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Effects of American Media Representation of South Asian Americans

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A Thesis in the Field of Anthropology and Archaeology

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

March 2018

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Abstract

42 American participants which included heterosexual Indian American men, Pakistani American men, and one biracial American man as well as heterosexual women and LGBTQI+ individuals who are romantically attracted to men, with the exception of one lesbian American woman, were interviewed in order to answer two major questions. Participants were asked how Indian American and Pakistani American men are portrayed in American television shows, films, news outlets, and politics. In order to answer that question, the participants were asked what Indian American and Pakistani American characters from television shows and films they remember from their childhood up until now. Then the participants were asked to discuss their in-depth perceptions of each character. Participants were also asked how Indian American and Pakistani American men are discussed in American politics and in news outlets. After answering those questions, participants were asked to reveal if these media portrayals have affected their general perceptions of Indian American and Pakistani American men in real-life.

Asking participants about their general perception of Indian American and Pakistani American men tied into the second major question of this thesis which was whether or not Indian American and Pakistani American male representation in American television shows, films, news, and politics affects heterosexual females and people from LGBTQI+ community's romantic attraction toward Indian American and Pakistani American men. Based on participant's responses, this thesis argues that the oversimplification or even gross misrepresentation of Indian American and Pakistani American men in television shows, films, news, and politics does make it more difficult for Indian American and Pakistani American men to obtain romantic relationships with heterosexual women and LGBTQI+ individuals.

Dedication

To my beloved fiancé Yahya Chaudhry and my not-so-little brother Erik Muffuletto.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis director Dr. Ju Yon Kim for giving me her valuable insight and encouragement throughout the thesis process even when she was on the brink of maternity leave.

I am also grateful for having such a fantastic academic advisor Chuck Houston as well as an excellent thesis advisor Dr. James Morris at the Harvard Extension School. Thank you both for your support and kind words.

The warmest of thank-you's goes to Bapa, known as Dr. Jayasinhji Jhala to some. Bapa has been my mentor since 2013 and his work was what drew me to Temple University. He was also the person who advised me to attend the Harvard Extension School. Bapa never ceases to inspire me, guide me, and be a Bapa to me in the truest sense of the word. Bapa is truly a gem and will always be a part of my family.

My fiancé Yahya Chaudhry also deserves my sincerest thanks. Yahya has given me feedback on countless drafts from the first draft of my thesis proposal all the way to the finished product. He has graciously kept me company even on my most stressful days, even on so many occasions when I would spend my days off from work and class in computer labs from the morning late into the evening. Yahya has been a beacon of constructive criticism and moral support. I love you darling.

I would also like to thank the rest of my family for always encouraging me to push the limits of my abilities while still making sure that I had fun outside of my academic responsibilities. I cannot name you all but, I would like to thank a few of you in particular. Mom, thank you for always making me see the positive aspects of even the toughest times. Thank you for always believing in me and raising me to value different cultures ever since I can

remember. Erik my brother, thank you for always being such a kind soul and a huge inspiration for me. Grandpa Steve & Aggie, thank you for always being supportive of my goals and expressing how proud you are of where life has taken me. Grandma Lynda, thank you for all of your kind words and insightful conversations. Thank you, Ami and Baba, for being such wonderful, soon-to-be, mother-in-law and father-in-law's who always offer sweet yet practical advice.

Finally, thank you to all of the 42 people for taking the time to be interviewed for my thesis. All of you are the ones who made this thesis a reality and I am glad that we are taking a much-needed step in tackling the real-life effects of Indian and Pakistani American representation together through an earnest and diverse discussion.

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Introduction

This thesis analyzes and explores the cultural role of American media representation of Indian, Indian American, Pakistani, and Pakistani American men in film, television shows, news outlets, and politics. It does this by examining responses to such media representation from a wide-range of participants who engaged in in-depth and open-ended interviews. The thesis first shares Indian American and Pakistani American men's perspectives of Indian, Indian American, Pakistani, and Pakistani American men they remember from American media, and whether or not they perceived those portrayals as being positive, negative, or neutral.

Secondly, the thesis inquires whether or not American media portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men correlates with the levels of romantic desirability heterosexual women and members of LGBTQI+ communities have towards Indian American and Pakistani American men, according to Indian American and Pakistani American male participants. This portion of the study also reveals whether or not the Indian American and Pakistani American male participant's personal romantic lives have been affected by American media portrayals of Indian, Indian American, Pakistani, and Pakistani American men.

In order to gain a more holistic perspective, this thesis also reveals what Indian, Indian American, Pakistani, and Pakistani American men from American television shows, films, politics, and news were remembered by Americans of differing ethnicities, racial groups, sexual orientations, and gender identities, and whether or not they perceived those portrayals as positive, negative, or neutral.

This thesis offers new empirical, qualitative research on responses to media, focusing on South Asian Americans whose identities have often been obscured in panethnic studies. In

addition, this thesis provides new research into South Asian American cultural citizenship, political inclusion, and masculine identities.

Lastly, the thesis asked Americans of differing ethnicities, racial groups, sexual orientations, and gender identities about their personal level of romantic attraction towards Indian American and Pakistani American men as well as their perceptions of how romantically attracted other Americans are towards Indian American and Pakistani American men.

Scholars who previously have conducted research pertaining to Asian American representation in American media, tend to use a model inspired by *Asian American panethnicity*. As defined by Espiritu, *Asian American panethnicity* is a broad identity for Asian Americans of vastly different cultures, languages, ethnicities, races, and religions that offers solidarity and a more powerful voice to "combat systems of chauvinism and inequality both within and beyond our community" (Espiritu 1993: xi). According to Espiritu, "Individual Asian American groups lack the numbers to mount a strong political voice by themselves, politically minded Asian Americans find it necessary to aggregate Asian American subgroups when seeking political recognition" (Espiritu 1993: 166). It is also important to note that *Asian American panethnicity* does not mitigate specific Asian American identities. Some Asian Americans prefer to not partake in having an *Asian American panethnicity*. Other Asian Americans only refer to themselves as having an *Asian American panethnicity* and others decide to refer to themselves as having a specified Asian American identity as well as an *Asian American panethnicity* (Espiritu 1993: 167).

While *Asian American panethnicity* is useful, the concept has been used by researchers to lump all Asian American groups together in their studies for easier sampling and to boost

their participant numbers. This is problematic because it lumps individuals of drastically different cultural backgrounds together as if they are a culturally homogenous group. Then the researcher attempts to extrapolate participants' feelings regarding the way Asian Americans in general are portrayed in the media and how it personally affects them. Using the *Asian American panethnicity* model in this context, seems to assume that individuals belonging to different types of Asian communities will relate to every type of Asian American character on television on some deeper level. Furthermore, when using the *Asian American panethnicity* model, the number of participants from differing Asian American backgrounds is usually unbalanced.

For instance, Helen K. Ho conducted a study for her dissertation about how Asian men personally relate to Asian male characters presented in American films and television shows (Ho, 2011). However, most of the characters she chose to discuss with participants in her study were East Asian with the exception of Kumar from the *Harold and Kumar* films. Her participant sample was also problematic because she had a total of 27 participants who included "8 Korean Americans, 11 Chinese Americans, 2 Japanese Americans, 3 Indian Americans, 1 Vietnamese American, 1 Filipino American, and 1 bi-ethnic American" (Ho 2011: 9). So even though Ho's study was laudable in terms of examining depictions of white male masculinity in American media and how Asian American men either attempt to emulate that narrow standard or form their own conception of masculinity (Ho 2011: 3, 22-26), the study may have been more insightful if she either had discussed a wider, more diverse range of Asian male characters or narrowed her participant pool to East Asian Americans, instead of only having a very small number of South Asian Americans and Southeast Asian Americans. These types of studies are quite common when researchers use either anthropological

qualitative approaches or psychological quantitative approaches to studying Asian American perceptions of Asian Americans in American media and how it affects them personally. The majority of other scholars specializing in Asian American media have exclusively focused on East Asian or Southeast Asian American media representation and reactions from East Asian and Southeast Asian American individuals.

The few scholars who have specialized in Indian representations in films and television shows mainly focused on Indian women being hyper-sexualized. Scholars who also studied male Indian roles are Shilpa S. Davé and Bhoomi K. Thakore. Shilpa S. Davé's *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American television and film* offered a media studies perspective on perpetuating Indian stereotypes using *brownface* and *brown-voice* in performances, which relied on film theory and the analysis of film and television show plots. Davé also examined how Indian male characters were represented as romantically undesirable because they had to be saved by a masculine man of another ethnic background since they were "savage-like" (Shilpa 2013: 32). She also discusses how Indian characters are easily discarded through sacrificing their lives in order to further the white male character's romantic relationships and heroism (Shilpa 2013: 32).

Bhoomi K. Thakore's book *South Asians on the U.S. Screen: Just Like Everyone Else?* took a sociological approach to explore Indian American racial hierarchy in film and television shows by collecting her data from an online survey with 155 participants (Thakore 2016: 15). Thakore delved into how perceptions of racial hierarchies are perpetuated through films and television shows by examining African American and Indian American roles. She explored how Indian men were not usually leading characters, but a friend of the main character who tend to be white American men, exemplified by Kunal

Nayyar in *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-Present) and Kal Penn in *House M.D.* (2004-2012) (Thakore 2016: xi, xv, 4-5). Thakore also discussed how many Indian American men were portrayed in television shows as emasculated (Thakore 2016: 78), asexual (Thakore 2016: 81), and nerdy to a fault (Thakore 2016: 65, 71, 81).

Bhoomi K. Thakore and Shilpa S. Davé's studies provided valuable insight into how racially charged and stereotypical representations of Indian American men in American media perpetuates a Eurocentric form of racial hierarchy since white American male characters are used as a prototypical model for what an American "is" and "ought to be" which can be alienating to Indian American viewers. But, Shilpa S. Davé did not examine Pakistani American roles at all and Bhoomi K. Thakore gave little attention to Pakistani American media representations. Also, Pakistani American men were not mentioned at all in studies following the *Asian American panethnicity* model. Instead, Pakistani American men were only discussed in a broad Muslim category. Unfortunately, there were not any studies about Pakistani American roles in American television shows and films. So, studies about Arab and Indian American roles were the closest representations to Pakistani American roles that could be found as a reference for this thesis. For instance, Jack Shaheen's book and documentary *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* analyzed Arab portrayals in American media, which is essential to a discussion of media stereotypes based on Indian American and Pakistani American phenotypic appearances and religions. Shaheen analyzed over 1,000 films in his book, most of which portrayed Arabs as violent towards women in general or to predominantly white Americans as a part of a main storyline.

This thesis builds upon Shilpa S. Davé, Bhoomi K. Thakore, and Jack Shaheen's work by taking an open-ended interview and in-depth socio-cultural anthropological approach to

understand 42 participant's recollections and perceptions of Indian and Pakistani male characters in American television, films, politics, and news. Then the thesis examines whether or not those media portrayals have an effect on Indian American and Pakistani American men's romantic lives in real life from the perspectives of Indian American men, Pakistani American men, and individuals of differing gender identities, sexual orientations, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.

I hypothesize that it is more difficult for Pakistani American and Indian American men to obtain romantic relationships because of how people are influenced by American films, television shows, politics, and news that negatively portray South Asian men in comparison to men of other ethnic groups. In order to test this hypothesis, I interviewed Indian American and Pakistani American men as well as people of differing ethnicities, races, gender identities, and sexual orientations who are all attracted to men with the exception of one lesbian participant.

The information I gathered from Indian American and Pakistani American male participants included:

1. Their recollection of Indian and Pakistani characters from films and television shows from when they were children, teenagers, and adults.
2. Their descriptions of those characters' personalities and occupations.
3. Their thoughts on what those characters contributed to the television shows and films.
4. Whether or not those portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men were pleasing, neutral or displeasing.
5. Their discussion of the differences between how Indian American men are portrayed in American television shows and films compared to Pakistani American men.
6. Their thoughts regarding if there are enough Indian and Pakistani men in the

American television film industry.

7. Their perspective on whether or not Indian American and Pakistani American male representation is important.
8. Their recollections of how Indian American and Pakistani American men are portrayed in American politics.
9. Their thoughts as to whether or not most Americans tend to be romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men.
10. Their perspective of whether or not the level of romantic attraction towards Indian American and Pakistani American men varies for Americans of different ethnic groups and members of LGBTQI+ communities.
11. Their discussion of whether or not American media influences what people think of their ethnic group.
12. Their recollection of whether or not American media influences how people personally perceive them before talking to them.
13. Their recollections of whether or not American media influences how perceive them personally while talking to them.
14. Their perceptions of obtaining hook-ups or deeper romantic relationships in person, through applications, or dating sites is easier, harder, or the same compared to American men who are not Indian or Pakistani American.
15. Their discussion of whether or not Americans think of Indian American and Pakistani American men as having more, less, or the same level of masculinity compared to American men of differing racial or ethnic backgrounds.
16. Their thoughts on whether or not typical American news coverage about Indian and

Pakistani people, Arab people, and President Trump's rhetoric affects the desire for Americans of other ethnicities to hook-up, date, or marry Indian American and Pakistani American men.

17. Their suggestions for how American media outlets should change the way Indian American and Pakistani men are represented.

The information I gathered from heterosexual women and members of LGBTQI+ communities who were of varying ethnicities, races, and gender identities included:

1. Their recollection of Indian and Pakistani characters from films and television shows from when they were children, teenagers, and adults.
2. Their descriptions of those characters' personalities and occupations.
3. Their thoughts on what those characters contributed to the television shows and films.
4. Whether or not those portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men were pleasing, neutral or displeasing.
5. Their discussion of the differences between how Indian American men are portrayed in American television shows and films compared to Pakistani American men.
6. Their thoughts regarding if there are enough Indian and Pakistani men in the American television film industry.
7. Their perspective on whether or not Indian American and Pakistani American male representation is important.
8. Their recollections of how Indian American and Pakistani American men are portrayed in American politics.
9. Their thoughts as to whether or not most Americans tend to be romantically attracted

to Indian American and Pakistani American men.

10. Their perspective of whether or not the level of romantic attraction towards Indian American and Pakistani American men varies for Americans of different ethnic groups and members of LGBTQI+ communities.
11. Their thoughts regarding whether or not the media has or ever could influence their perceptions of Indian American and Pakistani American men they have seen in real life.
12. Their discussion of whether or not Americans think of Indian American and Pakistani American men as having more, less, or the same level of masculinity compared to American men of differing racial or ethnic backgrounds.
13. Their perceptions of whether it is easier, harder, or average for Indian American and Pakistani American men to obtain hook-ups or deeper romantic relationships in person, through applications, or dating sites.
14. Their thoughts on whether or not typical American news coverage about Indian and Pakistani people, Arab people, and President Trump's rhetoric affects the desire for Americans of other ethnicities to hook-up, date, or marry Indian American and Pakistani American men.
15. Their personal labeling of Indian American and Pakistani American men as being attractive, unattractive, or average compared to men of differing ethnic or racial groups.
16. Their recollection of whether or not they have hooked-up with, dated, or married an Indian American or Pakistani American man.
17. Their personal ranking of Indian American and Pakistani American men as a top, in-

between, or lower choice for hook-ups, dates, or marriage compared to men of differing ethnic or racial groups.

18. Their suggestions for how American media outlets should change the way Indian American and Pakistani men are represented.
19. Their personal thoughts of whether they would be more likely to hook-up, date, or marry an Indian American or Pakistani American man if Indian American and Pakistani American men were cast for romantically desirable roles.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter I documented what Indian American and Pakistani American male characters participants remembered from American television shows and films. Since the participants collectively remembered over 100 characters, this thesis focused on eight of the most frequently mentioned characters and two archetypes. Half of the characters and archetypes discussed were Indian American while the other half were Pakistani American.

The most frequently mentioned Indian American characters participants perceived as positive or pleasing portrayals of Indian American men were Tom Haverford from *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015), Aziz Ansari's stand-up comedy routines, and Dev Shah from *Master of None* (2015-Present). Because participants described four additional Indian American characters as positive in *Master of None*, they are highlighted as well. Rajesh Koothrappali from *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-Present) and Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from *The Simpsons* (1989-Present) were the most frequently mentioned Indian American characters participants

discussed as being negative or displeasing portrayals. An overall negative or displeasing archetype participants recollected was a stereotypical side character with a blue-collar occupation.

Pakistani American male characters that were described as positive or pleasing portrayals according to participants included Dinesh Chugtai from *Silicon Valley* (2014-Present), Changez from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2013), and Kumail Nanjiani from *The Big Sick* (2017). Since participants overwhelmingly discussed the terrorist archetype from a wide range of shows and films as being a negative or displeasing portrayal of Pakistani American men, that was the sole focus for negative Pakistani American male portrayals.

Chapter I also discussed *whitewashed* and *ethnically-washed* characters that were recollected during participant's interviews. The majority of participants who were not South Asian American could not identify *ethnically-washed* characters. Chapter I also relayed how participants were personally affected by the representations they remembered. For instance, some participants were subjected to stereotyping based on stereotypical blue-collar worker portrayals of Indian American men. Some other participants were afraid of South Asian American men because of the negative portrayals on television shows and films.

Chapter II discussed the portrayals of Indian, Indian American, Pakistani, and Pakistani American men in American news outlets and politics. First, this chapter covered linguistic inaccuracies and biases. Then, the chapter explored whether or not Indian American and Pakistani American participants thought the media influenced the way people treated them in real life. Thirdly, the chapter relays whether or not participants who were attracted to men were influenced by the news and political portrayals of Indian, Indian American, Pakistani, and Pakistani American men when interacting with South Asian American men in

real-life. Lastly, the chapter discussed the link between hate crimes and racially as well as religiously charged news coverage and political rhetoric.

Chapter III discussed whether or not Indian American and Pakistani American male representations in television shows, films, news, and politics affected heterosexual Indian American, Pakistani American, and one biracial American male participant's real life romantic lives. Then the chapter explored whether or not portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men in television shows, films, news, and politics affected participants of differing sexual orientations, gender identities, ethnicities, and races real-life romantic attraction towards Indian American and Pakistani American men.

Chapter I

Indian and Pakistani American Male Roles: From Persistent Caricatures to Charismatic Leads

This chapter will briefly describe Indian American, Pakistani American, and ambiguous South Asian American roles that participants remembered from films, television shows, and stand-up performances during their interviews. Then, the chapter provides an overview of the typical genres in which Indian American men and Pakistani American men get cast, while explaining the ethnically ambiguously cast roles. Since so many characters were mentioned and assessed by the interviewees, only the three best and three worst-rated Indian American roles and Pakistani American roles, according to participants, will be discussed in-depth individually. However, there is also a whole section dedicated to covering the phenomena of *whitewashed* and *ethnically-washed* characters. Another section will talk about mistaken-identity characters, roles that interviewees thought were either Indian American or Pakistani American men, but in reality, they belonged to a completely different ethnic group that was not intended to be Indian American or Pakistani American in the film or television show. The chapter will also cover whether or not participants reported that these various types of roles negatively or positively impacted them in real life, and why the vast majority of participants reported that Indian American and Pakistani American representation is important.

Not surprisingly, the findings suggest that participants favored multi-dimensional, dynamic Indian American and Pakistani American characters over stereotypes, which nonetheless were memorable and played a significant role in participants' perceptions of Indian Americans and Pakistani Americans. This chapter provides empirical qualitative

interviews testifying to the power of media representations of South Asian Americans, a minority community that has been marginalized recently, complete with in-depth interviews. This chapter offers a nuanced image of how American media representations impact the lives of viewers. South Asian Americans are not monolithic in their answers; this research uncovers a wide array of responses that suggest nuanced, well-considered appraisals of such media portrayals.

The total number of characters mentioned in this study were 157. 100, including *whitewashed* and *ethnically washed* roles, of those characters were Indian American roles. 21 were ethnically ambiguous roles, meaning viewers were not sure if they were Indian American, Pakistani American, or Arab American roles. 21, including *whitewashed roles*, were Pakistani American roles. 16 were *whitewashed* or *ethnically-washed* roles, nine were characters who participants mistakenly assumed were Indian American or Pakistani American, and four roles were played by multiracial actors who are of either half Indian or Pakistani heritage.

Indian American Male Representation

The majority of Indian American male roles were cast in comedies in both films and television shows. Beyond comedies, Indian American men tended to be cast in romantic dramas or romantic comedies. However, only two characters mentioned were casted as the main love interests in the romances. The only other films that portrayed Indian men pursuing romance were documentaries about conservative Indian and Indian American cultures who practiced arranged marriages. When Indian American characters were in action or adventure

films and shows, half of them were animations. Based on the roles listed, it was rare to see Indian American men in science fiction, political dramas, and even medical dramas.

The three most negatively ranked Indian American male roles in this study were Rajesh Koothrappali from *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-Present), Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from *The Simpsons* (1989-Present), and Indian American side characters with blue-collar jobs who, according to interviewees, appear in all types of films and television shows. For the purpose of this study, these particular side characters are broadly categorized as blue-collar roles such as store owners, cab drivers, and tech people with minimal screen time.

The three most positively ranked Indian American male roles in this study were Tom Haverford from *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015), Aziz Ansari's stand-up comedy performance, and Dev Shah along with four other Indian American men introduced in *Master of None* (2015-Present).

One aspect of Asian American roles that seemed to irk South Asian American, and East Asian American participants in particular, was how directors chose to have South and East Asian Americans act and sound foreign regardless of their *immigrant generation*. For the context of this study, *immigrant generations* are identities that trace Americans' familial lineage to the first family member who emigrated to the United States, Puerto Rico or any other United States territory and gained American citizenship.

There are three basic *immigrant generations*: *first generation*, *second generation*, and *third* or *higher generations* (Pew Research Center 2013: 4-5). *First generation* refers to Americans who emigrated to America or American territories and whose parents were not American citizens. *Second generation* Americans are people who were born in the United States or American territories but have at least one parent who falls under the *first-generation*

category (Pew Research Center 2013: 4). *Third* and *higher generations* refer to Americans who were born in the United States or American territories whose parents were also born in the United States (Pew Research Center 2013: 5). Indian American actors who played characters falling under the *first-generation* category were commonly shown as a foreign minor character or a sidekick in need of self-improvement that could be obtained by assimilating to Eurocentric American culture. Rajesh Koothrapali, Apu Nahasapeemapetilon, and the strictly service oriented side- roles with minimal screen time tended to be *first-generation, one-dimensional* characters who lacked dynamic development and were either easily dismissed by the main character or who were encouraged to acculturate to Eurocentric American culture.

Rajesh Koothrappali in *The Big Bang Theory*

Only one participant, a Pakistani American woman, reported that she was pleased with the portrayal of Rajesh Koothrappali from *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-Present). Interestingly, only four Indian American men discussed Rajesh Koothrappali: three reported being neutral about the role, and one reported being displeased. Two other participants, one white man and one white woman, reported that they felt neutral about Rajesh's character. The remaining nine participants who were displeased with Koothrappali were three Indian women, one Pakistani woman, three white women, one Latino man, and one African American man.

The main critiques about Rajesh centered around how he was stripped of his voice, sexuality, and centered a lot of his comedic punchlines around Indian stereotypes. According to

one participant named Naomi,

> It's a character that can't talk to women without drinking. So, I mean, they all can't talk to women. But, it happens to be Raj who happens to come from a country where there happens to be sheltered dating and [romantic] public display. That it's him that can't talk to girls and [there's] not even at least one thing that would make that normal. That's a poor adaptation (Naomi, heterosexual female, 20s, white).

Another participant, Christopher, took Naomi's criticism a step farther by saying,

> Like, is he married on the show? Did he eventually get married? I don't know. I haven't watched every show. But, everyone else has a girlfriend. I remember, wasn't there one show where Koothrappali fell in love with the voice of Siri? It was either him or...no it was definitely Koothrappali! He fell in love with the voice of Siri! And, I thought that was really kind of like, interesting (Christopher, gay male, 34, African American).

The writers of *The Big Theory* not only reinforced the prototypical romantically undesirable, nerdy Indian American male trope throughout the series, they exaggerated it in the episode Christopher referred to, titled *The Beta Test Initiation* (2012). Upon using Siri for the first time, Rajesh instantly began dating the iPhone voice helper; his friends did not appear to be surprised. He flirted with Siri, attempted to go on a double date with Siri, and even had a dream about Siri being a real woman. However, Rajesh became so nervous once Siri started talking to him in a dream that he was not able to speak a word to her, just as he is unable to talk to the women who tried to interact with him in real life.

Aarohi, another interviewee, described the types of racialized humor Koothrappali used whether he was referencing stereotypical Indian culture or other characters in the show,

making generic Indian cultural jokes at his own expense.

> He's the funny character because he's always like, 'My cows!' and stuff like that. 'My parents will kill me!' with that accent you know? So, I think they contribute humor because you laugh at the character. I guess in a way they contribute to the general stereotype. The friends that's always there but is behind the background that they're laughing about (Aarohi, heterosexual female, 18, Indian American).

