interview data revealed that pressures from community, friends, and parents created tensions and anxiety around being second-generation South Asian. In this study racism and pressures to assimilate were important factors for second-generation youth. These factors are not adequately accounted for in Hall’s minimal selves or Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space and hybridity. Participants’ observations showed that hybridity and minimal selves are better understood at the level of the text than in the everyday experiences of second-generation South Asian youth.

The popular genres of romantic comedy and family drama have been inflected by South Asian experiences in the creation of South Asian diasporic film. Participants’ observations show that viewers have their own expectations of South Asian diasporic film. The representation of identity at the level of the text and its reproduction in the everyday lives of South Asian youth point to the role of viewers in co-constructing the generic classification of South Asian diasporic film. South Asian diasporic films are also
accepted as extensions of traditional Hollywood genres. Some participants responded to *American Desi* as a romantic comedy, indicating that they were less interested in or aware of the processes of cultural inflection. Interview data showed that *American Desi* also succeeded as a romantic comedy, true to its generic origin.

South Asian diasporic film is therefore situated between Hollywood and Bollywood. Audience expectations and reproduction of South Asian identity, along with diasporic directors’ ability to represent the everyday lives of second-generation South Asian viewers, locate South Asian diasporic film in the Third Space. The Third Space, like the diaspora, is a location where intergenerational conflict and cultural pressure contribute to the tension around being second-generation. Processes of representation and reproduction emerge from all films, but are distinct in South Asian diasporic film in their impact on identity formation.

Future research stemming from this study might include a comparative analysis of first- and second-generation South Asians’ responses to *American Desi*. In this case, through in-depth, open ended, semi-structured interviews, first-generation responses to South Asian diasporic film could be compared to second-generation responses in examining how the everyday use of and interpretation of popular culture represents and reproduces South Asian identity within a larger and more diverse diasporic cohort. Another study that could be undertaken is a comparative analysis of audience responses to all three films (*Bollywood/Hollywood, American Desi, and East Is East*) drawing upon a wider random sample of South Asians. In this case all three films would be screened and interviews conducted to understand how different South Asian diasporic contexts are manifest in the films and viewers’ responses. Another study could undertake a
comparative analysis of individuals from different diasporic sectors focusing on how the representation and reproduction of South Asian diasporic film varies according to these different contexts. Finally, a broader study might be conducted to explore diasporic channels of circulation and "Bazaars" (South Asian shopping districts) as keepers of "authentic" South Asian identity. "Bazaars" give consumers access to popular cultural phenomena such as Bollywood and South Asian diasporic film that determine whether one is perceived as "authentically" South Asian. This suggests a wider study of representations of identity in the diasporic community apart from readings of specific films. Such a study, building upon this one, would trace the transnational flows of cultural knowledge between the homeland and the diaspora.


information. In conclusion, the results of this study demonstrate that the proposed method is effective in improving the accuracy of the classification task.

Further research is needed to extend the method to other types of data and to explore the potential of the proposed method in real-world applications.


Bibliography


Filmography


Chadha, Gurinder, dir. *Bend It Like Beckham*. Twentieth Century Fox, 2002. UK/USA. 112 min.


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Interview Questions

(I) **What does the term “Desi” mean to you?**
- Are the terms “Desi” and “Indian” the same or different to you?

(II) **Do you find the representations in the film positive or negative?**
- Do you know people that are like the characters in the film? *(Go through main characters and get participant’s view on the characters)*
  - Nina
  - Krishna
  - Salim
  - Aja
  - Jagjit
  - Farrah
  - Rakesh
- Did any of the images offend you?
- Why or why not were you offended by the images? If yes, what was it?

(III) **Does American Desi influence your self-perception?**
*(I think this film speaks to us, it’s a unique film because it’s actually geared to us as second-generation Indian people)*
- What did you think about the plot?
  - Were you convinced by the story?
  - Were the relationships believable? If yes which relationships most resonate with you and if no, why not?
- Are the things that happened in American Desi, things that have happened in your life? If so, what things? If no, why not?
- What about the parents, are they accurately portrayed? – Jagjit’s father, Krishna’s mother and father
- Have you seen other films like American Desi, with or without Indian characters? *(If they can’t think of any, suggest Bollywood/Hollywood, East Is East and Bend It Like Beckham).*
- Have these influenced your self-perception? If yes, in what way? If not, why not?

(IV) **Do you see any gender discrepancies in the film?**
- Is there a difference in the way men and women are portrayed?
- What does the film say about changing gender roles?
- What about the women in the film? Are they well enough developed roles? – Nina, Krishna’s mother, Farrah

- With the exception of Krishna’s mother, there is nothing victim-like about Farrah and Nina. They have an impact on the men. Are the younger female roles accurate in the film?

(V) Moving forward, what would you like to see happen in terms of the images and representations of South Asian individuals in films like American Desi?
- Are these films that you like to watch? Why or why not?

- What about other genres besides the romantic comedy or the family drama to get these messages across?

Anything Else you want to add?