Because he lacks basic communication skills and knowledge of American culture, Rajesh is effectively emasculated and desexualized because he is not savvy enough to flirt effectively or to even talk with women in real life or in his dreams. Since talking to women and hooking up with them is an integral part of performing Eurocentric American masculinity, Rajesh is reinforcing the stereotype that Indian American men are not sexy or masculine compared to their white counterparts.

Bhoomi K. Thakore's, *South Asians on the U.S. Screen: Just Like Everyone Else?* which examines how South Asian Americans are portrayed in television shows as emasculated (Thakore 2016: 78), asexual (Thakore 2016: 81), and nerdy to a fault (Thakore 2016: 65, 71, 81) reinforced the findings in this thesis. Thakore's participants were also displeased with Rajesh Koothrappali's character. One of Thakore's participants described Rajesh as a,

> Pretty stereotypical Asian nerd, effeminate often, I think it's really just about how he can't talk in front of women. Cos when he's not around women, he has great lines, he's really funny. And then when they introduce women into the mix he becomes this quiet, awkward Asian man. Yeah, like asexual almost (Thakore 2016: 81).

Another one of Thakore's participants who was an African American woman had

similar sentiments but took her criticisms about Rajesh's lack of sexuality a step further by saying,

> He might as well be a eunuch or something. It's really odd that you can do that to a character on TV, like a character of color, and maybe I wouldn't have noticed it if it hadn't been a character of color […] But it just seems really weird that you can do that. Every time I watch that I'm like I can't believe it, like this is happening on television. I don't think it's a very positive portrayal, to be honest. I feel like with the other characters there is some funny or there are redeeming qualities but to me to basically castrate a character that way is just, oh my God, like seriously, Indian people should be writing letters about that, like that's not acceptable (Thakore 2016: 81).

However, the Indian men I interviewed who were neutral with Rajesh's character did not talk about his lack of romantic intimacy or communication with women. Instead they tended to see the truth in the stereotypes he portrayed. Especially when it came to his profession, his conservative family who wanted him to have an arranged marriage, and his deference to his parent's criticisms or wishes. According to Mokshi who was a conservative Indian American participant,

> I mean, I would say that's just [as] stereotypical as you can get. Kind of like a guy with an accent. And, I didn't really get to watch the whole *Big Bang Theory* and stuff. But [from] what I got [it's] like, his parents were in India. Like, he'd have to tell his parents everything he did. He was a doctor obviously. I mean, just typical stuff. I mean, I guess that's as average as you can get to an Indian. Like, how a lot of people actually are (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Even though Indian American men either did not remember Rajesh or were neutral with him,

all of the other participants who were attracted to men, with the exception of one woman, were not pleased with his lack of sexuality and exaggerated conservative Indian culture. His lack of sexuality and of basic communication skills in his interactions with women was unsettling to participants because it de-humanized him. To these participants, having healthy sexual relationships and communication skills was a large part of what makes characters relatable and realistic.

Apu Nahasapeemapetilon in *The Simpsons*

Six participants reported that Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from the television series *The Simpsons* (1989-Present) was a negative portrayal of Indian American men, one participant said Apu was a positive portrayal of Indian American men, and the remaining participant reported that Apu was a neutral portrayal of Indian American men. The participants who said Apu was a negative portrayal of Indian American men included one Indian American man, one Indian American woman, one Pakistani American woman, two white men and one white woman. One white male was neutral about Apu's character and one white woman reported that Apu was a positive representation of Indian American men.

Apu was the second-most negatively ranked Indian American character out of all the 75 Indian American roles discussed in this study. Apu is an owner of a Kwik-E-Mart which is equivalent to a gas station, and he is depicted as a foreign stereotype. Even though *The Simpsons* is a satirical television series that pokes fun at Eurocentric American culture and Apu's attempts to assimilate (Davé 2013: 41; Davé 2005: 315-316), Apu is a racial caricature.

Apu is a caricature because the humor he contributes to the show is based on his botched accent, lack of social skills, and using his exaggerated Indian culture to degrade him. The fake accent used to voice Apu was inspired by Peter Sellers, a famous white British actor, who played Indian male characters using *brown-face* and *brown-voice* (Davé 2013: 19-20).

Apu's character is *whitewashed*, meaning his character is played by a white person instead of an Indian American man (Davé 2005: 315). Hank Azaria uses *brown-voice* to play Apu, changing his voice in an attempt to mirror and exaggerate what Indian immigrants and Indian Americans sound like when speaking American English. However, Shilpa S. Davé says *brown-voice* consists of "Not only tonal qualities but also involves word choice, arrangement of words, and cultural expressions that are rooted in national (and regional) expressions of identity" (Davé 2013: 2). Davé emphasizes that the meaning *brown-voice* provides changes depending on what racial group performs it (Davé 2013: 44). For instance, historically (Davé 2013: 21-26) and even recently (Ansari 2015; Makarechi 2012) when white actors perform *brown-voice* it has been for stereotypical race-based comedic purposes (Davé 2013: 44) akin to *blackface* and *yellowface* performances (Chow 2014). *Brown-voice* racializes Indian American men because "an accent operates as an accessory or minor piece that highlights the dominant look or feature. An Indian accent therefore also becomes a cultural object, such as a hairstyle or a piece of clothing or a sidekick character, that adds to the overall picture" (Davé 2013: 2).

When six participants classified Apu as a negative representation of Indian American men, some of them reported that Apu's character affected how they were treated in real life by people who were not South Asian Americans. When asked what Apu contributed to *The Simpsons* in its entirety, a participant named Sajni recalled,

> Just like, comedic relief. Otherwise, really nothing. And, it was kind of annoying though growing up like, having that representation. Because, I remember people would like… when I reference my dad they'd be like, 'Oh! Like Apu!' And, I'd be like, 'No'. Or if I'd like, mention my dad's profession they'd be like, 'Don't all Indians work at 7/11'? So many people have told me, 'Oh! Do you own a convenient store and does your dad work at 7/11?'. I'm like, 'No, he doesn't'. It's just like, shitty when, you know that some of them are just ignorant. They're not maliciously trying to say these things. It's just frustrating because it's like, I don't ask you, 'Oh! Is your dad like, a white supremacist?' I don't say shit like that (Sajni, heterosexual female, 20, Indian American).

The people Sajni described were her classmates from a predominantly white area of Connecticut. Even though Sajni was raised in Connecticut and spoke with an American accent, she was still subjected to her classmates regularly making snap judgements about her father and Indian Americans in general based on the way *The Simpsons* portrayed Apu and his family. Apu's character reinforced the assumption that *racial voices* pair with *racial bodies* (Brayton 2009: 5) and that Indian Americans were more likely to have blue-collar service-oriented occupations, speak with accents, and not quite fit into Eurocentric American society.

Comedian Hari Kondabolu released a documentary this past November called *The Problem With Apu* (2017) which supported the findings of this thesis. A part of the documentary shows Kondabolu interviewing Dana Gould, co-producer and writer of *The Simpsons*, about the reason why Apu's character relies on *whitewashing* and *brown-voice* to be comedic. Gould nonchalantly says, "There are accents that by their nature to white Americans sound funny. Period" (Kondabolu 2017). Kondabolu also interviewed several high-profile

South Asian American actors and actresses about how the depiction of Apu had affected them in real-life. Some of those actors and actresses include Kal Penn, Aziz Ansari, and Sakina Jaffrey. All of the South Asian actors and actresses who were interviewed admitted that they were subjected to being compared to Apu or made fun of based on the character's accent or punchlines such as, "Thank you! Come again!" (Kondabolu 2017).

Only one participant named Casey was pleased with Apu's character and shared a different perspective about Indian migrants and Indian American characters, like Apu, being portrayed as stereotypical figures.

> Apu wasn't always married in the show. That's like, a plot point and it's a significant plot point and it matters a lot to them. And, they wind up having all these kids and these kids matter so much to them. To me that's such an interesting example to bring up and debate the pros and cons of that representation because it speaks to a lot of these stereotypes. But, I don't think in a mean way and I don't know if that's odd to say. But, I think there's a lot of love for those characters in that show even if there are a lot of tropes recalled with those characters (Casey, heterosexual female, 26, white American).

Casey described her reasoning in more depth by saying, "But, either way you are a human that is maybe flawed, and maybe shitty, and maybe awesome, and very lovable. But, I think in these cases it's been very important for those flawed characters who fit some tropes to also be very lovable" (Casey, heterosexual female, 26, white American).

Indian Americans and Pakistani Americans who are portrayed making a living by owning a gas station and having an accent should be able to have the same level of respect as other Indian American and Pakistani American roles. However, according to Michael Billig,

"It is possible - indeed it is likely - that the telling of an ethnic joke by members of the ethnic group will differ from its telling by outsiders. Insiders, who tell ethnic jokes about themselves, will acknowledge that there are limits within which the joke is being told" (Billig 2005: 31). Actors like Hank Azaria and the writers of *The Simpsons* have clearly ignored the limits of *ethnic comedy* through *whitewashing*, perpetuating *brown-voice*, and refusing to retire such outdated and simplistic forms of comedy.

Indian Side Characters: Blue-Collar Workers

For the purpose of this study, the only Indian American side characters being discussed in this section are characters with service-oriented jobs other than Apu Nahasapeemapetilon. Jobs that were white collar positions like doctors and engineers only elicited positive or neutral responses from participants. However, blue collar service jobs such as information technicians, store owners, and bodyguards were predominantly rated negatively by participants. The only time participants discussed secondary Indian American male characters with blue-collar service jobs as a positive portrayal of Indian American men was when they thought the portrayal was realistic or if the Indian American male character was making fun of the main character in a witty way.

Nine side characters, other than Rajesh Koothrappali, who specialized in information technology were mentioned by participants and five of them were labeled as being displeasing, two were labeled as being neutral portrayals, and two were labeled as pleasing portrayals. The people who reported feeling displeased with the information technology

characters included one African American man, one African American woman, one Indian American man, and one Indian American woman. One African American female participant reported feeling neutral towards information technology characters. The two participants who reported feeling pleased with information technology roles included one Indian American man and the same African American woman who reported feeling neutral towards another information technology character. Most information technology characters were described as disposable, unrelatable, and one-dimensional. According to Nagulan,

> It's funny, I was watching this show the other day called, *Legend*[*s*] (2014-2015) and I had not seen it. It was on Netflix and I just realized that in *legend[s]*, so first it showed an Indian geek and died in the first episode, right? And, he's shown playing Dance Dance Revolution. You know? He's a computer science geek and he dies soon thereafter (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

In this case, the information technology character served only as a prop for the storyline and did not have any depth. Nagulan discussed how these types of characters are difficult to relate to on a personal level because real-life Indian Americans are not so one-dimensional.

Six participants discussed shopkeepers, other than Apu, and three reported feeling displeased while two reported feeling neutral. The people who were displeased with the shopkeeper characters were one African American man and two white men. One Indian American man and one African American woman reported feeling neutral towards characters who were shopkeepers. The shopkeepers were described as rude and having a stereotypical accent. Drew described shopkeeper characters like this: "I hate to use the word because it sounds so politically incorrect, but *habib*, you know? He's a *habib*. He's a 7/11 owner. I think they're always portrayed as like, the guy's

almost a dick- head. Like, the guy's rude" (Drew, gay male, 45, white American). Drew also pointed out that rude Indian shopkeepers were not only portrayed in films or television shows with predominantly white casts. Interestingly, participants mentioned that the shopkeeper trope was also common when films or television shows had majority African American casts as well.

Security personnel and bodyguards were mentioned by five participants. Four of the participants reported feeling displeased while one reported feeling neutral about security personnel and bodyguard roles. The people who reported feeling displeased included one African American woman, one Pakistani American woman, one white man, and one white woman. One biracial man reported feeling neutral. One of the participants, Imani, was not pleased with the portrayal of Indian American security and bodyguards because she thought they were too one dimensional. According to Imani,

> They also end up, if they're secondary [characters] being like, the security or the bodyguard that the hero or heroine has to get past or is working with, or is a member of their team. So, kind of just a lot of those 'in the background roles' for good [guys], or for bad [guys], or with very little visibility or support (Imani, heterosexual female, 33, African American).

In these types of roles, Indian American men are not the focus but are the backbone of the story being told. They either serve as a challenging obstacle or as a person who is essential to saving the day but are not given credit for it.

Even though each of these basic character archetypes had different career paths, participants tended to emphasize that each of these service roles were not pleasing portrayals. They were repeated tropes that were not even particularly memorable compared to the rest of

the characters. Each of these basic tropes were one-dimensional, contributed racial humor, and functioned as an obstacle or helper for the main character's benefit.

Tom Haverford in *Parks and Recreation*

Aziz Ansari's role as Tom Haverford in *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015) was the most discussed positive representation of Indian American men in American media outlets amongst participants. 14 participants reported feeling pleased with Aziz's role as Tom Haverford in *Parks and Recreation,* while one participant reported feeling displeased. The participants who were pleased with Tom Haverford's character included one Indian American man, two Indian American females, one half white, half Bengali male, one Pakistani American male, one Pakistani American female, one white male, four white females, one Latino male, one Latina woman, and one African American woman. The one participant who was displeased with Tom Haverford's representation of Indian men was a Pakistani woman who explained that she found Aziz Ansari's voice and sense of humor in general to be annoying.

The 14 participants who were pleased with his role as Tom Haverford described his character as being funny but not a character whose Indian heritage was used as a punchline for cultural jokes. It was refreshing for Indian American viewers to see Tom treated like an actor who happened to be Indian American rather than a person who is only fulfilling a diversity quota for the show. One participant named Aditi explained it like this,

Not to say that I don't like Indian things being in pop-culture, but it's like, I'm not

> always going around talking about Indian things. So, yeah, they don't talk about the fact that he's Indian at all. And, his name on the show is Tom Haverford which is the whitest name ever. They never explain why that's his name (Aditi, heterosexual female, 26, Indian American).

Aditi's response discusses an integral issue concerning how Indian Americans, who are not immigrants, are often portrayed in television shows or films. As demonstrated by participant's perceptions of Rajesh Koothrappali, Apu Nahasapeemapetilon, and side characters who have blue-collar jobs, many Indian American characters are one-dimensional and are depicted as foreign whether they were immigrants or not. But, Tom Haverford's character subtly challenges those notions by having, "the whitest name ever" and not emphasizing his Indian heritage.

Nora, another participant, appreciated the way the writers of *Parks and Recreation* challenged a habit of white Americans casually alienating South Asian Americans in conversations. Nora, a participant I interviewed, described the scene.

> In one of the earlier episodes Leslie's talking to him and she's like, 'Where are you from?' and he's like, 'South Carolina'. And she was like, 'No, no. Where are you actually from?' And he was like, 'South Carolina'. So, I think that was a good joke on white people (Nora, heterosexual female, 24, white American).

This specific conversation Nora mentioned between Tom Haverford and Leslie Knope highlights the *perpetual foreigner syndrome* which is a situation where, "Discrimination against a group of people is instantiated through recurrent and seemingly innocent questions" (Zhu & Li 2016: 1-2).

The question, "Where are you really from?" constitutes as *nationality and ethnicity talk* (Zhu & Li 2016: 2-4) that reinforces *perpetual foreigner syndrome* by assuming that someone is not an American, is a *first-generation* American, or is less of an American based on superficial snap judgements.

Even though Tom was faced with an alienating form of *nationality and ethnicity talk* that could have resulted in discomfort, he chose to stand his ground which allowed viewers to see him as just another typical American. According to a participant named Aliyana,

> I think that was a really good role for him. I noticed this with his co-star Retta too. Like, she and Aziz like, they're both minorities and they're both part of this Parks and Rec department. So, I feel like they're on the same level as the other characters even. Even though they have other roles in that department. I think it was a good role (Aliyana, bisexual female, 26, Latina).

For some participants, like Nora and Chole, Tom Haverford was the first Indian American man they had seen in American media who had a significant role. According to Chloe,

> As far as what he contributed to the show, I think his character was incredibly important. He's one of my favorite[s]. I think he was one of the first people that, I'll say just geographical region and hopefully you'll understand what I'm talking about. One of the first actors who looked that part that I've seen play like, a relatively major role versus just a couple of lines for laughs or some random like, 'not really a part of the show' character. So, he added a lot. I would say he was third in line after Leslie (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American).

According to the participants in this study, Tom Harverford's character is a step in the

right direction for Indian American male representation in American television. His character was not exoticized, he did not allow himself to be casually alienated, and he did not use self-deprecating humor based on lazy stereotypes about his Indian heritage. All of the participants who reported feeling pleased with Tom's character chuckled or even laughed when they remembered him. Participants appear to perceive Tom as one of the first Indian American men to be seen on television who is not a side or background character. Tom humanizes and normalizes Indian American men by being more than a frivolous trope.

Aziz Ansari in Stand-Up Comedy

Aziz Ansari's stand-up comedy was the second most popular example of positive Indian American male representation that participants remembered. 12 participants reported being pleased and none of the participants reported feeling neutral or negatively about Ansari's stand- up comedy routines. The 12 pleased participants included four Indian American men, two Indian American women, one Pakistani American woman, three white women, one Latina woman, and one African American man.

Every participant who mentioned Ansari's stand-up comedy reported feeling pleased because he chose to incorporate politics, controversial cross-cultural dialogue, and romance as a part of his comedy routines instead of relying on racialized slapstick humor. Nagulan, an interviewee, even compared Aziz Ansari's comedy to *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (1999- 2015) by saying,

I mean, you think of Jon Stewart. One of my favorite lines from Jon Stewart is where he

said that he's a "jester". "Back in the day in courts, jesters were used to hold rulers accountable, right? I mean they said the unpleasant things that other people in the court were too afraid to say" Jon Stewart made that quote. Seeing Aziz Ansari perform, and I think recent political circumstances have certainly forced him into that. I think he's blossomed into something that's a lot closer to someone like Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert than anything else, right? (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

Nagulan argues that Ansari now fits Jon Stewart's definition of a jester because he uses his comedic platform to challenge the typecasting of South Asian and Arab men. Nagulan continued his description of Ansari's iconic comedy by saying,

> Now I remember watching Aziz Ansari who said you know, 'Take *Homeland* and just change the fucking music! Like every time, you show a brown man why the hell are you playing this ominous music?" You know? "Like why didn't you play *Xzibit* or something? It would make a huge difference!' (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

The same part of Ansari's stand-up routine resonated with Farjad, another participant, who said,

> I think we're definitely biased by brown skin being evil. I mean I was watching, it was a stand-up comedian. He's from *Parks and Recreation*…Aziz Ansari! I think he brought up the point that, why do certain shows have to have theme music which is Arab sounding and that's like, the evil and ominous tone? So that's for better or for worse, I think that media can shift conversations whether they like it or not (Farjad, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

Ansari used comedy to have his audience acknowledge what Sunstein refers to as the *availability heuristic*. People use the *availability heuristic*, "rules of thumb" or "asking

whether examples can readily come to mind" (Sunstein 2004: 14), to gauge if something or even groups of people, like South Asian or Arab men, are dangerous or safe to be around compared to other racial or ethnic groups. Rules of thumb or examples can come from first-hand experiences or even secondary sources like films or television shows especially if a person does not have real life exposure to the subject of what they are watching.

Music cues during films and television shows also have a strong influence on viewer's *availability heuristics* as shown by Nosal, Keenan, Hastings, and Gneezy's study about changing music cues in shark documentaries. The goal of their study was to see if participants were more likely to have negative associations of sharks in real life if shark documentaries they watched contained ominous music as opposed to neutral or uplifting music. Their study results were as follows:

> Participants who viewed a 60-second video clip of swimming sharks set to ominous background music regarded sharks more negatively and less positively than those who watched the same video clip set to uplifting background music or silence. Notably, participants who did not watch the video clip, but only listened to the 60-second uplifting or ominous audio clip (or waited in silence for 60 seconds), generally regarded sharks more negatively and less positively than those who watched the video clip. In the absence of any visual stimulus, these sentiments may reflect individual's baseline attitudes towards sharks (Nosal, Keenan, Hastings, & Gneezy 2016: 12-13).

This same principle can be applied to Aziz Ansari's comedic critique of television shows and films using ominous background music when South Asian, Arab, or ambiguously brown terrorists enter a scene. It would not be surprising if viewers of this type of media who are not as exposed to South Asian and Arab individuals base much of their *availability heuristics* not

only on demonizing terrorist roles; the ominous music constantly sets that tone. Aziz Ansari's recent standup comedy has certainly echoed social scientific studies in challenging negative media portrayals of South Asian and Arab individuals.

Christopher was pleased with Aziz Ansari for being a forerunner for positive Indian American male representation. According to Christopher,

> I know him because he's on *MTV* (1981-Present) and he's hosted award shows. He's been given such a platform. He has his own Netflix show I believe. So, I think he's been given more of a platform and what I think they contribute is that they open a door for other comics and entertainers (Christopher, gay male, 34, African American).

Based on participants descriptions of Aziz Ansari, he is an iconic comedian because he is driving cross-cultural dialogue about changing South Asian American and Middle Eastern American media representation. Ansari has used and continues to use his comedic and creative platform to challenge South Asian and Arab tropes in his work in a way that is relatable for South Asian American and Arab American viewers while simultaneously delivering his message in a way that is thought provoking for Americans of differing racial and ethnic groups who may not have given any thought to the topic.

Dev Shah, His Family, & Friends in *Master of None*

In addition to doing standup comedy and being a major character in *Parks and Recreation*, Ansari writes, produces and stars in his acclaimed television series *Master of None* (2015-Present) as Dev Shah. Nine participants reported being pleased with Dev Shah's character, three participants were neutral, and none were displeased. The participants who

reported being pleased with Dev Shah's character were two Indian men, two Indian women, two Pakistani women, one white man, and two white women. Participants who were neutral with Dev Shah were one Indian man, one biracial man, and one Pakistani woman.

Dev Shah was the third most discussed Indian American character that participants reported feeling pleased with. Pleased participants described Dev as funny and relatable, and as a person who criticizes stereotypical Indian American male roles. Participants also noted Aziz Ansari's role in writing and casting other Indian American characters in his show and how that was groundbreaking to have more than one Indian American on a show at the same time.

Aditi was a long-standing fan of Aziz Ansari, but particularly enjoyed and felt connected to Ansari's portrayal of Indian Americans in *Master of None* the most. According to Aditi,

> He was born and brought up here. So, he's not just Indian. He's more American than Indian and I think that's a part of it that people forget about us. People are like, "Oh, you're Indian". And, it's like, "No! I know the same things. I know the same references. I've lived the same life. The only difference is my background is slightly different. So, like on *Master of None* I think was the first time in a show that I can actually relate to a character on television. (Aditi, heterosexual female, 26, Indian American).

Aditi's comment is telling because it shows the lack of meaningful Indian American representation in American television shows and films. It also demonstrates a key finding in this thesis. Indian American participants reported that they either only just started fully relating to an Indian American character, or they are still waiting for a relatable Indian American

character.

Sajni, another participant, focused on Shah's masculinity which according to participants was decidedly modern and not macho. Dev is not constantly trying to prove his masculinity to others through physical strength or striving to be a player romantically to be respected more by his friends. He is just a typical American man. Sajni explained it this way,

> It's more relatable and I think it's interesting to see that he's not outwardly more masculine. He's just himself and that's a more accurate representation of how men are now. Where they're kind of adopting different types of masculinity. He's a little bit more of a beta male, but he's still is like, a normal guy. You see him get with girls. You see him have normal healthy relationships with his friends and with his parents. And like, he has a job and he's succeeding. It's not like he's particularly more masculine or less masculine. He just is, you know? So, I think that's what's really important. His race is not an identifying factor with how more or less masculine he is (Sajni, heterosexual female, 20, Indian American).

Dev being shown as a person capable of having a normal dating life and healthy sexual relationships is significant since so many films and television shows have depicted Indian American men as either too nerdy to be interested in having a love life or not having the social and linguistic skills to woo their love interest. He is also not striving to conform to a Eurocentric version of masculinity but is shown being comfortable with who he is.

Another participant named Banhi appreciated Dev Shah's character being a positive portrayal of Indian American and South Asian Muslims in general since he was a Muslim character. Showing a positive portrayal of Islam did not appear to be forced in the episode *Religion* (2017) like in Aasif Mandvi's four-episode sitcom and parody *Halal in the Family*

(2015). Banhi reported feeling refreshed watching Muslims be portrayed as average Americans too,

> In the brown communities, well there was that one guy Aasif [Mandvi] right? I watched a few of his shows. It was interesting. The guy tried and it was nice, you know? But again, the thing with, I feel like right now is that everything is so focused on proving that like, we're not terrorists. We're not like, even Aasif's entire show [*Halal in the Family*] is based on the fact like, 'We're normal!' Like, 'we're trying so hard!' And, that's what's nice with Aziz Ansari's *Master of None*, there is none of that. It's like, 'I'm here!', you know? (Banhi, heterosexual female, 24, Indian American).

Dev's religious beliefs were not discussed in the other episodes of *Master of None*. And, even in the *Religion* episode, Islam did not dominate or define his identity. He kept his multi-dimensional character intact while allowing the audience to see his parents more conservative interpretation of Islam versus his own.

Another aspect of the show that was appreciated by participants was the diversity of the writers and cast. *Master of None* employs a racially, sexually, and linguistically diverse cast without subjecting any of the actors or actresses to playing tropes. Dev was also a character who did not shy away from discussing racial inequality. Ari explained it as follows,

> He didn't beat around the bush. he talked openly about you know, facing discrimination and about concepts of *white privilege*, and about being typecast in a typical role. And, you saw both the *first-generation* born in America type of person as well as the struggles of his parents who had just come here. And, you got to see a lot of different aspects I think of that experience. You got to see multi-faceted characters.

> It wasn't just written by white people for the *white gaze* (Ari, pansexual trans male, 23, white American).

The *white gaze*, otherwise known as the *dominant gaze* is, "the tendency of mainstream culture to replicate, through narrative and imagery, racial inequalities and biases which exist throughout society" (Russell 1991: 244). When the *dominant gaze* is in effect, it downplays people's racial identities and their perspectives even if they claim to be representing that racial group in their film or television show (Russell 1991: 244). Dev's character unapologetically challenged the notion of allowing the *dominant gaze* to continue for Indian American and Muslim American media representation.

Participants who were not South Asian American expressed that they also related to Dev's character, but they emphasized being happy about seeing more than one Indian American man in a show at the same time. Casey explained,

> I saw a little bit of that and obviously, he would have the ability to bring in other guys. And, [to] contrast them all together was like, a really great thing to do. But I think the reason it's so notable is because, it's so not the norm to even have like again, that one Indian guy (Casey, female, 26, white American).

Since Aziz Ansari was the star of *Master of None* and one of the main creators, writers, and executive producers he had the agency to cast more Indian American characters. As a result, some of the participants discussed other Indian American male characters as well including Ramesh, Anush, Ravi, and Navid.

Four participants remembered Ramesh who is Aziz Ansari's father in real-life and Dev's father on the show. Three of the participants reported feeling pleased with Ramesh's character and two participants reported feeling neutral about him. The pleased participants

were one Indian American woman, one white man, and one white woman. The two participants who reported feeling neutral were one Indian American man and one Pakistani woman.

Sajni was pleased with Ramesh's character because Ramesh was not shown as being a stereotypical angry Indian American parent. Instead, Ramesh was strict with some aspects of Dev's life but was still a loving and supportive father who reminded Sajni of her own father as shown:

> I think they're very relatable too, especially his dad. His dad is exactly how my dad is. I thought it was interesting to see his actual parents to play the roles. Otherwise they're going to find this like, very youthful looking Indian mom and that's not how it is. So, it was cool to see an honest portrayal of what parents are like. Cause they like showed how his parents are still kind of like, strict on him in terms of, religion. But they still show the loving side. A lot of times when you see Indian parents you see like, they're just really, really mean to their kids…a lot of times you don't see how loving they are so I think it was cool to see that aspect (Sajni, heterosexual female, 20, Indian American).

Ari was also an avid fan of Ramesh's character because he was a multidimensional character who worked hard after emigrating to America but also exuded happiness.

> I love his dad so much! I can't fully articulate even why! But I love his father. he's a combination of while he's had to obviously like you know, work very hard and be very disciplined. But, he comes off as such a lighthearted, happy, kind of like optimistic. He's sweet. He's a very likeable, he's just such a lovable character. And, again, you get to see a back story of his childhood. They're very approachable

characters (Ari, pansexual trans male, 23, white American).

Celia, another participant, had the same perspective as Ari but was also pleased with how Ramesh was as a devout Muslim. According to Celia, "I love his father, I love his father! So, his father is a highly skilled doctor. he's really warm. He's really charming. He is a devout Muslim who wishes his son were more devout than he is and the portrayal of that is very positive even though sometimes it's very difficult for Dev" (Celia, lesbian female, 54, white American).

These participant's thoughts about Ramesh indicate that there are not enough roles that portray dynamic Indian American parents. Indian American parents are usually minor characters whose identities focus on strict parenting and become angry when their religious, academic, and romantic expectations for their children, even when their children are independent adults, are not satisfied. Ramesh's loving and light-hearted aspect of his personality counteracts that stereotype.

Mokshi was the Indian American male participant who reported feeling neutral about Ramesh's character because he thought Ramesh was a typical representation of Indian parents. However, Mokshi believed that if people were not *first-generation* children, then they would not have the capacity to understand the general bond between Dev and his father or the content of the show that discusses Ramesh's experience emigrating to America and working hard to raise his son. According to Mokshi,

> I mean, I don't think it really, like for example, someone who isn't in that situation or someone who isn't born into that situation couldn't understand. So, I mean I think it's also a very selective group of people who can understand that. And, I mean there are a lot of people who are first generation types of deal, born in America. But I mean, I

> feel like if you aren't that then you really can't appreciate the message in terms of what he's trying to say. And, it's a really heartfelt message. You know, it really sat with me. So, I feel like unless you are in that predicament or this situation then you can't really understand what he's trying to say (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Being an American can be a vastly different experience depending on an individual's racial and ethnic background. However, this line of thinking is problematic considering many Americans, including a lot of white American's, immigrant stories are still recent and are passed down through generations. Furthermore, as another participant pointed out,

> People can relate to anything. If I related to white people my whole life. Like, they can relate to brown people too. And, like giving them that mode to like, make that connection, I think media is huge and it's helpful. And, the fact that it doesn't exist is what creates the binary of 'us versus them' because it's like, 'This is what we are like! And, they are not like that!'. Yeah, it's just weird (Aditi, heterosexual female, 26, Indian American).

Master of None also introduced other Indian American male characters including Dev's friends Ravi and Anush as well as his cousin Navid. Four participants reported feeling pleased with Anush's character and one other participant reported feeling neutral. The pleased participants were one Indian American woman, one Pakistani American woman, one white man, and one white woman. The person who felt neutral was one Indian man. Two participants reported being pleased with Ravi's character and one reported feeling neutral. The participants who were pleased with Ravi's character were one Indian woman and one white man while one Indian man was neutral about the portrayal.

Only one participant, a Pakistani American woman, discussed Navid's role and she reported feeling pleased.

Participants who reported being pleased with these characters tended to appreciate the portrayal of Indian American men as having differing personalities, mentalities, body types, and interests. Akilah, an individual whom I interviewed, reported being pleased with Anush's character because he helped show a variety of types of Indian American men.

> I mean, I like that he's sort of a foil to Aziz Ansari's character, too right? I think he's not as contemplative, sensitive or critical thinking and more a muscly gym guy. And, I think that's fine. I like that there's opportunities for people to be different types of ways even within South Asians (Akilah, heterosexual female, 33, Pakistani American).

The one participant who reported feeling neutral about Anush's character but was not impressed with how Anush's character was not realistic. According to Mokshi,

> I mean, his character is very atypical because you really don't see too many Indian guys who are like, that big and kind of like, I guess absent minded. He didn't really seem to have it all in terms of like, intellectually. I mean, he's just kind of there, just kind of did what he was told. In terms of like, his character's not really a good portrayal of how Indians really are (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Ravi Patel was essentially playing himself, an aspiring Indian American actor, in *Master of None* because Aziz Ansari wanted to cast him for the episode *Indians on TV* (2015) in order to discuss both sides of the controversy regarding taking stereotypical Indian American roles and whether or not it is ok (India West Staff 2015). Ari appreciated how Ravi's character humanized Indian American men who resort to playing stereotypical roles and explained it this way,

> I think that's kind of what Ravi is trying to say. 'Yes, I acknowledge that the stereotype and all is harmful. But, I also need to eat and if I just wait for jobs that are a wonderful portrayal that you know, that changes the perception of what an Indian person is and is in no way stereotypical, and helps us'. Unfortunately, he probably would not be able to survive on just that salary (Ari, pansexual trans male, 23, white American).

Interestingly, Ari was the only participant who discussed this perspective of stereotypical Indian American roles. Even though this thesis argues that there needs to be more Indian American roles that are dynamic and romantically appealing, it also acknowledges this realistic perspective as well. Since Indian American tropes are still commonplace in American television shows and films, those roles may be a last resort, or even an only option, for low-profile Indian American actors.

Only one person commented on Navid's character and she emphasized that he was interesting since he was portrayed as being an attractive man but still having an appealing personality that was also different from the other Indian American characters in *Master of None*. According to Akilah,

> Yeah! I liked his character a lot! He's super sweet! He seems like, very buff and therefore, you know, you have to think he's very into exercise. They even talk about it in the show a little bit and yet he's still sort of a mild, easy going character. And, yeah, I was pleased with the way he was portrayed. He was like, a complicated character (Akilah, heterosexual female, 33, Pakistani American).

Indian American characters from television and films in general tended to be rated positively when they challenged Indian American tropes. Participants expressed being pleased

with American media that included more than one Indian American man, portrayed Indian American men as romantically attractive, showed Indian American with different personality types that do not have to be studious or culturally traditional. Allowing Indian American characters to be varied in these ways made them more relatable to viewers of all different types of racial backgrounds and sexual orientations. Characters who were rated more negatively by participants of differing racial backgrounds and sexual orientations tended to be *whitewashed*, putting on fake accents or making stereotypical jokes based off of a generic form of Indian culture, were overly nerdy, and were either not interested in having any romantic relationships or were too socially awkward to even communicate with people they were romantically interested in.

Pakistani American Male Representation

When participants were asked if Indian American and Pakistani American men were portrayed as if they were one homogenous racial and ethnic group or if they were portrayed as different types of racial and ethnic groups 15 said yes, five said it was a combination of yes and no, 18 said no, one did not respond, and one was not certain and as a result, did not feel comfortable answering the question. However, based on participant interviews, there is a stark contrast between Indian American and Pakistani American male representation. There were 82 Indian American male roles including those that were *whitewashed* and roles in which characters were mistaken for another ethnic group but were actually Indian. But, there were only 20 Pakistani American male roles including *whitewashed* and *ethnically-washed* roles. *Ethnically- washed* means to cast a person of color who is not actually the same race or

ethnicity as the character they are playing. Six of those roles were cast in comedies but only two of those roles were main characters. Five of the roles were cast in war and political thrillers and only one of those roles was a main protagonist. Only three characters were a main romantic lead and one of those characters was *whitewashed* while his love interest was *ethnically-washed*. The remaining five genres were split between a political campaign ad, a crime drama, and action adventure. Six of those roles were villains.

Participants also tended to mention Arab roles when trying to remember Pakistani American roles because they lumped them together as being racially brown and Muslim. The majority of those characters discussed were violent, villainous characters. Other Arab roles confused for Pakistani ones include store owners, cab drivers, victims of violence, Arab satirical characters, or characters from Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), which is also ambiguous because it is a fusion of South Asian and Arab cultures (Galer 2017).

The most negatively ranked Pakistani American and Arab American roles that participants thought were potentially Pakistani roles included terrorists from shows ranging from *Homeland* (2011-Present), *24* (2001-2010), *Zero Dark 30* (2012), and *Iron Man* (2008). Jeff Dunham's stand-up performances (2009-Present) where he used *brown-voice* for Achmed the Dead Terrorist during his ventriloquist performances, and general terrorist roles were included too. The most positively ranked Pakistani American male roles consisted of Dinesh Chugtai from *Silicon Valley* (2014-Present), Changez from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2013), and Kumail Nanjiani from *The Big Sick* (2017).

Terrorists: A Variety of Films & Television Shows, But the Same Old Trope

Terrorist characters were rated negatively by 11 participants who discussed them and only one participant reported feeling pleased with the portrayal of terrorists specifically in *Zero Dark 30* (2012). The participants who reported being displeased with terrorist roles were two Indian American men, one Indian American woman, one Pakistani man, three Pakistani women, two white women, and one African American man. The person who was pleased with the portrayal of terrorists in *Zero Dark 30* was Chloe, an African American woman. When Chloe was asked to describe the terrorist roles in *Zero Dark 30* and if she was pleased, displeased, or neutral about the roles she said,

> *Zero Dark 30*, I loved it. So, for the roles of like, Bin Laden, his family, the people who were in that network things like that. They obviously tried to get people who looked Middle Eastern. I loved that movie so, I guess I'll say pleased. I respect the fact that when people that are portraying the story are trying to…I'm not saying they're accurate across the board because I'm sure there are some lies in there. But as far as you know, trying to be realistic about identities. The way people looked. I mean, I think that's fine. I think it would be stupid to…I don't think it's racist to cast someone who looks Middle Eastern in the role of like a courier in Bin Laden's network, you know? Like, it makes sense. That's what you would do (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American).

While cinematic accuracy is ideal, this response also indicates that it is acceptable to cast South Asian, Arab, and even African actors as if they are interchangeable. This line of

thought was problematic to South Asian American participants who could tell the difference between South Asian, Arab, and African actors and actresses.

Some Indian American participants were displeased with terrorism roles because they believed most Americans who were not South Asian or Arab could not tell the difference between Indians, Pakistanis, and Arabs in television shows or in real life. According to Krishan, an individual whom I interviewed,

> Yeah, I think the way media portrays for example in TV shows, a role of a terrorist would be Muslim, Arab, Pakistani. And, I don't think people, I don't think there is an effort made to distinguish between these two, those things. I think it affects India a little bit because, this is a little political but India is also one of the victims of terrorism. But the way things are portrayed in the media here, sometimes Indians are [on] the receiving end for no reason (Krishan, heterosexual male, 30, Indian American).

Participants like Krishan want a clear distinction between Indians, Pakistanis, and Arabs in American television shows and films because being lumped into a terrorist category can be stigmatizing and even scary in different parts of America. When people cannot tell the difference between these racial and ethnic groups because of their phenotypic appearance, they can all be labeled as being potentially untrustworthy or threatening (Kunkle 2016; El-Behary 2016; Cronin 2016) which can make them more susceptible to hate crimes (abc7 News 2016; Holley 2015; Independent 2017). It was frustrating and scary for participants like Krishan who have never practiced Islam but are at constant risk for being labeled as a potential terrorist by people who are not South Asian American or Arab American.

Another participant, Drew, did not like the terrorism tropes either because he had witnessed how Islamophobia had affected people he knew in real-life. According to Drew,

> It doesn't matter the descent. I think the way society or the media does it as it's they're all 'the enemy'. They're all one. There's no debate. Because honestly, and I know this sounds horrible and it's not my view. But, it doesn't really matter what they are beyond what we see. We see them as terrorists or as Pakistan[i]. We see them as one because we don't want to see anything else. We don't care to see anything else. Because, one characteristic about them is the only thing they're being judged by. You know? And, in real life. So, now take away the TV and take away the different things. In real life, you know, so like, I have a Pakistani doctor who was actually sadly enough, and I will say this. He literally…I had an appointment with him two weeks ago and he had a team of lawyers there because he was trying to make sure to secure him and his family's citizenships. And, this is a doctor who lives in Pennsylvania and works in Pennsylvania. And, his brother is actually a big wig in New York. Does for the Mayo Clinic, is an epidemiologist, Dr. Korai. And, you know, I love my doctor. I think he's an amazing man and it broke my heart because he has this sister who runs the office for him. And, then of course he has multiple family members that he's brought over. And, I mean these are people that have worked hard. That they're working here, living the American dream, and they have to hire lawyers because they're being made to feel like they might not be able to stay in this country? (Drew, gay male, 45, white).

Drew's response indicates that stereotypical terrorist roles can reinforce Islamophobia in Americans who are not as exposed to South Asian American or Arab American Muslims. During the interview Drew also claimed that constant one-dimensional violent portrayals of South Asian and Arab Muslims are so insidious that they can influence American

news and politics.

Jack Shaheen's research about Arab portrayals in over 1,000 American films supports this notion. About 150 to 200 years ago the United States started using the same images of Arabs in American film (Shaheen 2006; Media Education Foundation 2006) which portrayed them as people with violent tendencies or killers (Shaheen 2012: 42-43, 47, 51, 379), rapists (Shaheen 2012: 41, 425), and Muslim fanatics (Shaheen 2012:392, 394, 409). According to Shaheen,

> When colleagues ask whether today's reel Arabs are more stereotypical than yesteryear's, I can't say the celluloid Arab has changed. That is the problem. He is what he has always been-the cultural "other". Seen through Hollywood's distorted lenses, Arabs look different and threatening. Projected along racial and religious lines, the stereotypes are deeply ingrained in American cinema. From 1896 until today, filmmakers have collectively indicted all Arabs as Public Enemy #1- brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad culture "others" bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, especially Christians and Jews (Shaheen 2012: 7-8).

Since terrorism roles have been such a long-lasting trope in American cinema, it has effectively negatively influenced wide scale personal and political American perceptions of Pakistani Americans, Arab Americans and anyone who looks like them (Media Education Foundation 2006).

Pakistani American participants who were interviewed had a few different critiques. One was about *ethnic-washing* Pakistani roles including terrorist ones. According to Bilan, "They find light-skinned African people to play Pakistanis. They're not interchangeable" (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani American). Another participant named Taimur had

the same perspective as Bilan as shown:

> I don't know, I haven't seen the actual scenes in *Homeland* but I know in the TV show there were a lot of inaccuracies when it came to, and this is less Indian and Pakistani but more Middle East, inaccuracies when it came to the location or setting they were trying to show at least on multiple occasions they did kind of a bad job of that by just kind of using stereotypical Middle Eastern cues to dress the scene up rather than doing their homework (Taimur, heterosexual male, 30, Pakistani American).

Bilan and Taimur's responses were common for South Asian American participants. It is problematic to cast South Asian, Arab, and African actors as if they are interchangeable especially since it seemed insulting and blatantly obvious for the South Asian American participants to notice. Later in his interview, Taimur gave an example of one way it is obvious for South Asian American viewers to easily distinguish South Asian, Arab, and African actors even if they are all playing minor terrorist roles. According to Taimur,

> A lot of times in the media. The American media that I see, it might happen in other countries' media as well. But, like a film for example they will take a…you know, an Indian. Like in that *Iron Man* movie what Faran Tahir is saying and the subtitles. I think this is kind of different but also tangentially related. It's totally off. I think there's not as much care maybe taken to you know, when characters are speaking Urdu or Hindi to, the subtitles are perfectly correct for what they want to convey you know, story wise. But, they won't actually pay attention to the actual Urdu or Hindi being spoken to ensure that it is actually saying what the subtitles are saying (Taimur, heterosexual male, 30, Pakistani American).

Taimur's example about interchanging Urdu speakers with Hindi speakers poses a couple of

issues. Firstly, even though those languages are related they are still fundamentally different. Hindi and Urdu have different scripts, dialect pronunciations, and do not share all of the same words. So, if filmmakers assume actors who either speak Hindi or Urdu are interchangeable there could be audience members who can tell the difference. Furthermore, if an actor is Arab or African but "looks" like a South Asian American according to the filmmaker's standards, then the language pronunciation and translation of South Asian languages, like Hindi or Urdu, can be even worse.

Banhi, another individual whom I interviewed, emphasized the identity crisis that constant terrorist roles can develop in Pakistani American children or even Pakistani American adults who are caught between having a devout Pakistani American Muslim background and the general American culture that believes Islam is an inherently bad religion.

> We're normal people. You know there's nothing like, special going on here. We're not like, harboring some like, special force of terrorism or anything. But how like, identity crisis relates to film and media and how that doesn't help our identity crisis in a sense. Because when you have like, can you imagine being a young kid? I was old when "American Sniper" came out. But being a young kid, and sitting down to watch this movie in the theater. And then the credits begin and the Azad begins playing. The call to prayer begins playing and like, all of a sudden you see this guy…This woman in like, a burqa bomb someone. And like, it's…these images can be very traumatizing. And they can really seriously confuse us because media is actually a very, very powerful tool. Film is a very powerful tool. And, filmmakers have a responsibility. Like, you can't… you can't say that you don't. You do. It's a really political realm.

> Especially when you're going to make a film like that. It's you know, like, people should be made to feel… that should just…it's shocking to me it's 2017. And we as like, a Western American society [who] still haven't moved past some of the simplest tropes and stereotypes (Banhi, heterosexual female, 24, Pakistani American).

Terrorism tropes are not something to be taken lightly because they perpetuate the common notion that Muslims or people who "look like" Muslims are less approachable, less trustworthy, are more likely to commit violent acts, have barbaric cultures, and as a result are less American. Terrorism tropes also perpetuate stereotypes about Islam since the majority of South Asian and Arab Muslims in American films and television shows are violent.

Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Changez's character in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2013) was ranked as the most positive Pakistani American male representation in this study. Four participants, who consisted of one Indian man, one Pakistani man, and two Pakistani women, reported being pleased with Changez's character. Those participants described him as thoughtful, realistic, political, relatable, and a person who legitimized interracial romantic relationships between South Asian American men and white women. However, interestingly two of the participants who reported they were pleased with Changez's character made it a point to report not entirely liking the film. Perhaps this is because it is rare for Pakistani American males to have lead roles and in the majority of American films and television shows. Also, Pakistani American voices concerning 9/11 are not nearly as present in mainstream American entertainment or news based conversations.

Akilah reported thinking that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was not the best film she

had seen with a South Asian male lead role, but she appreciated the way South Asian American perspectives of post 9/11 America were valued in the film. Akilah described Changez as such:

> He was political. He was brave. I don't like, love that movie or anything. But you know, it was a movie with a cast that was both South Asian and white. There was a real emphasis on South Asian characters which I thought was cool so I guess I was pleased with that. The fact that that movie happened I guess makes me pleased with that (Akilah, heterosexual female, 33, Pakistani American).

This representation of a Pakistani American perspective of life before and after 9/11 was a stark contrast to the negatively ranked terrorist roles so many Pakistani American, Arab American, and light-skinned African men continue to play in American political thrillers and yet, it was about the same type of violence. It allowed the audience to see the complexity of how South Asian Americans were treated before and after 9/11 and the negative experiences that come with mainstream hostility to their ethnic groups.

Another participant, Bilan, read the book and saw the film. She expressed that she liked the book more than the film and felt a bit distracted throughout the film. Bilan described Changez as an ambitious and high achieving student at Princeton University and said that she was not as impressed with that aspect of him. Bilan was more impressed with how thoughtful Changez was to post-9/11 sentiments in America as shown: "The fact that he's so conflicted to the reaction he got to post 9/11 America...before he was living his dream life. He's not one of those that just instantly turns into a fundamentalist" (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani American). She reported relating to Changez on a more personal level by saying, "His frustration spoke to me. It was really realistic" (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani

American).

Azzan, another person whom I interviewed, described Changez differently, focusing on the character's thought process,

> He plays a disaffected Pakistani born, American educated man who has a white girlfriend and things go wrong. And, it's not that she's white that he has any problems but, things go wrong as it is. He sort of becomes self-righteous and turned you know, resentful of the certain things that are happening and sort of abstracts it into the whole, so he makes these grand generalizations (Azzan, heterosexual man, 28, Pakistani American).

Azzan was also pleased with the realistic way Changez and other American business people were portrayed in the film because their lack of ethical training was highlighted.

Another participant named Aatif focused on another aspect of the film which had to do with Changez's interracial sexual relationship with a white American woman. One thing that bothered Aatif about American films and television shows in general was the lack of South Asian men being shown as sexual people or even people who could show off their body in general. According to Aatif,

> Something to pay attention to is when do you have a brown body? Like, I don't see brown bodies. I don't see. Like, I don't see brown nipples. Like, I've had friends that are like, 'Oh! You have like dark nipples!' And, I'm like, 'Yeah. Like, I'm a brown dude'. So, there are those [people]. Like, those things just aren't...yeah. Sorry, this is probably...That's I don't really see shirtless Indian guys. Especially like, the contrast in skin color like, a brown body against a white body. Like, I remember when I was watching, what movie was it? I think it was "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" with my

> girlfriend and we were watching Riz Ahmed like, in bed with his like, white partner. And, in all these movies they all have white girlfriends. They're like, all brown dudes with all like white girlfriends. And, like my girlfriend and I were in bed and we're like, you know. We're naked. We're just like, 'Oh my God! This looks like that! And that's weird!' That's like, unusual to see that experience legitimized! (Aatif, male, 22, Indian American).

To justify the lack of representation, portrayals of interracial couples are treated as a risky investment because they have the potential to lose racist viewers or corporate sponsorships that cater to a base that is racist (Killian 2013: 189). Another argument against showing normal interracial couples is that it can perpetuate contemporary racism by allowing the audience to legitimize their racist color-blind beliefs (Childs 2009: 180). According to Killian,

> This is because interracial couples still elicit strong emotional reactions from many people, feelings connected to assumptions and beliefs, conscious or unconscious, about personal identity and privilege, and their own investments in monolithic, unchanging notions of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' (Killian 2013: 189).

However, this thesis challenges those notions because participants were open to varied portrayals of interracial couples. Thirty-two participants who were attracted to men were asked if they would be more likely to be romantically involved with Indian American and Pakistani American men if they were portrayed in a more romantically desirable way. 18 of participants reported that they would be more likely to be romantically involved with Indian and Pakistani men if they were portrayed in a more romantically desirable way in American films and television. 12

participants said they would not have been more likely to be romantically involved with Indian American and Pakistani men.

However, out of those 12 participants, only three said no because they were adamantly not romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men. Four out of those 12 participants were already romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men. Another four of those 12 participants think romantic genres in American films are laughably unrealistic because romance in real life is way different than what's shown on the screen so they are not influenced by that portion of media. One out of those 12 participants said she worked really hard to get over monogamous romantic portrayals in films and television shows because she is polyamorous. So, the vast majority of these 12 participants did not say no because they were not open to having romantic relationships with Pakistani American or Indian American men. Lastly, only one participant said the question did not apply to her because she had an arranged marriage to a Pakistani man before emigrating to the United States with him.

Showing interracial couples in American films and television is beneficial to people who are already in interracial relationships because it legitimizes their relationship on a larger scale culturally, according to the participants. It is just as important for viewers to be able to see their own racial and ethnic group being represented in American films and television shows as it is for viewers to be able to see the types of interracial romantic relationships they are in. Even participants who have not hooked-up, dated, or married a Pakistani American or Indian American man are still more likely to pursue interracial relationships with Pakistani American or Indian American men. Therefore, including interracial couples in American films and television can help open viewer's minds to interracial relationships while simultaneously

legitimizing people already in interracial relationships, according to participants' viewpoints.

Dinesh Chugtai in *Silicon Valley*

Kumail Nanjiani played a lead character as Dinesh Chugtai in *Silicon Valley* (2014-Present) and he was tied for the most discussed positive Pakistani American male character in this study. Three people were pleased with his performance, one Pakistani American woman, one Pakistani American man, and one African American man. These participants described Dinesh as funny, smart, and dynamic.

Whenever Pakistani American or Indian American male characters had love interests participants never labeled them as negative characters. Giving characters love interests humanized them and was a key component to participants describing Pakistani American and Indian American male characters as dynamic. Akilah, one of the participants whom I interviewed, described Dinesh this way, "He plays a really funny character! He's funny and plays a complete role. And, he has love interests and he's, you know? I'm pleased with his character on that" (Akilah, heterosexual female, 33, Pakistani American).

Azzan, another participant, reported being pleased with Dinesh as shown, "I mean, they're all nerds because it's Silicon Valley. But, he actually plays one of the most socially capable of them all. They all have love interests of some sort so he has one as well" (Azzan, heterosexual male, 28, Pakistani American).

Interestingly, the other participant who remembered Dinesh's character, Christopher, mistook him for being Indian American most likely because Dinesh's was a software designer. It was typical for participants to associate Indian American men in real life and on television shows or films as having information technology, math, science, medical, and engineering occupations because they believed it was cultural for South Asians in India and South Asian

American

families. Christopher thought *Silicon Valley* was a great show but commented, "Whenever you see Indian men, aren't they always playing these kind of like, brainy people? They're always brainy and I know I keep going back to that. It's just like, why? I mean, I think it's just the way that we perceive their culture" (Christopher, gay male, 34, African American).

Dinesh was well received by these participants even though he was a tech person because he was not a stereotype. He did not force an exaggerated accent, he had great social skills, and he had romantic interests like everyone else in the show.

Kumail Nanjiani in *The Big Sick*

Kumail Nanjiani and his wife Emily V. Gordon decided to make a film about their real love story in the form of a romantic comedy titled, *The Big Sick* (2017). Two participants, one Pakistani American woman and one Pakistani American man, reported being pleased with Kumail's character. Kumail was the main lead playing himself and his wife was played by Zoe Kazan. Kumail's character was described by these participants as being realistic, confident, non- conforming, and having a sweet personality.

Bilan reported appreciating Kumail's confidence in himself even though he emigrated to the United States from Karachi, Pakistan when he was 19 years old (Marantz 2017). According to Bilan, "The way he comes across in the movie it seems to not be an issue. He's very aware that he's in another country. He's comfortable, and owning himself, and that is very refreshing" (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani American). Another aspect of *The Big Sick* that Bilan was pleased with was the portrayal of Kumail's family and the interactions

he had with them as shown: “The dinner scenes and everything. They’re so Pakistani and I get that! I guess my comment would be [that the portrayal is] realistic” (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani American).

Azzan, another participant whom I interviewed, focused on Kumail’s romantic interracial relationship and the constant pressure from his family to have an arranged marriage. According to Azzan, “It’s a romantic comedy about the trials and tribulations of arranged marriage and love marriage for Pakistani Americans, second generations. It was quite good and it showed a real depth and range of his character and sort of established him as another top comedian” (Azzan, heterosexual male, 28, Pakistani American). Azzan also discussed Kumail choosing the girl he wanted instead of feeling obliged to follow his family’s expectations as shown, “Overall he ended up with a white girl which was positive in showing you know, that you don’t have to get bogged down into expectations. Cultural expectations that often lead to racism” (Azzan, heterosexual male, 28, Pakistani American).

Kumail was well received by these participants because he was a romantic lead who showed the audience his personal version of a *first generation* or *second generation* Pakistani American experience. He showed some of the intricacies of being expected to have an arranged marriage in the American context and what it takes to ultimately bring two cultures together on a deeper level.

Whitewashing and *Ethnic-washing*

Whitewashing is a big topic in popular media and studies but, when a person who is not a white American plays the role of another ethnic or racial group it is not discussed in

academia and is rarely the topic in popular media articles. In order to discuss this phenomenon, I am using the term *ethnic-washing*. 20 characters mentioned in this study were either *whitewashed* or *ethnically-washed*. Ten of those roles were *whitewashed* and the other ten roles were *ethnically- washed*.

Ethnically-washed roles include: light skinned Africans and South Asians playing Arab terrorists in various shows and films including *Homeland* (2011-Present), Naveen Andrews as Sayid Jarrah in *Lost* (2004-2010), Mortiz Hepper playing lobby boy #5 in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), Danny Pudi playing Abed in *Community* (2009-2015), and Sacha Baron Cohen playing three other *ethnically-washed* characters in this study. Sacha Baron Cohen *ethnically- washed* 3 roles including King Julien in *Madagascar 2* (2008), Borat in *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006), and Aladeen in *The Dictator* (2012).

Interestingly, Pakistani American and Indian American participants were the only ones who spotted *ethnically-washed* characters. Some of this was discussed in the section of this chapter called, *Terrorists: A Variety of Films & Television Shows, But the Same Old Trope*. Two of the participants reported being irked by Pakistani roles in shows like *Homeland* and *24* (2001- 2010) being regularly *ethnically-washed*. Bilan, a participant, explained, "They find light skinned African people to play Pakistanis. They're not interchangeable" (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani American).

Another participant, Taimur, critiqued how the directors of *Homeland* do not research South Asian and Arab geographical regions or the people's cultures residing in them when they change the setting of the show. According to Taimur, "when it came to the location or setting they were trying to show at least on multiple occasions they did kind of a bad job of

that by just kind of using stereotypical Middle Eastern cues to dress the scene up rather than doing their homework" (Taimur, heterosexual male, 30, Pakistani American).

Ethnically-washed characters also tend to have odd accents when speaking South Asian or Arab languages that are required for the roles which can add another layer of annoyance for South Asian Americans and Arab Americans who speak the languages being portrayed on screen. However, if a character is the same racial group as the actor but is playing a *second generation* or even *first-generation* character, then it could make sense for them to not have to speak South Asian or Arab languages having a perfect accent.

Subtitling is another issue some South Asian participants noticed in television shows and films. For instance, Taimur described a part in *Iron Man* (2008) where Faran Tahir, who plays Raza, is speaking in Urdu like this,

> I think there's not as much care maybe taken to you know, when characters are speaking Urdu or Hindi to...The subtitles are perfectly correct for what they want to convey you know, story wise. But, they won't actually pay attention to the actual Urdu or Hindi being spoken to ensure that it is actually saying what the subtitles are saying (Taimur, heterosexual male, 30, Pakistani American).

Whitewashing was another issue that participants tended to be displeased with. Even though Krishan did not list any roles that were *whitewashed* or *ethnically-washed*, he was adamant about Indian roles only being played by Indians. According to Krishan, "So, if someone is going to play an Indian character then it better be an Indian person. Like, Mel Gibson playing a character of Scottish fighter in *Braveheart* (1995). I wouldn't like someone like that as a film connoisseur" (Krishan, heterosexual male, 30, Indian American).

Akilah, another participant, who had seen Zachary Levi play Ray Rehman in *Shades of Ray* (2008) was floored as shown, "I remember being so infuriated! And, he's a white…like a totally white dude! And, he's playing a half Pakistani guy and everything. I remember thinking that was hilarious and infuriating at the same time" (Akilah, heterosexual female, 33, Pakistani American).

Banhi, another participant, expressed the same line of thinking but also discussed the form of *whitewashing* that uses *brownface*, particularly Ashton Kutcher's role as Raj in a *Popchips commercial* (2012).

> I think nowadays we are way more hyper vigilant about like, stereotypes. You know Ashton Kutcher was in that ad? And, it was just so, so offensive. And, people called him out on it immediately which is beautiful. It takes a lot, you know? If people hadn't made it that big of an issue, they would have brushed it under the carpet (Banhi, heterosexual female, 24, Pakistani American).

Participants who were not South Asian reported not being pleased with actors who *whitewashed* South Asian American roles either. The only Indian lead character that Nora, a person whom I interviewed, remembered watching in her childhood was Fisher Stevens as Ben Jabituya in *Short Circuit 2* (1988). Fisher Stevens also managed to make Ben Jabituya a one- dimensional character. According to Nora, "I think he was kind of neurotic. I like, I watched that movie a lot when I was younger. But, I just remember him being like, very neurotic and I think that was the main personality trait. Was very like, tense and neurotic" (Nora, heterosexual female, 24, white American).

Interestingly Benno, another participant, thought Sacha Baron Cohen was Pakistani since he played Borat in *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious*

Nation of Kazakhstan and Aladeen in *The Dictator*. Those were the characters he reported seeing a South Asian male lead roles. Benno described those films like this, "Oh, I think it's like everything, every stereotype bad against the culture. It['s] just one big package. it's nothing of like they really are like" (Benno, gay male, 20s, Puerto Rican American). When asked to elaborate about the stereotypes Benno said, "Just going off the fact that like, the first thing at least when I saw it. I was younger when I saw it. That, 'Wow I can't believe they would even do this' is the fact that every time that they would speak in their native language everyone assumed they were just planning a bomb threat" (Benno, gay male, 20s, Puerto Rican American).

Another participant Ari, thought it was essential to describe when slapstick humor is offensive versus when it's not. According to Ari,

> Marginalized people making fun of themselves is very, very different than other people making fun of them. Like, you can tell the difference if the writers…you can tell the difference when it's white writers or not. White people making fun of minorities has obviously been done to death. And, you have that unfair systems of power and everything. It's just bad. But, people making fun of themselves and doing those kind of jokes and all is a completely different thing (Ari, pansexual trans man, 23, white American).

Ethnic-washing and *whitewashing* are just as detrimental to the portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men. Each of them doubles as a facade that either limits Indian American and Pakistani American characters by making them one dimensional tropes or takes the opportunity of having multifaceted roles away from the actors who need them.

Why Indian and Pakistani American Male Representation Matters

Each participant was asked if they think Indian American and Pakistani American male representation in films and television shows is important and 41 out of 42 participants reported that Indian American and Pakistani American representation in films and television shows was important. 37 out of 42 participants argued there were not enough Indian American and Pakistani American men on American television shows and films. Indian American and Pakistani American representation in American films and television shows is important because it has the potential to influence how marginalized groups are treated in real life in formal contexts such as school or the workplace as well as informal settings including spending time with friends, hook-ups or dates. Indian American and Pakistani American representations in American films and television shows also serves as a way to help legitimize Indian Americans and Pakistani Americans as *cultural citizens*. According to Toby Miller, "Cultural citizenship concerns the maintenance and development of cultural lineage through education, custom, language, and religion and the positive acknowledgement of difference in and by the mainstream" (Miller 2001: 2). *Cultural citizenship* certainly applies to representation in film and television shows because films and television shows mirrors and shifts popular culture. This means television shows and films can serve as a tool to change preconceived notions of various racial and ethnic groups.

Having dynamic Indian American and Pakistani American roles legitimizes Indian and Pakistani Americans as being normal Americans in real life as well. In order to accomplish this holistically, it is important to represent Indians in India and Indian Americans from different ethnic groups and cultures since each Indian state has its own ethnic groups,

language, sub- cultures, foods, and religious beliefs. The same concept applies to representing Pakistanis in Pakistan and Pakistani Americans since different regions of Pakistan also have different languages, cultures, foods, ethnic groups, and religions.

This was a topic of concern for multiple participants in this study. As I conducted the interviews some of the American immigrants, *first-generation*, and *second-generation* participants revealed their concern that perhaps I did not know how diverse Indians in India actually are. For instance, toward the end of his interview, Krishnan said,

> Yeah, I think the focus is Indian and Pakistani. That group. So, I don't know if you can...when you say Indians it's...I mean, there are different parts in India. Which you will find so much diversity in India. Like, personally from North East India it is completely different from South India. So, I mean generalizing Indians in one group is also kind of broad. Yeah, I don't know exactly what you are looking for in your research but it's just something to I guess consider. Indians are not just Indians. There's much diversity there (Krishnan, hetersosexual male, 30, Indian American).

This is not entirely surprising considering I am not South Asian American and snap judgements about my cultural knowledge from some participants were to be expected. I also decided not to use specific Indian ethnic groups in my interview questions in order to keep the interview questions consistent while avoiding any possible confusion non-South Asian American participants may have had if specific Indian and Pakistani ethnic group terminology was used instead. But comments like these also reflect the need for American filmmakers to abolish a prototypical homogenous portrayal of Indians and Pakistanis and replace it by showing the diversity of Indian and Pakistani communities whether they are located in South Asia or in the United States.

Additionally, other participants like Mokshi wanted to make a clear distinction between Indian characters who were playing people from India versus Indians playing Indian American roles. For instance, when Mokshi was talking about Indian American characters from *Master of None* he said,

> I mean, well first of all it's kind of hard to describe. it's kind of hard to put them in an Indian point of view because both of them have obviously grown up here. You don't have any accent and they're really well rehearsed. And, sort of like [a] *medium American* type of thing. You can just tell by their lifestyle and how they are. So, I think it's kind of hard to categorize them as a typical Indian because there's a distinction between American Indians and like, Indians in India type of [thing]. Like, people born in India and people who aren't" (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Medium American is another way to say growing up in America with an emphasis on American cultures and American education. Participants who are not South Asian American also emphasized that people raised in America versus people who are the same race or ethnicity but raised in a different country are completely different types of people. Asher, a participant whom I interviewed, could relate to Indian and Pakistani Americans who grew up here because he was also frustrated when other Americans treated him as if he were a foreigner as opposed to someone born and raised in the United States. According to Asher,

> I'm Asian but I was born in the U.S. I was born in Lancaster [Pennsylvania] and I would consider myself Asian American because I'm Asian but I'm also American. And, I just happen to be bilingual because I was taught that way growing up. But, if you stuck me next to someone who is born in Vietnam and like, was raised that way,

> we'd totally be different people…but if you put us next to each other and you have like, a white guy judge us they'd be like, 'They're exactly the same'. And, then they would instill every stereotype from them onto me (Asher, gay male, 25, Vietnamese American).

Other participants and people they know have been treated like foreigners since childhood as shown by Aarohi,

> I think it's important to break down the barriers that all of us have faced in our childhood. Where people are like, 'Oh my God! You must be so good at math and science!' Or, I remember one time my brother was like, 'Mom. Don't give me more Indian food for lunch. It always smells and my friends always look at me. And, it's weird'.... [it] is important to show children that you're not alone. It's ok. All of us face it (Aarohi, female, 18, Indian American).

Another participant, Nagulan, emphasized the importance of Indian American and Pakistani American children having good role models on American television shows and films. According to Nagulan,

> I mean my son...my wife's white. My son's half white, half Indian. He looks like me and you know he's going to grow up here. He has many classmates and friends. He grew up here right? Not being able to relate to role models or positive [role models] who look like you. I think that's something that hurts people in the long run (Nagulan, male, 35, Indian American).

Diversifying Asian American roles and making a distinction between Asian Americans and Asians outside of America, so long as it does not perpetuate racial tropes, could significantly aid in abating how often Indian Americans, Pakistani Americans, and East Asian Americans

are casually lumped with Asians in Asia and as a result, othered based on racial stereotypes regularly shown on American television shows and films.

Chapter II

The Lingering Effects of American News and Political Bias

This chapter begins by exploring how Indian, Pakistani, Pakistani American, Indian American, and Arab American men are portrayed in American news outlets. Then it will discuss whether or not news media affects people's perception of Indian American and Pakistani American men in real life. This portion of the chapter has two parts. The first part explores how South Asian American male participants consider the influence of such media on how they are treated in real-life. The second part explores how such media portrayals affect participants who are attracted to men. This chapter concludes with a discussion about the relationship between hate crimes and racially- and religiously-charged news coverage and political rhetoric. Findings suggest that representation in American media and politics plays an immense role in the lives and identities of South Asian Americans and non-South Asian Americans. Specifically, inaccurate and biased media and news alienated South Asian participants who found their cultural and political citizenship under threat. Interestingly, participants indicated that close contact with South Asians can act as a bulwark against bias and prejudice while engendering cultural exchange.

Linguistic Inaccuracies and Bias in News Coverage

Adequate news coverage follows the five core principles of ethical journalism which are 1) truth and accuracy, 2) independence, 3) fairness and impartiality, 4) humanity, and 5) accountability (Aidan White 2015). Following these core principles produces holistic and

ideally impartial results. However, European and American news coverage tends to use racial or religious descriptions of American domestic criminal activity committed by people of color. When negative language is reserved for certain racial groups or people practicing certain religions, it plays a role in perpetuating *structural violence*. The same negative language is also used to describe marginalized minorities who speak out against *structural violence*. For the purpose of this study, *structural violence* is subtle oppression through systemic racism and sectarianism (Farmer 2004: 307; Galtung 1969: 168, 173).

Aditi, a participant in this study, was taking two classes about Islam during the same semester that her interview was conducted. In one of the classes she was assigned to read a linguistic article that discussed Jilan Hostas' controversial cartoon drawings of the Muslim prophet Mohammed and how different media sources employed biased vocabulary to describe Muslim perspectives on the controversy as opposed to European ones:

> So, basically in it they have like, the words that were used with Muslims and the words that were used with just like, European people. And, the words with European people were very neutral. Like, 'Oh, they said this' and 'They admitted to this' and like, that sort of thing. Whereas Muslims when they were referenced were like, 'They frowned upon...', 'They were angry by...', 'They were frustrated'. Just like, 'fury'. The words that were associated with them was like, so much more volatile than like, the Western people. Then it became not even an issue of freedom of speech versus freedom of religion. And, I was like, 'Yeah, you're using your freedom of speech to oppose freedom of religion so where does that fall?' (Aditi, heterosexual female, 26, Indian American).

Europe and the United States consistently use subtle negative terms that Aditi described

when discussing South Asian American Muslim and Arabs American perspectives on controversial topics. When South Asian American Muslims or Arab Americans commit crimes, this negative language is magnified, according to research.

South Asian American Muslims and Arab Americans are almost exclusively labeled as *terrorists*, *extremists*, *radicals*, and *jihadists* when they commit acts of violence, while their mental health is rarely taken into consideration. White Americans who commit similar acts of mass violence are not described with derogatory racial or religious labels. Instead, news stories emphasize a white American's mental health prior to committing mass violence (Morin 2016: 987). White Americans who commit mass violence also receive less airtime than their South Asian American and Arab American counterparts. According to Kearns, Betus, and Lemieux, "If the perpetrator is Muslim, expect 449% more news stories about the attack… [there is] a 212% increase in coverage when the perpetrator is arrested, a 228% increase if the target is governmental, and a 64% increase per fatality, on average" (Kearns, Betus, & Lemieux 2017: 10). Kearns, Betus, and Lemieux also found that Muslims were responsible for only 12.4 percent of mass violence but still had 41.4 percent of the news airtime (Kearns, Betus, & Lemieux 2017: 11).

It is important to note that news outlets use the term *jihad* as if its definition is a holy war against people with different faiths (Sullivan 2016: 147). This is a misnomer since the Arabic word *jihad* means to struggle or strive more broadly. In the context of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, *jihad* has multiple meanings since there is a *greater jihad* and a *lesser jihad*. Anthony T. Sullivan describes the *greater jihad* as "the eternal struggle of each individual against temptation and the wiles of Satan" (Sullivan 2016: 147) as opposed to the *lesser jihad*, which is, "the conduct of defensive war to protect the Islamic community"

(Sullivan 2016: 147). Qur'anic scriptures that emphasize this principle include, "And fight in the way of God against those who fight against you and be not aggressive; for surely God loves not the aggressors (The Qur'an 2:190; Sullivan 2016: 147) and "Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and sought to expel the Prophet and attacked you first?" (The Qur'an 9:13; Sullivan 2016: 147).

News media outlets should use the Arabic term *hirabah* instead of *jihad* to describe mass violence. From a linguistic perspective, *hirabah* means, "to be furious or enraged" (Sullivan 2016: 149). In the context of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, *hirabah* is an "unholy war" and "warfare against society" (Sullivan 2016: 149). So, unlike performing *jihad*, a person who commits *hirabah* is a criminal whose actions can be seen as outside of the Islamic faith. Crimes described as *hirabah* include making threats, assault, and mass murder with an aim to "intimidate an entire civilian population, and the attempt to spread a sense of fear and helplessness in society" (Sullivan 2016: 149).

Understanding social hierarchy in Islam is also essential to appreciating the difference between *hirabah* and *lesser jihad*. According to Islamic law, accredited leaders are the only people who can sanction lesser jihad. For instance, leaders of terrorist organizations, otherwise known as resistance groups, such as Osama Bin Laden do not actually have the authority to enact *lesser jihad* or aggressive holy wars against anyone (Sullivan 2016: 151-152) if they belong to a minority sect of Islam, believe a faith outside of Islam, or are not religious at all. Osama Bin Laden's orchestration of the 9/11 attacks was an example of committing *hirabah* rather than *jihad* because he was not a recognized leader and was calling for mass violence toward other religious and ethnic groups.

American Muslims have tried to explain the inaccurate usage of the word *jihad* in

American news outlets and political rhetoric, and some are trying to reclaim the word *jihad*. An example of this is Ahmed Rehab's #MyJihad educational advertising campaign (Yaccino & Si Teng 2013). His advertisements explain how *greater jihad* are everyday struggles (#MyJihad 2017; Yaccino & Si Teng 2013; Chowdhury 2013). One such advertisement says, "'#MyJihad is to not judge people by their cover' What's yours?" (#MyJihad 2017). Another advertisement reads, "'#MyJihad is to not take the simple things for granted' What's yours?" (#MyJihad 2017).

This past July, another prominent Muslim American activist, Linda Sarsour gave a speech at the annual Islamic Society of North America in Chicago, encouraging Muslims to reclaim the term *jihad* (Sarsour, 2017). Sarsour explained how a man asked the Muslim Prophet Mohammed, "What is the best form of Jihad?" and the Prophet Mohammed's response was, "A word of truth in front of a tyrant ruler or leader. That is the best form of Jihad" (Sarsour 2017). Sarsour continued her speech by passionately saying,

> And, I hope that we, when we stand up to those that oppress our communities that Allah accepts from us that as a form of jihad. That we are struggling against tyrants and rulers not only abroad in the Middle East or on the other side of the world, but here in these United States of America, where you have fascists and white supremacists and Islamophobes reigning in the White House (Sarsour 2017).

Sarsour viewed systemic racism as a form of *greater jihad* and encouraged other Muslims to make their voices heard and to be involved in American politics so they can help end Islamophobia.

News and Politics: Inextricably Linked

Participants in this study were asked how American political media portrays Indians and Pakistanis residing in South Asia as well as Pakistani Americans and Indian Americans. All 42 participants reported that American political rhetoric about Pakistan and Pakistani Americans is negative, and 38 of participants said political rhetoric about India and Indian Americans is negative as well. Three participants argued that India was portrayed positively, and one participant said India and Indian Americans are not talked about in the news. Although I did not ask participants about Arab countries, Arabs, and Arab Americans, many participants would discuss American political portrayals of them because Islam is racialized as an ambiguous category that includes Arabs and South Asians, also known as brown.

Abdulrahman Al-Zuhayyan wrote a media congruence dissertation on the link between United States news outlets reporting on Saudi Arabia before the Iraq War, and its influence on the political relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Al-Zuhayyan conducted a study that found that 25 percent of United States political rhetoric was influenced by news outlets (Al-Zuhayyan 2006: 158). As a result, people believed that the Saudi Arabian government promoted the spread of terrorism through Islam, its culture, formal teaching (Willis 2007: 64-65), and by manipulating the common people into joining their forces (Al-Zuhayyan 2006: 2). According to Al-Zuhayyan,

> Consequently, Saudi Arabia was viewed as creating an atmospheric conducive to terrorist organizations to recruit susceptible and vulnerable Muslims, especially Saudis, to commit terrorist attacks on the United States. In addition, the US mainstream media pointed out that Saudi Arabia restricts these ideologues the freedom of expression at home but encourages them to vent their anger at the United States (Al-Zuhayyan 2006:

3).

With this mindset, the American news coverage generalized the entire nation of Saudi Arabia and Islam as threats to the West, liberal democracy and Christianity. News organizations also neglected to investigate the perspectives of Muslim Americans and Muslims abroad in regards to terrorism as described:

> These media organizations committed a strategic mistake by only addressing the US people and completely ignoring Arab and Muslim audiences, who are the most concerned with US government's objectives in their world, as the content of messages produced by these media including US press are communicated to the Middle East by Arab and Muslim media (Al-Zuhayyan 2006: 159).

Using racially and religiously charged language for news coverage about Muslim-majority countries and mass violence influences political rhetoric which marginalizes Arab American and South Asian Americans through the promotion of fear-based and discriminatory governmental policies. For instance, shortly after 9/11, the USA-PATRIOT Act (United and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) was passed and allowed the United States to racially profile Arab American and South Asian American individuals. The USA-PATRIOT Act also allowed the United States government to heavily profile Muslims in general, according to research (Domke, Graham, Coe, John, Coopman 2006: 291). According to Suniana Maria,

> The Patriot Act has violated basic constitutional rights of due process and free speech, and in effect, sacrificed the liberties of specific minority groups in exchange for a presumed sense of "safety" of the larger majority by creating an ambiguously defined category of "domestic terrorism" (Maira 2004: 219).

Since many Americans were in a state of hysteria and were not educated about Islam or Muslim majority countries, views regarding racial profiling significantly changed. Before the 9/11 attacks only twenty percent of Americans were in favor of law enforcement being allowed to racially profile people. However, after 9/11 attacks, sixty percent of Americans condoned law enforcement's use of racial profiling, particularly "directed toward Arabs and Muslims" (Maria 2004: 219). Consequently, the United States government detained South Asian and Arab men. According to Maria,

> As part of the domestic "War on Terror", at least 1200 and up to 3000 Muslim immigrant men were rounded up and detained in the aftermath of 9/11, without any criminal charges, some in high security prisons. Nearly forty percent of the detainees are thought to be Pakistani nationals (Maira 2004: 220).

As a result of these unconstitutional detainments and unrelenting hysteria, families became separated, and at least 15,000 Pakistani people fled the United States. Some people sought asylum in Canada while others emigrated to Europe or Pakistan by the year 2003 (Maira 2004: 220). Other South Asian Americans and Middle Eastern Americans decided to continue living in America but with continued scrutiny from authorities and Americans who were not of South Asian or Arab heritage. Immigrants who were not American citizens were forced to live in even more secrecy (Maria 2004: 220-221).

Unfortunately, the same fear mongering and Islamophobic sentiments were an essential component of Donald J. Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. One such example was Trump's use of former Navy seal Charles Higbie's endorsement in a campaign advertisement titled, *Donald Trump: The Enemy* (2016). The dialogue of advertisement follows:

> Charles Higbie: As a U.S. Navy SEAL, I did two tours in Iraq, in Baghdad, in Fallujah.

> I faced the enemy on the battlefield and know what it takes to defeat them. The Orlando tragedy is a stark reminder that the battlefield and the enemy is moving here to our shores and our communities. But this enemy won't be defeated by taking away our guns or by weak leaders in denial who won't even call out the enemy by name. This enemy will only be defeated with strong leadership by a commander in chief who understands this threat and is willing to make tough choices to protect America. Donald Trump is that leader. He has the toughness and resolve to defeat radical Islamic terrorism. Donald Trump will give our military and national security agencies the tools and resources they need to protect our citizens. The stakes are high, and the decision is clear. Join millions of active-duty military members and veterans like me to stand with Donald Trump (Donald Trump: The Enemy 2016).

Another campaign advertisement titled, *Donald Trump: Concerned* (2016) took a different approach to the same Islamophobic and jingoistic narrative by having a white woman who appeared to be a housewife lament,

> Sure, I get some grief when I say I'm voting for Donald Trump. But you know what? I want to protect my family. Paris, San Bernardino, and now Brussels. I want a president that will keep us safe. We need to control our borders and stop letting in dangerous people. Trump will do that. And Ted Cruz? He wanted to let in more Syrian refugees and give amnesty to illegal immigrants. That won't protect my family. Donald Trump will (Donald Trump: Concerned 2016).

This type of racism, jingoism, and Islamophobic rhetoric allowed Donald J. Trump to win the Electoral College vote necessary to clinch the presidency (Desilver 2016).

After winning the election, Trump signed two executive orders this past January that exclusively target Arab, South Asian, and African Muslims including refugees. According to Trump's executive order titled, *Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States*,

> Numerous foreign-born individuals have been convicted or implicated in terrorism-related crimes since September 11, 2001, including foreign nationals who entered the United States after receiving visitor, student, or employment visas, or who entered through the United States refugee resettlement program. Deteriorating conditions in certain countries due to war, strife, disaster, and civil unrest increase the likelihood that terrorists will use any means necessary to enter the United States. The United States must be vigilant during the visa-issuance process to ensure that those approved for admission do not intend to harm Americans and that they have no ties to terrorism (Trump 2017).

Trump's other executive order, *Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States*, had the same rhetoric but emphasized tracking and deporting immigrants, primarily Muslim and Latin American immigrants, who met the following criteria:

> (a) Have been convicted of any criminal offense; (b) Have been charged with any criminal offense, where such charge has not been resolved; (c) Have committed acts that constitute a chargeable criminal offense; (d) Have engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation in connection with any official matter or application before a governmental agency; (e) Have abused any program related to receipt of public benefits; (f) Are subject to a final order of removal, but who have not complied with their legal obligation to depart the United States; or (g) In the judgement of an

> immigration officer, otherwise pose a risk to public safety or national security (Trump 2017).

The document also financially threatens sanctuary cities or states that do not follow these orders by stating, "Ensure that jurisdictions that fail to comply with applicable Federal law do not receive Federal funds, except as mandated by law" (Trump 2017).

One participant, Vincent, likened Trump's executive orders that target Muslims to the same line of thinking that lead to the Japanese internment camps in the United States as a response to the Pearl Harbor attack during World War II. According to Vincent,

> I think with the media's…at least with the administration's trying to view [it] is that especially bringing up a Muslim ban, you know? So, I feel like that's what they're trying to portray and it's the same tactic they've used like, in the past history. So, the same thing with like, the Japanese Americans in concentration camps back then. They viewed them as bad people, you know? That 'Round them all up!'. [It's] the same thing right now. They're trying to round them all up by doing this ban. Trying to like, 'Oh, you need to like, kick them out!' or 'Prevent terrorism!'. [They're] striking fear in the masses so they can believe that. And, people are very gullible. It's very easy to trick people in general. So, that's what I think (Vincent, gay male, 25, Vietnamese American).

Vincent thus emphasizes that Trump's orders, just like the Japanese internment camps, are based on racism and irrational fear.

Only three immigrants who were from countries listed in Trump's Muslim ban have been found to be guilty of domestic terrorism in the United States between the years 2008 and 2016. Those three immigrants only constitute one percent of Americans guilty of domestic

terror offenses (Neiwert 2017: 2). It is also important to note that during the same time frame, right-wing extremists were almost twice as likely to commit acts of terrorism as American Muslims (Neiwert 2017: 1; Neiwert 2017). During this period, there were a total of 63 acts of domestic terrorism committed by Muslims as opposed to 115 acts of domestic terrorism committed by right-wing extremists. There were a total of 201 acts of domestic terror between 2008 and 2016 (Neiwert 2017). The remaining acts of terror, 19, were committed by left-wing extremists. What is even more striking is that 76 percent of those 63 acts of domestic terrorism committed by Muslims were prevented, whereas only 35 percent of the 115 domestic terror acts caused by right-wing extremists were prevented (Neiwert 2017).

Why Media Matters: Pakistani American Perspectives

Disproportionately aired news about crimes, federal policies, and wars concerning Muslim-majority countries, Arab Americans, and Muslim South Asian Americans have fostered a form of nationalism that requires *cultural citizenship*, regardless of having *political citizenship* (Miller 2001:1) and *economic citizenship* (Miller 2001: 1). According to Toby Miller, "Cultural citizenship concerns the maintenance and development of cultural lineage through education, custom, language, and religion and the positive acknowledgement of difference in and by the mainstream" (Miller 2001: 2). *Cultural citizenship* is also described as having the ability to fit neatly into mainstream cultural standards and having, "a deeper sense of belonging and acceptance within a nation that long rejected them" (Lopez 2016: 4). *Political citizenship* involves having the right to participate in the country's electoral system by voting for presidents or local officials (Miller 2001: 1). *Economic citizenship* is when individuals have the right to work, have the option to have

access to health care, as well as retirement security (Miller 2001: 2). So even if individuals are American citizens who are allotted the same rights as any other American citizen, they still have the social hurdle of proving they can assimilate to Eurocentric standards of what it means to be American.

Eurocentric standards of what it means to be an American include anything from eliminating certain accents while speaking English, diet, clothing, and practicing certain religions. According to six social psychology studies, to be American is implicitly synonymous with being white (Devos & Banaji 2005: 447) person's ethnic background indicates if they are "real" Americans regardless of how many generations of their family have been United States citizens. This thesis seeks to identify how American media and politics have effected Pakistani Americans' cultural citizenship through discussions with participants.

Banhi, an individual whom I interviewed, appeared to be the most affected by issues of *cultural citizenship*. She described her experience of being subjected to questions concerning her *cultural citizenship,* because of her Pakistani American heritage and her Muslim identity. She explained how she constantly explains her faith and ethnicity to people who are suspicious of her or Islam:

> We're not all the same. And really…it's actually really depressing. Like, it sometimes gets really hard. And you have this...and it really causes this identity crisis in people. Especially people like us growing up. We really don't know, you know? Like… what to believe. We're constantly told like, A) we're not true members of society and B) Like, we're somehow predisposed to like, violence and oppressing women. You know, everything and then some. And especially when you know the truth, and you

> know that this is all propaganda. Everybody else knows it's propaganda too but they still don't really do anything about it. It's…I mean that's basically, not caring and ignoring, which hurts more (Banhi, heterosexual female, 24, Pakistani American).

Banhi's frank discussion reveals that American media and politics have negatively affected her sense of identity starting at a young age. This finding highlights the pervasive effects on Americans of all ages, including young children.

Bilan, a different participant, emphasized how news and political coverage is not holistic when it reports on stories regarding Muslim-majority countries, South Asian American Muslims, and Arab American Muslims. According to Bilan, "It's not always negative. But, it's not a 100 percent whole portrayal [of events]. Sometimes it's hostile. Sometimes it's condescending. You want to lump them in a box but they're just as varied as anyone else" (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani American).

Another participant, Akilah, described the current political climate under the Trump administration by pointing out the careless lumping together of South Asian, South Asian American, Arab, and Arab American individuals. Akilah described American news and politics as follows:

> There's a real...unfortunate...ugly brand of xenophobia in parts of our country. Especially right now. And, there's a lot of nationalism that's pretty dangerous and ugly in our country. And, I think a lot of anti-foreigner, especially anti-Brown sentiments in our country. So, I think to have more interesting and sympathetic portrayals of South Asian men would be helpful (Akilah, heterosexual female, 33, Pakistani American).

Interestingly, the news organizations and politicians who generalize Muslims, or people who "fit the Brown description," was brought up by Jamila, another participant, from

a different perspective. Jamila was not bothered by being placed into a broader South Asian American category. Jamila explained it this way,

> I mean, this is just me, just because I grew up here and I moved from Pakistan when I was one. So, I don't really have the distinction as much at least mentally between Indian and Pakistani. So, I think in American media they often don't make that distinction either. So, I guess like you said before, they are kind of grouped together. People often think like, 'Oh, it's the same place'. So, I think there's a lot of that (Jamila, heterosexual female, 30, Pakistani American).

When Pakistani American male participants were asked if they believed the media influenced what other Americans thought about their ethnic group, both of the participants said yes. Taimur, a participant whom I interviewed, described the way Pakistan, Pakistanis, and Pakistani Americans were portrayed on the news and politics as suspicious people. He also reported that local politicians have become slightly better with their portrayals of Pakistani Americans and Muslim Americans whereas the Trump administration has exacerbated the bias against Muslims and Pakistani Americans. Taimur described it this way,

> Especially you know, back in January, the Muslim...just to name one prominent event. The Muslim ban, and the travel ban, and all that. The country's affected and yeah, the Muslim registry that Trump is talking about. So, based on how they portray those things, how they write about that. I think it definitely affects...yep (Taimur, heterosexual male, 30, Pakistani American).

Taimur was quite apprehensive in his responses when asked if this type of biased news coverage and political rhetoric had influenced people's perceptions of him before talking to

him and during conversations. Taimur said,

> I don't...I think it affects how some people you know…I've had some interactions like that where I feel like you know, someone's treating me differently because of, you know, what the media puts out. But, I, you know, some [people]. And, in those instances yeah, it's been evident while they've been talking to me that there's...you know, they've been acting a certain way. Yeah, I guess that's not a very clear answer, but sorry" to which I said, "No, that's ok! I want you to be comfortable".

Taimur also emphasized that he only encounters people who treat him negatively because of his ethnic group once in a while.

Azzan also believed that bias news coverage, the Trump administration policies, and political rhetoric affects Americans of other ethnic group's perception of him before talking to him. But, he reported not having any issues while talking to people. Azzan described the Trump administration's relationship with South Asia this way,

> Indians in India are sort of promoted as a democratic, business friendly, alternative to communist China. So, there's a huge lobby for them especially as Modi is taking over and Trump has the presidency. It's two xenophobic, Islamophobic, right-wing leaders in office together. And, that's basically two peas in a pod. Pakistanis, you know, they're basically portrayed just like other Middle Eastern you know, terrorists. 'They're just up to no good', 'You can't trust them' (Azzan, heterosexual male, 28, Pakistani American).

Azzan also mentioned a positive Pakistani male figure during the 2016 presidential election named Khizr Khan, a father of a deceased US military captain. He said it was disheartening to see Donald Trump unabashedly disrespect Khan's family throughout his campaign for

being Muslim, while at the same time claiming he cared about the military. According to Azzan,

> He's a Pakistani American, Harvard trained lawyer, and his son was a soldier of the U.S. army and was killed in action. Killed in the war in Iraq. He stood up against the bigotry of Donald Trump and ultimately, he failed. So, yeah, I think it was a really clarifying moment to see that the United States would choose somebody who would insult somebody who's given so much to this country. And, especially since Donald Trump is a draft dodger. So, I felt really positive towards him (Azzan, heterosexual male, 28, Pakistani American).

Arguably, the most powerful Hillary Clinton 2016 campaign advertisement, titled *Captain Khan*

(2016), featured Khizr Khan. The advertisement went as follows:

> In 2004, my son was stationed in Iraq. He saw a suicide bomber approaching and my son moved forward to stop the bomber. When the bomb exploded, he saved everyone in his unit. Only one American soldier died. My son was Captain Humayun Khan. He was 27 years old and he was a Muslim American. I want to ask Mr. Trump; would my son have a place in your America?

When Azzan was asked how he felt about Khizr Khan being featured in *Capitan Khan*, he replied,

> That was a great ad. It was positive. It really included Muslim Americans in the American narrative. You know, like in a lot of countries like in Israel, to be a part of the narrative is to be a part of the armed services so...and he was quite open that he didn't support the Iraq war" (Azzan, heterosexual male, 28, Pakistani American).

Another participant, Banhi, unaware that Khizr Khan tried to convince his son not to become a soldier during the Iraq War (Khan 2017) shared a vastly different perspective on Khan's support for Hillary Clinton and Donald J. Trump's response. Banhi was displeased with Khizr Khan being a part of Hillary Clinton's campaign as shown:

> I mean obviously Trump is just crazy and he was going to say something ridiculous about it right? The fact that people were so shocked I think was funny. I was like, 'what did you expect?' you know? But what's interesting with Khzir Khan is that he...you know, very much stood on the platform of U.S. military, right? And, a lot...it's divided. Personally, I might also be bias. But the way that I see it is like, most people in our communities have a lot of mixed feelings about the military. About being...the actions of our government especially overseas. Especially in Pakistan, you know? They're not positive and essentially, when you think about it, our military is just one big like, imperialistic void. To go out and like, conquer and divide (Banhi, heterosexual female, 24, Pakistani American).

When Banhi was asked about Khizr Khan being featured in the *Captain Khan* advertisement, she added another layer to her criticism. Banhi was upset with routine deadly US drone strikes in Pakistan ("Will I Be Next?" 7-9, 12) and that Hillary Clinton was an essential politician in the Obama administration. She did not think the Democratic Party was sincere when they spoke positively about Muslims:

> It's really interesting to watch, especially white Americans and particular celebrities, use Muslims. And, whether you're, you know…from the Middle East or you're from Pakistan or anywhere when it helps drive their narrative and when it helps them look good. And, then kind of ignore us and reject us when we're not helpful to them. You

> know? Like, it doesn't suit Hillary Clinton's narrative when Muslims would be like, 'Well, then stop bombing our countries. Stop'. You know, like, 'Stop…stop funding wars that will literally destroy our communities'. But then it's ok for her to use Khizr Khan. Cause literally, he was used kind of like a prop just like Malala [Yousafzai] was (Banhi, heterosexual female, 24, Pakistani American).

These participant interviews confirm the important role of American media and politics in South Asian Americans' sense of cultural citizenship and inclusion within the United States. The association of South Asian American and Muslim characters on television with terrorism troubles participants who find the connection to be irrational and unjust. In addition, this research helps to identify a major obstacle for young South Asian Americans developing a sense of American identity.

Does Islamophobia Even Apply to Indians?: Indian American Perspectives

Though Indian Americans, Pakistani Americans, other South Asian Americans, and Arab Americans have differing politics, cultures, religions, and languages they are often lumped together in a broad and heavily biased brown Muslim category. Superficial American media coverage of terrorism often fails to offer a nuanced portrait of America's varied minority experiences. Part of this thesis sought to identify how Indian Americans respond to how they are portrayed in American media and politics.

There are two components to this section. The first section covers the way Indian Americans are portrayed in American news media and politics. The other section discusses hate crimes directed toward Arab Americans and South Asian Americans as a consequence of Islamophobia and Islam being racialized. When Indian American participants discussed the

portrayal of India, Indians, and Indian Americans in the news and politics, they usually discussed their lack of prominent politicians and inclusion. Safal, a person whom I interviewed, described it this way:

> I think [they're] always more docile. There really aren't that many Indian American politicians. But, docile, reserved, a lot of characteristics that are sort of like in Hindu or just like, Indian culture that's like, 'Oh, you should be respectful. You should do this and you should do this' (Safal, heterosexual male, 20, Indian American).

Mokshi, another participant, explained the lack of Indian Americans in news and politics as a result of Indian American disinterest. According to Mokshi, "So, I mean honestly like, from my perspective, Indians don't really care about politics and stuff like that. They're just here to do what they came here to do and I think that's how they'll always be" (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

The only male politician who was brought up regularly was Bobby Jindal, former Republican Governor of Louisiana and a presidential candidate during the 2016 election (Quinlan 2016), and none of these participants were pleased with him. Nagulan, an individual whom I interviewed, explained his impression of Jindal this way:

> Overall, other than Bobby Jindal, I can't think of anyone else in American politics who has captured the media limelight. And, Bobby Jindal hasn't done a really good job. He comes across as an idiot and somebody who's not super...how do I say this...who doesn't have the best interest of people in mind. Let's just leave it at that. I wanted to say batshit crazy but, essentially other than that I can't really think of anyone else (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

Nagulan along with some other participants, like Aarohi, reported that Jindal had tried his best

to erase his Indian American identity even though his parents are immigrants, which felt like a betrayal in a couple of ways. Firstly, these participants did not appreciate how Jindal helped perpetuate the notion that extreme assimilation is the only way to be a "real" American. Secondly, they did not like that Jindal is generally anti-immigration, but makes exceptions for those who are willing to give up their cultural identities and completely assimilate to Eurocentric American cultures. When asked about Donald J. Trump's Muslim travel ban on *Fox & Friends* Jindal said,

> Look, the president's first and most important responsibility is to keep us safe. Now you guys may remember, it was almost two years ago. I went to London. I gave an important speech talking about the threat of radical Islamic terrorism. I believe I was the first back then to say, 'Immigration without assimilation is not immigration. It's an invasion' (Jindal 2017).

To hear this line of political rhetoric from an Indian American politician, especially considering that prominent Indian American political voices are fairly rare, was disheartening for participants. Aarohi offered her perspective:

> I think the people in politics right now like Bobby Jindal, there's a woman. I can't remember her name. But, they're often portrayed as betraying Indian culture in a way because they're very…Bobby Jindal at least is very Republican. And very...his opinions on immigrants are very 'No immigration!' and very like, an antithesis to who he is. So, they're either portrayed as like, 'Oh my God! They're traitors!' or they're portrayed as like, Oh! Look at this! That's so weird!', you know? It's never normal to have an Indian integrate into society other than in Silicon Valley (Aarohi, heterosexual female, 18, Indian American).

A majority of the Indian American male participants, seven out of nine, said they believe Americans of differing ethnic groups perceive them differently before speaking to them in part because of the news and political rhetoric, two participants said it depends on the location, one participant said he was not affected by it, and one participant was not sure. In addition, seven of the participants reported that Americans who are not South Asian judge them partially based on news and political rhetoric, three said that is not the case, and one said it depends on the individual. The Trump administration's rhetoric certainly did not help the situation.

Indian participants always discussed the Trump administration. They expressed concern about news organizations and politicians lumping all South Asians, South Asian Americans, Arabs, and Arab Americans together as if they are a cultural, economic, religious, and physical threat to Americans who practice Eurocentric versions of American culture. All nine of the Indian American male participants reported that they believe American news and politics affects the way Americans of other ethnic groups perceive them. According to Nagulan,

> But, the truth is I think that in Middle America it would, right? Because it would. It brings to the forefront this narrative of 'us versus them'. And, it is 'implicit' and 'inherent'. And, all of Trump's statements and all of [his] recent rhetoric, political rhetoric. That represents Anglo-Saxon, Christian America and [doesn't] represent anything that's not. I don't know if people appreciate the nuance [of ethnic groups] and they're not going to care either. I read in the media, that when Trump was running, there were a bunch of Indians that were like, supportive of Trump, right? They're all Hindu nationalists. Anyway, whatever their reason is, the thing that

> boggles my mind is that Trump supporters, Steve Bannon or his elk, they're not going to care. They're not going to be like, 'Oh! You're Indian and not Pakistani!'. In their mind, you're one and the same (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

Mokshi also had concerns about the Trump administration's effect on conservatives. But, he was also not impressed with liberals as shown:

> I mean, I think right now it's just ridiculous because there's too many left or right-wing people who are just, I don't know. I think the Trump presidency has taken a huge toll on India. With Barack Obama, there was none of this nonsense and I think that has a lot to do with people kind of coming out there. And, just because he (Trump) is the president, and just because of his views, how he is as a person that's kind of let people like, give them an outlet to say and do what they really want (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

A couple of the participants were more optimistic in regards to the effects of the Trump administration on Americans who are not South Asian. According to Aarish, "many people think our dear president is crazy so probably they cannot be wooed by that. Maybe his acting in a particular way [will] make them think otherwise" (Aarish, heterosexual male, 40, Indian American). Another participant believed that Trump's rhetoric and executive orders made Democrats more politically involved as shown: "I feel like where I am, I feel like Trump is...they don't buy that garbage. If anything, it mobilized the left and like, makes them stronger" (Aatif, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

However, other participants feared the Trump administration's hostile political rhetoric against Muslim, South Asian, and Arab immigrants. These participants viewed Trump's generalizations and racial lumping as contorted and dangerous to Arab American

and South Asian American communities. According to Zubin, an individual whom I interviewed, “It sort of makes it difficult to understand what politicians are talking about when it comes to immigration or education, or whatever it may be" (Zubin, heterosexual male, 18, Indian American).

Racial lumping and Islamophobia reinforces the Eurocentric standard of what an American “should” be and leads to a rise in racial as well as *cultural citizenship*-based nationalism due to the fear of Muslims and Muslim Americans committing mass violence. Mokshi, an individual whom I interviewed, explained just how broad racial lumping really is:

> It's really hard to categorize people as Pakistani versus Indian, versus like, Bangladesh[i] because like, that's just an example. Just because there is no…I don't know. I just feel like there is no distinction amongst Americans so it kind of gives a blurred line for these groups. A lot of people will like...for example like, Sikh and Jain are two different religions but people don't see it that way. So, it's really hard to kind of...I feel at this point you're Brown and I feel like that puts you in one category whether you're Muslim or you're Hindu. Or whether you're Pakistani or Indian you know? (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Aarohi, a participant in this study, also pointed out how South Asian Americans are treated like foreigners because of their phenotypic appearance. She added another layer to the discussion by explaining how the same generalizations about South Asian American immigrants are extended to South Asian Americans whose families have been American citizens for generations:

> For a lot of Americans, Indian and Pakistani people are immigrants. Which, creates an

> issue because there are a second and third generation Indian people whose parents weren't from India like mine and who didn't move here. So, I'm first generation. My parents moved here before I was born and I was born here, lived in India for a while and they're like, second, third-generation people. They have their own kids and their kids are often very American. And, in a way being labeled an immigrant is very hard for them because they really aren't. They haven't had that immigrant experience to be labeled that (Aarohi, heterosexual female, 18, Indian American).

This type of broad racial lumping and politicization of Islam since the 9/11 attacks have politicized South Asian and Arabic cultural and religious symbols and languages (Mataloni 2016; Beydoun 2016; Suleiman 2016). There have been cases where racial lumping, coupled with Islamophobia, have been linked to hate crimes committed against Muslims of an array of ethnic backgrounds, including Arab Americans and South Asian Americans who are assumed to be Muslims solely based on their phenotypic appearance and or apparel (Muslim Advocates 2017; SAALT 2017; SAALT 2001). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center's *Hate Map* there are 917 active hate groups in the United States. One hundred and one of those active hate groups are anti-Muslim, which marks a 197 percent increase since 2015, and there are 14 active anti-immigrant hate groups across the United States (SPLC 2016).

Farjad, a participant in this study, pointed out that the American Sikh community has faced backlash for the 9/11 attacks as well as the Trump administration's political rhetoric and consequential executive orders. According to Farjad,

> Unfortunately, people think...I mean right after certain events we're all flattened to it. [In] the Sikh community if you have a turban you're just portrayed as those are 'the bad guys'. Again, they had nothing to do with it. So, that was terrible! I mean, the

> violence that happened in particular just because of how you look in a particular community, is being persecuted against (Farjad, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

There are about 24,000,000 Sikhs globally and around 92 percent live in South Asia. One source claims there are about 300,000 Sikhs in America (Nesbitt, 2016: 3), while the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund estimates that there are around 700,000 American Sikhs (Learn about Sikhs 2017). *The 5 Ks*, otherwise known as "the five outward signs required of a Sikh," (Nesbitt 2016L 47-48) are 1) *kes* (uncut hair), 2) *kangha* (comb), *kachh* (cotton breeches), 4) *kirpan* (sword), and 5) *kara* (steel or iron bangle) (Nesbitt 2016: 48). Another component of Sikhism is the wearing of a turban which covers their *kes* (uncut hair), and to maintain facial hair that can range from shorter lengths to around their chest. In many cases, Sikhs have been mistaken for Muslims who decide to wear turbans and have facial hair because many Americans associate that religious style with Osama Bin Laden (Stanford Peace Innovation Lab 2013: 31). According to Wendy L. Klein,

> Images of those thought responsible for the multiple attacks appeared on television, internet websites, and in newspapers and magazines. The representations spread rapidly through the media, and Osama Bin Laden became the prototypical image of a 'terrorist': a dark-skinned, turbaned, bearded male (Klein 2007: 3).

As a result, Sikhs are at a higher risk of being racially profiled (Nesbitt 2016: 94; SAALT 2016: 12; Hauser 2016), targeted for non-lethal, anti-Muslim hate crimes (Muslim Advocates 2017, SAALT 2017: 12; SAALT 2001: 9, 12-13, 15-17, 24, 28, 35-37, 41-46, 48) or are even killed because people thought they were Muslim (Muslim Advocates 2017). Even though Sikhs are one of the most likely Indian American groups to be targeted for hate crimes and

other forms of harassment, they are certainly not the only Indian American religious groups facing Islamophobic attacks. Hindu Americans as well as Indian Americans of other faiths have been targets of lethal and nonlethal hate crimes (Muslim Advocates 2017; SAALT 2001: 40, 43). According to one participant, Mokshi:

> I think right now there's obviously a lot of hate crimes going on with Indians and with the right portrayal in the media it could obviously influence a lot of people and kind of help shorten the gap between Americans. How Americans view Indians versus how they actually are. Like, I feel like obviously there's a huge language barrier, a huge cultural barrier. But, with the right type of portrayal and with more exposure, I think people could get more accustomed to who we are…and kind of more open to who we are so that, you know. Stuff like murdering random Indians or hurting people like, just for the sake of their race you know, kind of comes to a halt (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Recent reported hate crimes have shown that anti-Muslim attacks reached at least the same number of hate crimes days after the 9/11 attacks (Patel & Levinson-Waldman 2017: 7; Pew Research Center 2016). American Muslims and Americans who are suspected of being Muslims based on their phenotypic appearance are just as likely to be targets of these hate crimes.

Heterosexual Females and LGBTQI+ Individual's Perspectives

This part of the chapter discusses how some participants were not influenced by negative American news coverage and political rhetoric unlike the majority who were influenced by American news coverage and political rhetoric during George W. Bush's presidency, Barack

Obama's presidency, and the current Trump administration.

When participants who were romantically attracted to men were asked if the media has ever influenced their view of Indian and Pakistani men, 23 participants said yes while only eight said no. Three out of the eight participants reported that the media had not influenced their perceptions of Indian American or Pakistani American men; this included two Indian American women and one Pakistani American woman. The other five participants who argued their perceptions of Indian American and Pakistani American men were not influenced by the media included one Puerto Rican man, two white American men, and two white American women.

The first reason why these participants were not influenced by negative American news coverage and political rhetoric was their own South Asian American identities. According to Bilan, an individual whom I interviewed, "I don't get my cues from the media when it comes to...I have a connection. I am 'them'" (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani American). Sajni, another South Asian American participant, shared the same sentiment and explained it this way, "I don't think so for me because I have been exposed to a lot of Indian and Pakistani men like, before I've ever seen them in portrayals in media. So, I don't think it's changed my perception. It just makes me more upset about it I guess" (Sajni, heterosexual female, 20, Indian American).

Participants of different ethnic groups reported not being influenced by negative American news coverage or political rhetoric because they were exposed to Indian American or Pakistani American men in real life. One participant named Casey explained it this way,

> So, I feel like I was exposed to people who fell under this demographic in my real life before I was exposed to it in the media which is kind of funny. Like, I don't know if

> I've ever told anyone this. Like, the first boy I remember having a crush on like, had a turban and he was like, in my first-grade class (Casey, heterosexual female, 26, white American).

Casey also reported having a close Pakistani male friend in school and during that same time period Afghan students attended her school as well. She had also studied abroad in Gujarat, India for a part of her bachelor's degree and currently has numerous South Asian and South Asian American friends, one of which is her best friend. Casey also expressed, "I really don't think that the evolution that I hope is happening in the media has impacted how I felt about them. But, I think that how I feel about them has impacted what I want to see from my media (Casey, heterosexual female, 26, white American).

Another participant named Benno had a similar experience to Casey but took his criticisms of American news and political rhetoric further by saying,

> I'm very displeased like, when things like the banning of Muslim people came in the news just because of their religion and things like that. And, me having friends that are from [the] Middle East and are Muslims like...that upsets me because I just think about like, they maybe could not have gotten the chance to come here just because of what someone else did. They really did nothing to actually hurt anyone. They are trying to better themselves. They just are like, trying to help their children and it's just upsetting to see like, how people automatically just want to dismiss them. Just because of where they come from and their religion (Benno, gay male, 20's, Puerto Rican American).

Drew, a person whom I interviewed, described the Pakistani Americans and Pakistanis he knew in real life as follows:

> The Pakistani men that I know in real life are very successful, hardworking fathers and husbands who own a business other than 7/11. Who are doctors like, I was just telling you about my doctor, Dr. Korai and other Pakistani men. I mean, that's kind of been the new norm outside of media (Drew, gay male, 45, white American).

Drew also explained how negatively South Asians, South Asian Americans, Arabs, and Arab Americans were portrayed on American news outlets and in political rhetoric. He also reported thinking these portrayals were not fair as shown:

> As terrorists! I know it sounds awful but it's really almost that simple. It's kind of like that, you know, innocent until proven guilty but it's the opposite of that. It's just based on your looks. And, just based on your dress and whether you wear specific clothing. Or your religious beliefs have you doing certain things that aren't the American norm. You're automatically going to be portrayed as the enemy. You're automatically going to be portrayed as somebody that is the threat to our country because you're not a white, Anglo-Saxon, pick-up driving, rednecky kind of guy, you know? (Drew, gay male, 45, white American).

Easton, another participant, relayed that Pakistan tends to be a topic of contention in the conservative area where he grew up, whereas India is not typically associated with hostility. Easton explained it this way,

> It seems like cause Pakistan is sort of very much at the center of our consciousness politically...because of terrorist activity happening in that section of the world that is sort of more like, a buzzword where people are more willing to buy into of that being like…a place of unrest as opposed to India which is just like, you know, different. When you think of India you think of like, Hindu[ism], and faith, and karma (Easton,

bisexual male, 25, white American).

Easton had Indian American friends in high school and college. Interestingly, his last name was another way he bonded with Indian Americans. According to Easton,

> When I met them in real life I realized they were just kind of like me. I don't know, I felt...this is kind of dumb. But like, in college I met somebody whose last name is Gill who is Indian and like, I felt this comradery because we share this last name. We became good friends and I mean, he just seemed like a typical person to me (Easton, bisexual male, 25, white American).

As these accounts show, having personal relationships with Indian American and Pakistani Americans whether they are on a professional basis, friendships, or romantic counteracts bias news coverage and negative political rhetoric.

However, the remaining 22 participants reported being influenced by biased American news coverage and negative political rhetoric came from various racial and ethnic backgrounds including: ten white Americans, three African Americans, three Pakistani Americans, two Indian Americans, two East Asian Americans, and three Latino Americans.

Chloe, a person whom I interviewed, did not grow up in a town with many Arab Americans or South Asian Americans. She reported feeling afraid when she saw strangers who were Arab, Arab American or even people who "looked like them", like South Asian and South Asian American people. She began fearing them in elementary school and did not realize she was being bigoted until high school. According to Chloe,

> I think because of when I grew up…where I grew up, I was like, very scared of anyone who looked like 'them'. 'Them' being the terrorists on 9/11. When I was younger I think I definitely developed some prejudice towards them. I didn't realize

> where it was coming from until I was sitting at an airport and realized like, 'Oh, shit! I'm praying because I see someone who looks Arab, or Middle Eastern, or Indian, or whatever. And, I have no idea why I feel this way'. But then I realized, this is the media, this is being told to us to feel a certain way. Literally these people like, they're just not that much different. You know, it probably wasn't until I had realized that in high school. And, it wasn't until probably college that I went around more people and different people where like, I find Arab men very attractive (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American).

Interestingly, Chloe was able to overcome her prejudiced snap-judgements when she moved to a more diverse setting and actually interacted with Arab Americans and South Asian Americans.

Celeste, another participant, had similar experiences. Celeste was also used to seeing Arab, Arab American, South Asian, and South Asian American men as terrorists in American news coverage and political rhetoric while not having a lot of exposure to them either. However, she also avoided interacting with Arab Americans and South Asian Americans. According to Celeste, "When I was younger and less aware of being a jerk, I definitely had like, unasked thoughts of like...pushing off that person. And like, that person doesn't matter. I should probably be afraid of this person based on media portrayal" (Celeste, 27, polyamorous female, 27, white American). But, after moving to a more diverse area, Celeste became more open to changing this part of herself and not being afraid of interacting with Indian American and Pakistani American men.

Another participant named Beckett also previously lived in a predominantly conservative white area. According to Beckett,

> I have definitely observed a lot in a lot more conservative circles a very harsh view of all of like, Arab culture and Muslim culture with the war coverage in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran. And, I feel like that has really poisoned a lot of people's views of Indian and Pakistani men. It's interesting though because I think that…I'm sure that there are still people who continued more in that direction with the actions of our current president and current administration. But, I also think that there are a lot of people that I observed with fairly harsh views maybe a year ago who are starting to see...who are starting to question a lot of that. In particular, in light of the sort of outrage over the current administration and I wonder whether or there's a sort of net change in the opposite direction because of the pushback from so much of America regarding the abuse of the current administration (Beckett, bisexual polyamorous male, white American).

Beckett also elaborated on how he has been prejudiced because of snap-judgements but how they were abated once he knew South Asian American men on a personal level. He described it like this:

> I think that the influence that the media has in my experience is probably mostly with like, first meeting someone. That's where the prejudice creeps in. But, knowing a person over a longer period of time, a lot of that gets eaten away by just learning who the person is. So yes, it has influenced me. My perceptions of people are my experiences with them. But, also not necessarily on a permanent basis (Beckett, bisexual polyamorous male, white American).

Now that Beckett has worked through these issues more, especially with the outcome of the presidential election, he reported believing that it is essential for Indian Americans,

Pakistani Americans, as well as other racial groups, to be perceived as being just as American as anyone else.

Another participant named Celia had studied abroad in Tamil Nadu, India when she was attending college so she had a different perspective regarding the portrayal of Indians in American news outlets. She also elaborated on how Pakistan and Pakistani people are portrayed in American news outlets and political rhetoric. According to Celia,

> So again, I have a different awareness of the news than someone who's never been to India might. So, I'm aware of Hindu nationalism. The fact you know, that there's a lot of violence coming from Hindus as well as Muslims in South Asia. But, what you hear about in the news, you certainly hear all this stuff about Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan. You never hear anything like that about India. So, you know, if I think about the news portrayals of Pakistani men I immediately go to violence, us trying to kill them, trying to search them out, [Osama] Bin Laden being hidden there, you know? All of that stuff (Celia, lesbian female, 54, white American).

Celia also admitted to being quite influenced by negative news coverage and political rhetoric even when she had positive real-life experiences with South Asian Muslim Americans as shown:

> So, I went to…she's up there on my wall. I went to a diversity training by a Muslim chaplain here at Harvard. It was great and it made me afterwards look at women in burqas and sort of be like, 'Awww! They're like her and they're nice!', you know? But whatever, I'll just go on about it anyway. So, it really made a difference and then there was a Muslim in the news who killed people and then suddenly I'm sorry to say...I mean, I just reflected on how much the news portrayals affect my perspective.

> Suddenly again, I was looking at women in burqas and feeling negatively towards them. And, I don't want to feel that way. But, I hear something in the news and it really affects my feelings (Celia, lesbian female, 54, white American).

Some other participants like Estephan did not have as much to say about this portion of the interview because they had never thought about how American news outlets and political rhetoric could influence their real-life perceptions of Indian American and Pakistani American men. Jailene, a participant, was originally from the Dominican Republic and was not as exposed to American news and political rhetoric about India, Pakistan, and South Asian Americans as shown:

> Talking about men individually, I don't remember any Indian or Pakistani men in the politics. I only remember women but I don't remember any men. And, how they talk about India...and how they portray India and Pakistan, like I don't remember seeing any news like, related to those countries (Jailene, heterosexual female, Dominican American).

This chapter described how biased American news coverage and political rhetoric is commonplace because Arabs, Arab Americans, South Asians, and South Asian Americans are lumped together because of religion and a prototypical version of their phenotypic appearance. Building on established research on bias against minorities in American media, this study sought to identify responses to such media on South Asian Americans and others. By discussing the role of American media and politics with a wide-range of participants, this study can conclude that this type of news coverage and political rhetoric has affected Indian American and Pakistani American participants in real life. All of the Pakistani American participants were aware of how the news coverage, political rhetoric, and Trump's executive

orders had the potential to be dangerous or affect their relationships with other Americans. Indian American participants experienced othering as well but acknowledged that though the news coverage and political rhetoric about India and Indian Americans was not positive it was better than the news coverage and political rhetoric regarding Pakistan because of the generalizing and demonization of Islam. But, some of the Indian American participants did experience othering as well. Other Indian participants also expressed concern about Indian Americans being mistaken for Pakistani Americans or Arab Americans because Indians, especially Sikhs, have been targets for Islamophobic hate crimes. Participants who were not Pakistani Americans or Indian Americans tended to be influenced by the 9/11 attacks, biased news outlets, and negative political rhetoric when they did not have personal relationships with Pakistani Americans, Indian Americans, or Arab Americans. These particular participants were more likely to be afraid of Arabs, Arab Americans, South Asians, South Asian Americans, as well as Muslims in general. Crucially, however, according to what the participants reported, their fears could eventually lessen or even be completely abated by living in a more diverse area where they could have positive relationships with Arab Americans, Pakistani Americans, Indian Americans, and Muslims in general.

Chapter III

Findings: Is Media Really Linked to Romance?

The first two chapters discussed participant recollections and thoughts regarding American media portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men in television shows, films, news, and politics. Each of those chapters also explored Indian American and Pakistani American roles, political rhetoric about India and Pakistan, and news coverage of South Asian and Arab American criminals. This chapter discusses whether or not it is more difficult for Indian American and Pakistani American men to obtain romantic relationships because of biased news coverage, racially and religiously charged political rhetoric, desexualized roles, and terrorism tropes. In spite of some American films and television shows allowing Indian American and Pakistani American men to be cast for integral and multi-faceted roles, it was still difficult for Indian American and Pakistani American men to obtain romantic relationships whether they were hook-ups, dates, or marriages particularly if they were interracial.

Indian American Male Perspectives

Five out of eight Indian American male participants reported that it was harder for them to hook-up, date, or marry people compared to people they knew in real-life who were not Indian Americans. Common explanations for Indian American men having a harder time with romance centered around women using snap judgements based on stereotypes to determine if Indian American men were romantically desirable. According to one participant, Nagulan,

> You're more likely to get passed on because [of] all these stereotypes. So, like you know, [Nagulan puts on Indian accent] "Am I going to be with this crazy guy with this

> Indian accent? Who is going to smell and who does not know deodorant?", right? For all they know, it could be that person. [Nagulan puts on Indian accent once more] "Who loves eating curry and oh, is going to smell bad all the time", right? They're going to have that preconceived notion. You have to fight that, right? So, [in] that sense it's hard (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

Nagulan's initial thoughts on women making snap judgements for romantic decisions based off of racial stereotypes, indicates that these types of snap judgements are the most prevalent on dating applications and online dating websites that do not cater exclusively to romantic *endogamous* relationships.

Romantic *endogamous* relationships include pairing with someone, or multiple people, who are within the same race, ethnic group, or social status such as wealth, caste, education level, and religion. This section of the thesis also argues that *endogamy* is a spectrum. For instance, some of the people in this study sought exclusively endogamous relationships for every phenotypic and social aspect of their life. Other people were open to having hook-ups or even partake in long-term dating with people of differing racial and ethnic groups but, expressed either their personal desire or their family's insistence to have an *endogamous* marriage. Yet, other participants, like Nagulan, had interracial marriages instead.

Indian American male participant's recollections of whether or not American media influences how people personally perceive them before talking to them versus Indian American male participant's recollections of whether or not American media influences how people perceive them personally while talking to them suggest that Nagulan's thoughts about snap judgements are predominantly through dating applications and dating websites. Indian American male participants overwhelmingly recalled that Americans of differing ethnic

groups were more likely to treat them differently before hearing them speak. This was particularly relevant for participants who either had an Indian accent, darker skin tones or both of those attributes.

Aatif, another participant, compared Indian American men and white men's odds of obtaining romantic relationships based on sex appeal. According to Aatif, "It depends [on] which group. Like, Black, Asian, white. But, I definitely do think like, Indian men, South Asian men are not like, sex icons by any means. So, yeah, I think it's easier particularly if one was white" (Aatif, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Aatif and Nagulan's thoughts about snap judgements were frequently discussed by other Indian American male participants. Interestingly these negative stereotypes mirrored the Indian American characters from television shows and films that participants remembered and reported feeling displeased about their representation. As mentioned in chapter one, Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from *The Simpsons* (1989-Present), Rajesh Koothrappali from *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-Present), and stereotypical blue-collar side characters were shown having thick accents, lacking social skills, and either appearing to be asexual or struggling to interact with women in general. Some other Indian characters remembered who fell under the same stereotypical romantically undesirable tropes included Hadji Singh from *Jonny Quest* (1964-1965), the priest Mola Ram and the rest of his cult from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), Ben Jahrvi from *Short Circuit* (1986) and *Short Circuit 2* (1988), as well as Zaboo from *The Guild* (2007-2013), according to participants. All of these characters demonstrate how writers and directors are not held accountable for perpetuating racist Indian and Indian American tropes. One participant even discussed Ashton Kutcher playing an Indian *brownface* role in a *Popchips ad* (2012). Ashton Kutcher has still not apologized for

performing Indian *brownface* which shows how even high-profile actors continue to perform racist romantically undesirable stereotypical Indian roles without social or monetary consequences.

Interestingly, some participants like Safal, discussed women who were experimenting with being romantically interested in Indian American men but gave back-handed compliments. According to Safal, "You always hear like, "Oh, he's good looking for an Indian guy", right. And so, I think this is actually something I've experienced more as I've come to college rather than high school which is interesting" (Safal, heterosexual male, 20, Indian American). Safal's discussion about this aspect of his dating life supports the case that women who give racially charged back-handed compliments to Indian American men are in part basing Indian American men's attractiveness on what they expect an Indian American man to be. If a person does not have as much real-life exposure to Indian Americans, which is evident when people decide to give racially charged back-handed compliments, then they can base it on Indian American characters.

Aarish, another participant, discussed the difficulty of Indian American men obtaining romantic relationships from another perspective. According to Aarish,

> No, no. Because, in the case of Indians and Pakistanis they are more oriented to match the cultural aspect. They're less open. That is, the family is less open to the possibility of this inter-mingling. So, from this angle it is probably a little more difficult than the free Western sort of culture. Of course, like, these days children…it depends on how much they are listening to their parents and they're willing to (Aarish, heterosexual male, 40, Indian American).

By using the phrase, "free Western sort of culture", Aarish referenced conservative Indian and

Pakistani American families who wanted their children to eventually have *endogamous* arranged marriages. Traditional Indian and Pakistani American parents ideally wanted their future daughter-in-law's to be of the same race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, and in some cases astrologically compatible with their sons. Other things conservative Indian and Pakistani American parents learned about before suggesting a woman as a potential match were details about her immediate family members, whether or not she is a virgin as well as her phenotypical appearance which includes her skin tone, height, and weight. Of course, these basic expectations for daughters-in-laws vary depending on how conservative Indian and Pakistani American parents are. But, conservative families' expectations for their children to have arranged marriages are certainly still a relevant aspect when discussing Indian American and Pakistani American's romantic lives. Other Indian American families do not insist on arranged marriages but still expect their future daughter-in-law to be from the same racial and ethnic group. There are also some families who do not care if their child has an *endogamous* marriage or not.

Even though the majority of Indian American men reported having a harsher dating landscape compared to American men of differing racial and ethnic groups, they still emphasized that in-depth conversations with women could eventually abate the women's preconceived racial stereotypes about them and other Indian American men. According to Nagulan, "But, on an individual level it is certainly possible, that if somebody takes a minute to look at you and you realize, "Oh, I like this person, they look interesting, and they do great things, and you're well educated. Maybe I'll give you a shot" (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

The remaining three Indian American male participants were split between three

experiences. One participant ranked his level of difficulty of finding romance as being average, another participant said it depended strictly on individual women's personalities, and the remaining participant said he had never tried to pursue a romantic relationship so he was not sure how difficult obtaining a romantic relationship would be.

The Indian American male participants were also asked if they believed Americans were generally romantically attracted to Indian American men. Three participants said no. which in part echoed Indian American male participant's responses to the previous question. These participants discussed how the majority of Indian American men are not portrayed as romantically desirable and how Indian accents are not marketed as attractive like European accents. Even though three other participants said it depends and the remaining two participants said they were not sure if Americans in general were romantically attracted to Indian American men, the majority of them discussed geography and women's political views as a major factor. According to Zubin,

> Not really, based on my own experience. No, I mean, that being said, I went to a high school that was very intentionally diverse, very liberal. So, my experience might be a little skewed. But, you know, I had a good Indian friend who was dating an African American girl for a long time and still is actually. I myself dated an Asian girl at one point. Now I'm dating a South American and [unintelligible but she is biracial] girl. So, like, just personally my experience is, I don't think there's a division in that (Zubin, heterosexual male, 18, Indian American).

Another participant had a similar response as shown,

> So, honestly growing up like in Canada...and it's all a function of the circles I grew up in. No, like I was always very surprised like, when a white girl would be attracted to a

> South Asian man or the reverse too. Like, a South Asian, sorry. Like, a white guy being attracted to a South Asian girl. With that said, I went to like an all-boys prep school. So, I think that class played a role in that. So, like I remember the phrase like so-and-so says, "Hot for a brown girl" was common. Or people would be like, "Oh, like you're an attractive brown guy". So, it kind of confines you're particular. But, when I got to college I didn't find I, at least like, here at Harvard. Again, similar environment. Liberal, elite. I found like, yeah. Girls were more attracted to me (Aatif, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Both of these participants were in liberal elite settings where the majority of the people who lived in those areas were Democrats. This is important to consider since diverse settings allow people to intermingle and rectify inaccurate or incomplete preconceived notions of race, ethnicities, and religious beliefs with more ease compared to conservative areas especially when those areas are racially and ethnically homogenous.

Nagulan explained how there are stark differences between diverse cities like the Cambridge, Boston area and majority Republican rural areas that are more homogenous. According to Nagulan,

> But, I went to school in Georgia. I mean, in a place like Georgia, it is going to matter. It's going to matter a lot. They're going to be like, "What the hell? What is this?". Like, "Did you bring a snake charmer home?" you know what I mean? It's…I've heard worse. Trust me, so…there are all these stereotypes that are harder to fight. And you know, if you had to fight those stereotypes it adds effort. You…it's a primary filter like, "Oh, I don't even know this person. Why should I go through the difficulty of all these other people"? (Nagulan, heterosexual male,

35, Indian American).

Nagulan's experiences demonstrate how the people he was exposed to in Georgia were not used to seeing Indian American men in real life. Especially, people who made derogatory comments about his race before even speaking to him. If people do not have real-life exposure and interactions with Indian Americans they are more susceptible to believing Indian and Indian American racial stereotypes whether it is from television shows, films, the news, or politics.

Another Indian American male participant insisted that American women's attraction or lack of attraction towards Indian American men were on an individual level. According to Mokshi, "It really depends. Like, you'll meet girls who are open minded. But, you'll meet people who are just like, blatantly ignorant" (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American). While personality certainly plays a role in whether or not women are willing to have interracial relationships, my findings argue that the reasons for romantic prejudice are more systemic than that.

The next interview question asked if the level of attraction towards Indian American men was the same or different for members of the LGBTQI+ communities. Three participants said they were uncertain and one did not answer the question. According to Safal,

> I'm not sure, like, I don't have that much interaction with [them]. I do know that in, you know, I have gay friends and stuff like, who are involved with the gay community. But, I would say that I don't know how many Indians are in the gay community from a standpoint of it being a huge cultural taboo like…how many Indians feel comfortable coming out. I don't know how prevalent it is (Safal, heterosexual male, 20, Indian American).

The issue of considering people who are LGBTQI+ as being taboo is still common in India and even in Indian American communities. There is still a risk of being stigmatized or even disowned for being LGBTQI+. In fact, the findings also found, that the vast majority of participants whether they were Indian American, Pakistani American, heterosexual women, or people from LGBTQI+ communities reported never seeing an Indian American male who was LGBTQI+.

Two other Indian American male participants speculated that LGBTQI+ individuals would be more likely to have romantic relationships with them than their heterosexual counterparts. According to Aatif,

> Definitely! I've just had a lot of queer friends in general. But, I've definitely like...I feel like I've received more attention from sort of like explicit. People will you know, be interested from queer guys then, of varied races. But, that might just also be a function of sort of them being more like, explicit about their interest. But, I do feel like yeah. I don't know how correct it is. But, I do feel like I have some belief that queer men care less about race (Aatif, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Aatif's speculations about people who are LGBTQI+ being less likely to view race as an important factor for romantic relationships turned out to be essential in this study. There seemed to be a common assumption that LGBTQI+ people would be more likely not to ostracize other people because so many LGBTQI+ people are ostracized for not following heteronormative standards of romance.

The remaining two Indian American male participants said LGBTQI+ people would probably have the same likelihood of being romantically attracted to Indian American men as heterosexual women. Nagulan worded it this way:

> It's funny…I have a couple of gay friends who are both married to white people and one is gay and one is lesbian. And they are both married to white people. So, I certainly don't think that it's…it's an issue but I do not know enough to speak about it (unintelligible). I think the responses should be proportional to the amount of knowledge you have on a subject, right? But statistics tells me that you know, cultural conditioning is broad and so what you see in heterosexuality should probably extend to homosexuality (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

Another person who did not say he had any connections to LGBTQI+ individuals simply said, "I don't think that there would be a difference in that" (Krishan, heterosexual male, 30, Indian American).

These findings were also significant because they did not romanticize LGBTQI+ individual's experiences of being ostracized for not following heteronormative romantic expectations. Instead, they assumed that LGBTQI+ people would be just as likely to be open minded or prejudice towards people of differing races or ethnicities just like their heteronormative counterparts.

Five Indian American male participants noticed racial patterns regarding who was more likely to be attracted to Indian American men. All of the Indian American male participants emphasized that South Asian American women were the most likely to be romantically attracted to them. Indian American male participants who mentioned East Asian American women, always said they were the second most likely to be romantically involved with them. Interestingly, white Europeans tended to be ranked in the middle for being attracted to Indian American men while white Americans were ranked as being the least likely to be attracted to Indian American men. Latina Americans and African Americans were also

ranked as being less likely to be romantically interested in Indian American men. But, white Americans were always ranked as the least likely to consider even having a fling with Indian American men.

Nagulan described it this way,

> I'd say yes, I mean given my own dating experiences and you know, that of my friends. I would say that it is a lot easier for Indians to date A) fellow Indians and South Asians, right? Followed by East Asians. And I think, you know when it comes to a lot of Indians dating white people in the U.S., the challenge there…you see a huge spike in terms of dating Caucasians who are not Americans. So many of my South Asian friends are married to Russians or Germans or Fins or whatever. But, they're all Caucasians but they all came here as students themselves (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

It is interesting that the findings highlight three things in particular. Firstly, Arab American women are not referenced at all. Secondly, East Asian American women were reported as being the second most willing group to be romantically involved with Indian American men. The Pakistani Male section of this chapter will discuss the perceptions of Arab American and East Asian American women's level of attraction to South Asian men. However, the third interesting aspect of these findings is that Indian American male participants who mentioned European women always said that they were more likely to be attracted to Indian American men than their white American counterparts.

There are two explanations that would make sense in explaining this finding. Firstly, interracial marriage, or any other romantic interracial relationships really, were illegal in the United States until 1967 which means that interracial relationships have only been legal for 50

years. Additionally, Hollywood films mirrored this strain of institutionalized racism with the *Hays Code* which prohibited miscegenation to be depicted in television shows, films, or any other performance. If interracial couples were to be shown on screen, one of the white actors or actresses had to done *blackface*, *brownface*, *yellowface*, or *redface* to slightly navigate around this law. Even when interracial relationships were depicted this way they could still not be physically romantic with one another since that would still infringe on the code.

In places like England and other parts of Europe, it was not illegal to have interracial relationships or to show them on screen even though it may have been heavily stigmatized. Many white Europeans have not experienced interracial relationships being outlawed. The white Europeans who have, did not experience it nearly so recently.

Two Indian American male participants said there was not a pattern for racial attraction towards Indian American males. But, one of those participants said it was because he has been romantically involved with women of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds while the other participant expressed how all women find South Asian American men unattractive. The final participant reported that he was not sure.

When Indian American male participants were asked if they believe Americans in general think they have more, less, or the same level of masculinity compared to American men of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds four of the participants said less. Also, two participants said the same, and two participants said it depends on women's personalities.

According to Nagulan,

> Oh, I would probably say that they think we have less masculinity. I mean, so, let me take this a step back. If we are playing terrorist, then they certainly think we have more masculinity. Because we're shown as this you know, having this great scruff

> and just you know, ready to beat up people, be all macho. But if you're playing like the geek or the call center guy, or you know, whatever, then you know definitely that means you know. You're less masculine. So, it's so funny, now that…I've never really thought about it in those terms. But, it's so bipolar (Nagulan, heterosexual male, 35, Indian American).

Nagulan makes a couple of excellent points. Firstly, intelligence is considered a masculine trait if the intelligent person is a white American, African American, or Latino American, or even a European male. However, if a South Asian American or even East Asian American male is intelligent, then he is usually emasculated in the process. Nagulan's second excellent point will be highlighted more in the Pakistani American male section of this chapter. There certainly are two conflicting stereotypical roles regarding South Asian American men's masculinity. However, according to the findings of this thesis, the hyper-masculinized terrorist role has a lot to do with the framing of Islam.

Mokshi associated masculinity with body size as shown: "I don't think I have ever run across this issue before, but I guess Indians are portrayed as more nerdy in a sense. I personally am 200 pounds and 6'2". So, I don't know if I have ever encountered this. Punjabi men are known to be big as well. So, there's always exceptions" (Mokshi, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Mokshi's thought makes an interesting point with how prevalent stereotypes about Indian American and Indian bodies are. It is rare to see Indian American male bodies appear to be the Eurocentric standard of what constitutes as masculine. Aatif's answer to the masculinity question significantly builds off of Mokshi's by incorporating the sensuality of South Asian American and South Asian bodies. According to Aatif,

> Something to pay attention to is when do you have a Brown body? Like, I don't see Brown bodies. I don't see. Like, I don't see Brown nipples. Like, I've had friends that are like, "Oh! You have like dark nipples!" And, I'm like, "Yeah. Like, I'm a Brown dude". So, there are those. Like, those things just aren't...yeah. Sorry, this is probably...That's…I don't really see shirtless Indian guys. Especially like, the contrast in skin color like, a Brown body against a white body (Aatif, heterosexual male, 22, Indian American).

Since sexuality is such an important sign of traditional American male masculinity, women who are not exposed to South Asian American men in real-life may not even associate them with being sexual compared to their white American, African American, and Latino American male counterparts. Although there has been some increase of Indian American and Pakistani American men being sexualized, there is clearly a long way to go considering so many women who are not South Asian American are unaware that South Asian nipples, among other body parts, tend to be shades darker than the rest of their skin. What makes this particularly striking is that even if a woman does not have a romantic encounter with a white American, African American or Latino American man, they would still know what to expect the color of their nipples to look like. The sexual experience would be less of a mystery or a shock.

Pakistani American and Biracial American Male Perspectives

The exact same questions from the *Indian American Perspectives* section of this chapter were answered by two Pakistani American men as well as one biracial American. All three of these participants said Americans in general were not romantically attracted to South Asian American men. One of the major reasons Pakistani American male participants as well

as one biracial American male participant gave mirrored the Indian American male participant's responses. Like Indian American men, Pakistani American male roles were also subjected to desexualization, emasculation, and exaggerated accents. But, like Nagulan, another participant Taimur highlighted the Muslim terrorist trope as shown:

> I would say absolutely not. I think that's a mixture of terrorism and the resulting and you know, mass stereotyping that occurs. And, then also probably, you know, the way we're portrayed in films. Like, you'll have like, a desi guy's dad who's like, chubby, and balding, and speaking with this, you know, very strong Pakistani or Indian accent. And, you know it's just not sexy (Taimur, heterosexual male, 30, Pakistani American).

The only main difference in Taimur's response was the sensationalism of Muslim South Asian, South Asian American, Arab, and Arab American terrorism in American media outlets. As the first chapter of this thesis also demonstrated, Muslim terrorism tropes have permeated American films and television shows. The second chapter of this thesis discussed how crimes that fell under the Muslim terrorism category were also disproportionately sensationalized compared to people of other racial and ethnic groups that committed terrorism. According to the findings of this thesis, terrorist roles are often times not sexless but are still the antithesis of anything romantic. Male Pakistani or even Arab terrorists are depicted as being the epitome of chauvinistic by being domestic abusers, rapists, and murderers. But, what makes Muslim Pakistani and Arab terrorists most threatening of all is that they are almost always depicted as Muslims who are the greatest enemy of the Western versions of Christianity and Judaism.

Milan, another participant, focused more on acknowledging the advantage of having lighter skin as shown:

> I haven't really seen it as a barrier. But, a lot of people do think I'm Mexican for some reason or just white actually. You know, my skin's not very dark generally. And, I guess I don't because it's never really mentioned in my life very much at all beyond when I mention it. So, I know that you can't necessarily extrapolate that to the experiences of the community at large (Milan, heterosexual male, 28, biracial American).

Milan's point is an interesting finding because he also talked about having the ability to pass as either ethnically ambiguous or white even though one of his parents is a Bengali American and the other is white. His response implies that he is not hindered romantically at all because of women making snap judgements about him based on his racial stereotypes in part because of not having a South Asian accent and having lighter phenotypic appearance.

Like, the Indian American male participants, both of the Pakistani American male participants and the biracial American participant reported noticing racial and ethnic patterns of women who were more or less likely to be romantically attracted to South Asian American men. Each of the participants mentioned how South Asian American women are the most likely to be attracted to them, or South Asian American men in general, and white people are the least likely. Azzan described it this way, "Well, I think non-white people are more likely to be with other non-white people and that includes Indians and Pakistanis integrating with other non-white people of different races" (Azzan, heterosexual male, 28, Pakistani American).

Taimur's response happened to build off of Azzan's by saying, "I guess I would say other groups besides American white, Caucasian women. Other groups besides those are probably generally more likely to be attracted to Indian and Pakistani men I would say.

Maybe not African American women. But, I guess other groups" (Taimur, heterosexual male, 30, Pakistani American). Taimur also elaborated on his answer by explaining how South Asian and South Asian American women were the most likely to be attracted to South Asian American men. Then Arab, Arab American, East Asian, and East Asian American women would be the second most likely to be romantically involved with Pakistani American men. Taimur's observation makes two excellent points.

Firstly, it is important to note that Indian American male participants did not mention Arab or Arab American women at all when asked about women's attraction, or lack thereof, towards Indian American men. Perhaps that is because the vast majority of the Indian American male participants were not Muslim but Hindu and Zoroastrian. But, even if Pakistani American men are secular or Ahmadiyya, which was the case for the two Pakistani participants in this thesis, perhaps the religious component makes them more likely to include Arab and Arab American women as well.

The other interesting point that was made by Taimur during this section of the interview was when he said East Asian and East Asian American women would also be more likely to be romantically interested in Pakistani American men. Perhaps, East Asian American women are more likely to be attracted to Indian American men because they experience, or at the very least tend to be more cognizant of, some strikingly similar stereotypes. Indian Americans and East Asian Americans are still considered *model minorities*. *Model minorities* are associated with Asian Americans in general since they have a higher rate of having lucrative white-collar jobs compared to Americans of other racial and ethnic groups. However, in spite of a significant portion of Asian American populations being so monetarily successful, they are still subjected to another set of conflicting racial stereotypes. Some of the prominent

conflicting stereotypes include desexualizing men while hypersexualizing and exoticizing the women, exaggerating and using Asian American men's accents as comic relief while framing Asian American women with accents as cute or sexy, making men more likely to be clueless about social faux pas as opposed to women being knowledgeable about social norms.

Milan also made another important point by saying,

> Well, I mean other Bengali girls are because, you know, there's kind of especially if you come from [a] more conservative family there's pressure to marry within the community. I do know that I had a friend marry a white girl whose mom disrupted the wedding because she threw a fit like, right before it was happening. You know, right before it was happening, because she wasn't Islamic and he can't make her be. And, he wouldn't make her be (Milan, heterosexual male, 28, biracial American).

Milan's story about his friend's marriage being interrupted by his disproving mom could also be something that Americans of differing racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds are concerned about when considering having a romantic relationship with South Asian American men. Even if the South Asian American man of interest is not conservative on an independent level, his family may be which considering the statistics for interracial marriage as mentioned in the *Indian American Male Perspectives* of this chapter, is not something that many Americans of differing backgrounds are not used to navigating.

The biracial American man as well as one Pakistani American participant reported that LGBTQI+ individuals were just as likely to be romantically attracted to them as their heterosexual counterparts. The other Pakistani American participant said LGBTQI+ individuals would most likely be more romantically attracted to South Asian American men compared to heterosexual people. Taimur worded it this way, "I guess I think the LGBT

group might slightly be more open to them than the heterosexual group" (Taimur, heterosexual male, 30, Pakistani American), which was also the same response some Indian American male participants had to this question.

Azzan and Milan's responses to this question also echoed some of the Indian American male participant's responses by discussing LGBTQI+ individuals as being taboo. Azzan's response was as follows: "The same or less just because I think there's such a bias. I mean [it's] just taboo to just being gay in these communities that there are just so few of them that are out" (Azzan, heterosexual male, 28, Pakistani American). Milan also made it known that people who admit to being LGBTQI+ in South Asian and South Asian American communities are labeled as taboo. Like Azzan, Milan also made it clear that he did not agree with that mindset as shown,

> It's something that's not necessarily fair because if you look at any of the Abrahamic religions you can find pretty strong abominations of you know, homosexual practices. I mean that and shellfish are both "abominations" according to Leviticus on an equal level. You know, [using sarcasm] "those shellfish. They're terrible" (Milan, heterosexual male, 28, biracial American).

Milan also reported that some LGBTQI+ people, even ones who are not South Asian American, may be more hesitant of being in a romantic relationship with a South Asian American man because of conservative Muslim or Hindu stereotypes.

When asked about the level of difficulty for South Asian American men to obtain romantic relationships, one Pakistani American male participant said it was harder. The other Pakistani American male participant said it was easier than before, especially with dating applications. The biracial male participant said it was average for him probably because he

has lighter skin. All of the reasons these three participants gave mirrored a lot of the Indian American male participant's answers. For instance, Azzan said, "As they've been portrayed they're not shown to particularly have any sort of sex drives or sex capabilities so people would assume similarly. Or, the ones that are portrayed as sexual, a lot of people don't even know they're brown" (Azzan, heterosexual male, 28, Pakistani American).

Each of these participants were also asked if they believed Americans in general thought South Asian American men had more, less, or the same level of masculinity compared to Americans of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds. The biracial male participant said masculinity was perceived as the same. Taimur had a similar response to Indian American male participants but added another layer to common emasculating South Asian stereotypes as shown:

> I guess it's kind of a funny or weird area. I guess a lot of times when it comes to macho and bravado probably not. But, South East Asian men are not often, they have the barrier. They have the mustaches so in that regard it's usually in a comedic reference usually. But in that regard, it's usually like, "Wow! Look at that guy's mustache!" or something like that. It's in a joking way but it's the opposite in those kinds of references or situations (Taimur, heterosexual male, 30, Pakistani American).

This response is interesting because it gives an example of how actor's, who are not South Asian Americans, comedic lines can be used to turn even *Eurocentric* masculine traits, like facial hair, into an emasculating trait if it is not fashion forward. However, even if a white American male has facial hair that is not fashion forward, it may still be used as a point for comedic relief but it will not diminish the character's masculinity in the process.

Heterosexual American Women's Perspectives

The majority of the romance questions from the *Indian American Male Perspectives* and *Pakistani America Male Perspectives* sections of this chapter were asked of 18 heterosexual female participants as well. Heterosexual female participant's responses to those questions were actually, quite similar to Indian American and Pakistani American male participant's responses. This section of the chapter also inquired about heterosexual female participant's personal perceptions of Indian American and Pakistani American men's attractiveness and the likelihood of the heterosexual female participants to hook-up, date, or marry Indian American and Pakistani American men.

When heterosexual women were asked about their thoughts as to whether or not most Americans tended to be romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men, 13 out of 18 women said no. When asked to describe why, most of the reasons mirrored Indian American and Pakistani American's responses but from their personal lenses. According to Chloe,

> I'm going to say no. I mean, so I think that part of the reason why would be because of the portrayals that a lot of us grow up seeing. I think another part of that is like, unless, and there are obviously predominant Indian and Pakistani areas of the U.S. But, like if you grew up in an area where you do not come across many people that are from India and Pakistan. And, you don't have any other representations other than what you see on TV and movies, and those are normally not that attractive because they're in these like, funny roles. Or like, kind of annoying roles. The ones that it's ok to dislike, you know what I mean? (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American).

Chloe's discussion of superficial exposure to Indian American and Pakistani American men

through American television shows and films versus exposure to Indian American and Pakistani American men in real-life has been an integral part of the findings of this thesis. Firstly, Indian American and Pakistani Americans make up a small portion of the population in the United States. So, when there is a strong typecasting pattern of Indian American and Pakistani American men either being portrayed as a violent enemy, a one-dimensional side character, or a significant character who is portrayed as hopelessly unattractive, it is not surprising for those Americans to use typecast roles as references to determine if Indian American or Pakistani American men are romantically attractive.

Jamila also reported that Americans in general were most likely not to be romantically attracted to Indian American or Pakistani American men. But, she added another perspective as shown:

> So, I've come across like, a polarizing I guess, way of thinking about this. Because, when I was a teenager I thought like, "No way!". Like sadly, our people are just not attracted to American people just because of you know, our accent is usually not that attractive. You know, I guess like, the typical accent. But, I did come across a lot of girls in high school that found the idea very exotic. So, I used to be very confused by that (Jamila, heterosexual female, 30, Pakistani American).

The perspective of American women of varying racial or ethnic groups labeling Indian American and Pakistani American men as attractive in a way that exoticized them were rare. However, this thesis also argues that people who are romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men but exoticize them, lack meaningful real-life exposure to Indian American and Pakistani American men and reinforce an insidious form of systemic racism. Exoticizing Indian American and Pakistani American men do a couple of things. Firstly,

exoticizing Americans specifically, perpetuates the misconception that Indian American and Pakistani American men are foreign, even when they are born in the United States, and therefore, are less relatable according to Eurocentric standards. Secondly, exoticizing Indian American and Pakistani American men serves as a means to transform phenotypic appearance and stereotypes into an experimental sensual experience while simultaneously, dismissing what an authentic interracial relationship actually entails. This is problematic because it effectively typecasts Indian American and Pakistani American men as well as minimizes interracial couple's experiences.

Two heterosexual women reported that Americans are generally romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men. Two heterosexual women said they were not entirely sure if Americans in general are romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men or not. These participants argued that romantic attraction strictly depends on an individual's personality. According to Autumn,

> I have no idea. I feel like it depends on the person. If you put a picture of an attractive man up…if he's an attractive Pakistani. If he's an attractive Indian. Yeah, I mean. I have never heard of anybody being like, or my friends being like, "I don't think he's cute because he's Pakistani". Like, I've literally never heard that (Autumn, heterosexual female, 38, white American).

The remaining participant did not answer the question.

When heterosexual female participants were asked about their thoughts of whether or not the level of romantic attraction towards Indian American and Pakistani American men varies for Americans of different racial or ethnic groups 14 participants said yes. Generally, white American women were ranked as being the least likely to be romantically interested in

Indian American and Pakistani American men while South Asian American women were ranked as the most likely to be romantically interested in Indian American and Pakistani American men.

Akilah reported that South Asian American women would be more likely to be romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men. According to Akilah, "It's because there's more familiarity. There's a more shared cultural background and a more critical eye for understanding how these things happen. So, I think that that's why" (Akilah, heterosexual female, 33, Pakistani American). Certainly, being Indian American or Pakistani American will give added cultural and systemic perspectives of race that people of differing racial or ethnic groups will either not notice, blatantly ignore, or learn over time.

Chloe focused more on phenotypic appearance when discussing possibilities of interracial attraction. According to Chloe, "I would assume so. Just because I do think that proximity to whiteness matters for white people. And, probably for Latino people" (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American). This response seems to acknowledge a couple of integral points. Firstly, that the standard of Eurocentric beauty has historically, and is currently, still dominated by white bodies whether they are in television shows, films, advertisements, or even in formal media like political campaigns or news outlets. And secondly, white skin is a form of social capital for things like not being subjected to additional searches in airports due to racial profiling or being more likely to survive encounters with police. So, from this standpoint, proximity to whiteness could certainly matter to white Americans since society has historically, and remains, to cater standards of beauty and protection towards them.

Nora, another participant, gave a different perspective as to why white American

women may not consider Indian American and Pakistani men to be as attractive. According to Nora,

> I think it definitely is. Especially girls like white women or American women think that Indian guys are like, kind of weird. And I think it's also because they're seen as being…like wanting to be sexually dominant or something. Because they're not from the U.S. they're not as like…I don't want to say not as well educated in feminism. But, it's the same with European men. They're just more aggressive. And, I think Indian men are seen that way. But, because they don't have that like, cute, charming, European like, Italian or French accent like, it's a non-white accent (Nora, heterosexual female, 24, white American).

The idea that Indian American and Pakistani American men are not as educated about harassment or sexual consent certainly displays another form of whiteness, and even accents, as being social capital. 57 percent of perpetrators that commit rape or other forms of sexual assault were white Americans, 27 percent were African American, and the remaining 15 percent accounted for people in unknown ethnicity, other, and mixed group categories (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network 2017). According to those statistics and participant's discussions surrounding the negative portrayals of Indian American, but more-so Pakistani American men, in American films, television shows, political rhetoric, and news coverage, it is actually irrational to be wearier of Indian American and Pakistani American men than their white counterparts.

Heterosexual female participants were also asked if LGBTQI+ individuals were more, less or just as likely to be romantically involved with Indian American and Pakistani American men compared to heterosexual women. Seven of the heterosexual female

participants did not give a response.

Six heterosexual female participants reported that LGBTQI+ individuals would probably be more likely to be romantically involved with Indian American and Pakistani American men than heterosexual women. According to Bilan, "Perhaps slightly more because of their own experiences. They are not as having to be tied down to traditions" (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani American). The sentiment that people who are LGBTQI+ are more open minded to being romantically involved with Indian American and Pakistani American men as well as interracial romantic relationships in general was echoed throughout these six heterosexual women's responses. The rationale was also the same amongst all of them. Each of those participants reported that LGBTQI+ people are already outside of the sexual norm and that would make them more likely to break the norm of not having interracial relationships as well. Interestingly, this assumption for the most part was a misnomer according to LGBTQI+ participants. The explanation as to why, will be covered in the following section of this chapter.

Five heterosexual female participants reported that LGBTQI+ individuals would probably be just as likely to have romantic relationships with Indian American and Pakistani American men as their heterosexual counterparts. According to Jailene,

> I think the level of interaction will be the same. I don't think there would be like, a difference. Because, if you're a girl and you like a boy. And, you're a boy and you like a boy. Like, why should you have any preference because of your own sex [preference] from the other sex? (Jailene, heterosexual female, 20s, Dominican American).

Jailene's perspective about LGBTQI+ people also reflected many of the other heterosexual female's responses. Like these other participants, Jailene did not associate LGBTQI+ people's

potential experiences of being ostracized for their sexuality with being less racist compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

Imani, while having the same perception as Jailene, honed in on racism in the LGBTQI+ community as shown:

> There are stereotypes or generalizations that women have made about men. Black men, Asian men, Latino men, etc., that plays a part in how they filter their interest in whether or not they're going to give a man the time of day. Similarly, it's in the heterosexual community as well as the homosexual communities. So, I know there was like, a big study that came out that my friends and I were talking about. How like, in the gay community they will straight up say like, "No Asians or No Black men" and they try to couch it as a sexual preference. But, it really is fucking racist. Excuse my language. Because, it's not just saying, "I like what I like". Like, there's a reason, like excuse my language, that you are or are not interested in dating this person (Imani, heterosexual female, 33, African American).

Imani's answer provided two essential pieces of information. Firstly, that some LGBTQI+ or heterosexual people do commit casual racism when they try to frame race and ethnicity as if it is another typical sexual preference. Secondly, that the discrimination is so blatant on dating applications and websites. This perception will be discussed at length by LGBTQI+ participants in the following section of this thesis.

12 heterosexual participants said Indian American and Pakistani American men had less masculinity compared to men with differing racial and ethnic backgrounds. According to Jamila,

> I guess compared to the American portrayal of like, macho and masculinity I guess like,

> maybe a little bit less. I guess we've never really, there's never been really much of a portrayal outside of Bollywood I think of Pakistani and Indian men as being sort of the typical macho, masculine, men (Jamila, heterosexual female, 30, Pakistani American).

Jamila makes an interesting point by comparing Bollywood to Hollywood. Bollywood does offer Indians, and less frequently due to conservative politics, Pakistani men opportunities to be cast in dynamic roles. A lot of South Asian male roles are strong and heroic which fundamentally, are not so different from Hollywood roles that are predominantly given to white American and African American men.

Chloe had some other thoughts that were also reflected in other heterosexual women's responses as shown:

> For Indian men, I would say probably less. But, for Pakistani men, I don't know if I would say less. I think Indian men are associated with academia a lot. Sometimes like, in the media, and movies, and TV shows and stuff. Or just like, upward mobility in general. I don't view them and I'm sure other people don't view them as being far from the like, stereotypical like, what was it called. A model minority, middle man minority. Whatever Asians were called. I don't think people see them that far from that classification (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American).

Since Indian Americans and Pakistani Americans are actually a part of a broader Asian American category, they are also subjected to *model minority* stereotypes. Higher intelligence in academia and lucrative white-collar jobs were associated with less masculinity according to heterosexual female participant's responses.

Two participants reported that it could be both depending on if a person viewed

South Asian American men to be more sexually aggressive or more likely to be terrorists. According to Casey,

> Well isn't that a pretty masculine trait though? To be a little bit barbaric? And I don't know if that sounds funny to say, but isn't it? If you think this group is more sexually aggressive or less you know, restrained or whatever the assumptions are that you make. That's not a very effeminate trait. It's you know, not stereotypically. So, I think there's a lot of…I think there tends to be emasculation of these groups of people in terms of their physical representations. But then, at the same time, that seems to often be accompanied by…this contrast of them next to a female and that they are clearly the masculine of the two in terms of the roles they're expected to play. And I think that those tropes are very prevalent too. So, I almost feel like, maybe without having me articulate this, this way before…I think I have this perception that there's almost this unfair like, hierarchy that maybe they are considered less than the hyper masculinization of our Western cultures and yet still by contrast are considered hyper masculine next to the females that they operate (Casey, heterosexual female, 26, white American).

Acknowledging the polarizing portrayals of South Asian American male masculinity in American films and television shows was something the majority of participants in general reported not thinking about until being interviewed for this thesis. Casey also makes an essential point when discussing South Asian women being dominated by violent South Asian men on screen, especially when the plot involves Muslims committing mass violence. Even the most violent South Asian men are still less masculine compared the to the predominantly white American or African American heroes on screen. Only one participant said Indian

American and Pakistani American men have the same level of masculinity. The remaining two participants did not answer the question.

All of the participants were also asked about their perceptions of whether it is easier, harder, or the same level of difficulty for Indian American and Pakistani American men to obtain hook-ups or deeper romantic relationships in person, through applications, or dating sites compared to American men of differing races or ethnicities. 13 heterosexual participants said it would be harder. When asked this question, Akilah said,

> I think there's a belief that South Asians are foreign. And, people feel like they won't be able to connect with somebody who's foreign and doesn't share any of their like, cultural upbringing which is often not true. You know, if you're second generation in this country and therefore, find yourself on one of these apps, you'll probably have a lot culturally in common, culturally similar people who are white. Especially if you control for things like, education, location, and things like that, right? (Akilah, heterosexual woman, 33, Pakistani American).

One aspect of this concept was talked about toward the beginning of this section of the chapter when another participant was discussing how Indian American and Pakistani American men are exoticized by some heterosexual women who are not South Asian Americans. However, Akilah's observation is certainly relevant in a different way. There is a difference between sexually fetishizing Indian American and Pakistani American men by stereotyping them as if they are the same as people who actually emigrated from India or Pakistan versus completely dismissing even the possibility of hooking-up with Indian American or Pakistani American men by stereotyping them as if they themselves were immigrants. Even though both of those hook-ups or dating scenarios entail severe

stereotyping, they have polarizing but equally negative effects.

Nora's response added another layer to Akilah's as shown: "There's so many weird things in social media, memes kind of making fun of other races and stuff that it makes it very easy to apply those like, stereotypes to people. And, I know, I don't know if you knew this, there's a subreddit that's about Indian men with weird fetishes" (Nora, heterosexual female, 24, white American). This was the only response in the study that classified racially charged memes and subreddits as being a major influence in heterosexual women's snap judgements of whether or not Indian American and Pakistani American men are romantically appealing. But, this is certainly relevant considering how memes and gifs are popular for online communication and how quickly they become viral.

Nora also gave a real-life example for why she thought it was more difficult for Indian American and Pakistani American men to obtain hook-ups or deeper romantic relationships. When Nora was attending a liberal arts college that had a predominantly white student body, an Indian American male student would do the following:

> He would message girls. Like, a bunch of girls. He did this like to me and a bunch of my friends trying to do this like, weird Peter Pan roleplay. Where he'd be Peter Pan and the girl would be Wendy and he would want them to have sex with them. But I feel like, that's just like, falling into a stereotype. And no one knew if this was a joke or not. We're like, is this some kind of weird joke that's been going on for years or is he actually serious? (Nora, heterosexual female, 24, white American).

This type of behavior from men, regardless of their race or ethnicity, can certainly be a turn off. Unfortunately, if people are not exposed to many Indian American and Pakistani American men in real-life, incidents like this may make a significant impact on snap

judgments.

Jamila made a key point that quite a few Indian American and Pakistani American female participants discussed about previous generations of Indians, Indian Americans, Pakistanis, and Pakistani American's perceptions on romance. According to Jamila,

> Our generation is definitely more open minded about dating in general. But, otherwise I think culturally it's just very difficult just because we're generally a very conservative culture. Dating and even hooking-up now is just [like], "what do you mean? That doesn't exist". So yeah, I think in general it is harder (Jamila, heterosexual female, 30, Pakistani American).

Living in a combination of a conservative South Asian American culture where a lot of families still do not like the idea of casual hook-up or dating culture and another overarching culture that encourages casual hook-ups and dating which is followed by almost every other racial or ethnic group in the United States would be difficult to balance. However, even in countries like India and Pakistan there are large hook-up and dating culture that have emerged. So, there is a shift happening in the United States amongst South Asian Americans as well as in South Asians.

Bilan answered this question from a Pakistani cultural lens as well as shown: "I think religion plays a huge role in that. Whether they are [religious] or not, they are perceived a certain way. Whether [they are religious] or not, I think it is harder" (Bilan, heterosexual female, 54, Pakistani American). This concept was discussed in great depth in chapter II of this thesis but should be highlighted in this context as well. It can be difficult for Pakistani American or Indian American men to obtain hook-ups or deeper romantic relationships when women associate their phenotypical appearance with violent sects of Islam.

Over a decade of intense Islamophobic rhetoric in American politics and in the news, could certainly make women who have not been exposed to many Indian American or Pakistani American men in real-life hesitant to hook-up or date them.

Naomi made a very important point when discussing her perceptions of whether it is easier, harder, or the same level of difficulty for Indian American and Pakistani American men to obtain hook-ups or deeper romantic relationships compared to men of differing races or ethnicities. According to Naomi,

> I think that it's the influence that the media's had on my real life, my in-person relationships with South Asian men has definitely been at the outset less...less sexual than with a white male or an African American male. I think that certainly the downplay of sexuality in the media has influenced my...it influenced the length of time that it took for me to start to see all South Asian men sexually (Naomi, heterosexual female, 20s, white American).

Overcoming snap judgments whether they are based on Indian American and Pakistani American men from television shows, films, news or political rhetoric, may take a bit of time to debunk but it is completely doable. Multiple heterosexual female participants have come forward saying they were either afraid of Indian American or Pakistani American men. Or, that they never thought of Indian American and Pakistani American men as people who were interested in sex and romance until they were exposed to more attractive Indian American and Pakistani American men. Participants emphasized that real-life exposure was best for overcoming racial stereotypes but that stereotypes could also be debunked through media as well. Some participants emphasized watching Bollywood films, some watched films and television shows that had attractive Indian American and Pakistani American men in them.

Others even decided to take overcoming South Asian stereotypes by researching South Asian cultures and religions.

Two other heterosexual female participants said the difficulty level for Indian American and Pakistani American men to obtain hook-ups or deeper romantic relationships can be easy or difficult depending on the geographical area and dating platform being used. According to Chloe,

> I'm going to say no, that it wouldn't be harder just because. I think that if we're talking about like, a Tinder kind of hook-up situation, I think that's when people are a little bit less intimidated and a little bit more willing to try things that they wouldn't normally see themselves trying. If you're talking about like, a dating app or like, some of those newer like, you're going to have to be invited to join. Or have to have like, gone to a certain school. With those, I wouldn't be surprised if it's significantly fewer Black people or if there are significantly fewer Indian men and if that affects their chances of success on these sites. So, I think it probably depends on the site and what people are looking for (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American).

Shortly after saying this, Chloe also added, "I don't want to be overly pessimistic but, I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of people aren't still mostly swiping for their own race" (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American).

Two heterosexual female participants said they were not sure. One heterosexual participant said it is easier for South Asian American men compared to South Asian American women but ignored the rest of the question.

When participants were asked if they personally thought Indian American men were

attractive, unattractive, or average six heterosexual female participants reported that Pakistani American men were attractive whereas five heterosexual female participants reported that Indian American men are attractive. According to Nora,

> I've like, gone on dates with other guys who are Indian and I think they are really nice. And, like, sweet, and charming, and interesting. And, I felt bad saying this. But there's definitely a stereotype that they're very intelligent and I think that's just a type of culture they come from. I think they have like, families that kind of push them academically. And, for me intelligence is a really attractive trait. So, I think that's why I find them more attractive. It's because I feel like, they're probably more like, academically driven especially compared to white guys who are sometimes mediocre Nora, heterosexual female, 24, white American).

The belief that Indian American men and Pakistani American men are more likely to be intelligent than men of different racial or ethnic groups, including white men specifically, was actually, the most cited reason why some of the heterosexual female participants were romantically interested in Indian American and Pakistani American men.

Naomi offered some more reasons why she finds Indian American and Pakistani American men romantically attractive. According to Naomi,

> Why, Indian and Pakistani men are very attractive. They have a lot of the personal qualities that I would want to hold and they are intelligent. They are worthwhile people. They're very ethically and morally guided people. They're very grounded in terms of self-awareness. They are often very funny. They're often very driven. They have instilled in them a high sense of drive and passion that transfers to achievement

> in many realms. I think they have physical qualities. I think they have excellently healthy hair. They have...there's an entire range of just aesthetic facial and physical features that are a product of just the vast Ayurvedic...I don't know how to explain it (Naomi, heterosexual female, 20's, white American).

Multiple heterosexual female participants expressed that they found phenotypical appearances of Indian American and Pakistani American men appealing but shied away when it came to concrete details other than the color of their hair and the styling of their facial hair.

Chloe's response echoed Naomi's but contributed another outlook along with it as shown, "Sometimes Pakistani people look a little bit Italian-esque but like better. I think growing up, my town was like, really Italian. So, I was like, attracted to sort of like, darker hair. Like, just that look and I also find that more appealing" (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American).

Ten participants thought Indian American and Pakistani American men were average and they all emphasized that they would consider having a romantic relationship with people from any racial or ethnic group. One participant did not think they were attractive, and the remaining participant did not answer the question.

Another question participants were asked was if they have ever hooked-up, dated, or married an Indian American or Pakistani American man. Four heterosexual participants hooked- up with an Indian American or Pakistani man, eight had dated one which included short-term and long-term dates, and two Pakistani American women had married Pakistani American men. One of the Pakistani American women had an arranged marriage when she was in college in Pakistan and the other Pakistani woman had a love marriage.

Participants were asked about their personal ranking of Indian American and

Pakistani American men as a top, in-between, or lower choice for hook-ups, dates, or marriage compared to American men of differing racial and ethnic groups. Nine participants ranked Indian American and Pakistani American men as being average. According to Autumn,

> I don't know. What's funny about that is I feel like cultural things would probably be the biggest difference for me. If I was looking at, I mean hooking up probably wouldn't be…whatever, there's hardly any ramification, right? But, if I was talking about a long- term relationship then you know, I would have to take into account what does that mean for me and my future children culturally? And so that would play a big part, not in making it a lesser priority. But just in you know, deciding if that's what I want for my life. But not in any way different than I would for somebody of a different nationality (Autumn, heterosexual female, 38, white American).

Interestingly, Autumn's response made a distinction between her willingness to hook-up with Indian American, Pakistani American as well as men of other racial and ethnic groups versus her willingness to be in a serious relationship with them. This was another pattern in heterosexual female participant's responses. Participants were more likely to hook-up with a person who was from a vastly different ethnic background but not date or marry them.

Akilah had the exact opposite inclination when she used to date and eventually married her husband. According to Akilah,

> So, if I were to be thinking about marrying somebody, right? I would be thinking about how involved they are with their family and the amount of influence that their family has on them. The amount that their family wants to be involved with me and things like that which tends to be more in South Asian families. And, that's not

> something that I love as a quality. So, that would be something that would turn me off potentially (Akilah, heterosexual female, 33, Pakistani American).

Akilah is married to a white American man and has a four-year-old biracial son. So, when this question was asked, she thought about what she was looking for in a potential spouse before meeting her husband. Instead of feeling the need to have homogenous relationships, Akilah actually seemed to be looking for someone whose family would not mirror traditional South Asian families. She wanted to marry someone who was completely independent and whose decisions would not be more likely to be controlled by his parents' wishes.

Five heterosexual participants ranked Indian American men as a top choice for having a romantic relationship and four of those participants were South Asian American women. According to Naomi, "I would choose them as a top choice. My hesitation was I briefly mentally segmented like, native and first-generation Indians and Pakistanis. And, second-generation. And, both are a top. Then they leveled and both are at the top of all groups" (Naomi, heterosexual female, 20s, white American). Naomi makes an essential point by distinguishing Indians, Indian Americans, Pakistanis, and Pakistani Americans. As the second chapter of the thesis has pointed out before, there is a big difference between people living in India and Pakistan or even first-generation Indian American or Pakistani American individuals compared to second-generation Indian American and Pakistani Americans. It was rare for heterosexual female participants to make a concrete distinction between South Asian Americans and South Asians living in South Asia. Naomi also gave some specific reasons why Indian, Indian American, Pakistani, and Pakistani American men are her top choice for hook-ups, dates, or marriage as shown:

> I hold them in the top group because the highest group of the attractive males for me is

> one that is...grounded morally, that is very intelligent, has a strong sense of loyalty to their family and their culture, and their own personal definition. And, they have individualism as well as a collective loyalty to the larger homeland and origin. And, I think that Indians and Pakistanis have such a strong, even generations later, have such a strong connection that this carries over into the types of confidence, and passion, and also individualism, and also just sense of being a part of wider things. That puts Indians and Pakistanis in the top. And, the very top (Naomi, heterosexual female, 20s, white American).

As discussed previously in this section of the chapter, heterosexual female participant's thoughts regarding Indian American and Pakistani American men's intelligence was the primary reason why they were romantically interested in Indian American and Pakistani American men. This response also demonstrates how people who are interested in serious interracial romantic relationships have to be more willing to understand the culture they are potentially marrying into in order to make an interracial relationship healthy and successful.

Only one heterosexual female participant separated Indian American and Pakistani American men when discussing her personal ranking of Indian American and Pakistani American men as a top, in-between, or lower choice for hook-ups, dates, or marriage. According to Chloe, "I would say, Indian men would probably be in my like, lower half of like, groups I'm attracted to. I would probably put Pakistani men in the top half" (Chloe, heterosexual female, 26, African American). Chloe's response was also unique because as previously mentioned in the section of this chapter she separated Indian American and Pakistani American male masculinity as well. In another part of her interview Chloe talked about how she perceived Pakistani Americans and Pakistanis to be more like Arab Americans

and Arabs. She explained how she was the most physically attracted to Arab American men who were tall, had black hair, facial hair, and other physical features that she did not disclose, perhaps because she did not want to risk sounding politically incorrect during the interview. But, when she thought of Indian American men she thought of men who were shorter and without facial hair.

Four other heterosexual female participant's personal ranking of Indian American and Pakistani American men as a top, in-between, or lower choice for hook-ups, dates, or marriage ranked Pakistani American men as their lowest choice. Three of those women were Indian American. They all said it was because their family was traditional and would not want them to be romantically involved with any Pakistani man. But there was one white American female participant who ranked Indian American and Pakistani American men as a lower choice. According to Amelia,

"I'm going to say lower. So, we were, on my own personal experience, I haven't had the best of interactions. So that would color my judgment. It would take a little bit to get beyond that bias" (Amelia, heterosexual woman, 36, white American). When the interview was over and the recording application was turned off, Amelia revealed the "not so good interactions" with South Asian men, were based on two Indian American men who harassed her. These men did this at different times and it sounded like these two men did not know each other either. Amelia had made it known to these men that she was not interested in them romantically but they kept ignoring her and continued to pursue her anyway. The remaining participant did not answer the question.

LGBTQI+ American Perspectives

There were 13 LGBTQI+ participants of differing ages, genders races, and ethnicities. Nine of those participants were men and four of them were women. Six of those men identified as gay, one identified as bisexual, another identified as bisexual and polyamorous, and the remaining male participant identified as trans and pansexual. One of the women identified as bisexual, another identified as bisexual and polyamorous, a different woman identified as pansexual and polyamorous, and the remaining woman identified as a lesbian. This thesis also recognizes the current debate over whether or not polyamorous people should be included under the LGBTQI+ label. While this thesis acknowledges that there are people who identify as heterosexual and polyamorous, all of the participants who identified as polyamorous in this study also identified as having other components of their sexualities that fall under the broader LGBTQI+ category. Therefore, in the context of this thesis polyamory also falls under the broader LGBTQI+ category. Furthermore, each of the LGBTQI+ participants were asked the exact same questions from the *Heterosexual American Women's Perspectives* section of this chapter.

When LGBTQI+ participants were asked about their thoughts as to whether or not most Americans tended to be romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men, all of them said no. According to Beckett,

> I guess the easy answer there is no. But, of people who are generally attracted to men I would probably still say no. I don't think most people who are attracted to men are attracted to Indian and Pakistani men. I think that, part of the sort of typecasting of Indian men and Pakistani men, and a lot of other men from Asia or of Asian cultural background, they're never really cast in a way where they're like, offering any sort of sexuality (Beckett, bisexual polyamorous male, 24, white American).

Beckett's response echoed many of the heterosexual women's responses who had also said media portrayals of Indian American men, Pakistani American men as well as other men belonging to the broader Asian American category were not shown as being sexy compared to their white American, African American, Hispanic or Latino American counterparts. Beckett also discussed how, based on people he knows, that this media portrayal of seemingly sexless Indian American and Pakistani American men partially leads to *diet racism* in casual conversations within the white section of LGBTQI+ communities. *Diet racism* falls under a category of racist rhetoric that is subtler such as race-based back-handed compliments.

One part of Asher's response to the same question talked about *diet racism* in more depth as shown: "I remember like, one of the new friends I made that night was like, "Oh! That guy is kind of cute for like, a Muslim guy". It kind of like, it really bothers me when people say, "They're kind of cute for a, whatever". [I'm] just kind of like, "Oh, my gosh! Why would you say that?" (Asher, gay male, 25, Vietnamese American). *Diet racism* can also include actions such as clutching a purse tighter only when walking past African American men but not doing this while walking past white American men. Asher also discussed overt racist conversations about Indian American and Pakistani American men. According to Asher,

> I've made a lot of gay friends within the last couple months. And, they're all single and like, at a point I wasn't single. So, I would try to find people for them. And, they would tell me like, and these are white people by the way. They would tell me like, "Oh, I'm not into like, Indian guys, or like Muslim guys, or anything like that". And, like you know there's like, other things. But, you know, I would be like, "Ok, I guess" and I would go out and I wouldn't really see anyone of that ethnicity or anything like

that. And, I'd look for people (Asher, gay male, 25, Vietnamese American).

The previous section of this chapter, *Heterosexual Women's Perspectives*, also highlighted this form of romantic discrimination as well. But, Asher's response makes an essential point about how some members of LGBTQI+ communities, just like some of their heterosexual counterparts, casually frame race or ethnicity as a sexual preference outside of dating applications or websites. Even though framing race and ethnicity as a sexual preference is a form of racism, this research shows that it continues to be a common way to foreignize Indian American and Pakistani American men through racial and religious stereotypes without facing serious social backlash since racial slurs are not being used.

Drew discussed one of the underlying reasons why many white LGBTQI+ individuals as well as heterosexual people are quick to dismiss Indian American and Pakistani American men when looking for romance. According to Drew,

> So, on that, I think we're taught not to be. I think in media and even in our own cultures, we're taught that it's not ok to look outside of our particular origin or whatever. It's just not ok and so they won't sexualize or make somebody look really appealing because that's not ok. That's not ok to look at somebody of that descent and have those types of desires. I mean you can bring that right back to the 50s or 60s when women were marrying Black men or are attracted to Black men and, "How dare they?". And, in the same scenario, homosexuality, you know? We're taught that unless you are a heterosexual, white couple you know, with three little blonde kids eating apple pie and playing baseball, then you're not American (Drew, gay male, 45, white American).

Drew makes two essential points, one of which reflects a section of the *Indian American Male*

Perspectives section of this chapter. In 1966, it was illegal for Americans to have interracial marriages and people who decided to have interracial romantic relationships were harshly stigmatized and more likely to be in physical danger. The law was also reflected in film through the Hays Code. It is not surprising that the same basic law and media exposure would historically affect LGBTQI+ individuals just as much, if not more than their heterosexual counterparts.

Christopher added another perspective of why he perceives Americans in general as less likely to become romantically involved with Indian American and Pakistani American men that was quite rarely discussed by participants who were not South Asian American in this study. According to Christopher, "Most Americans? No. I think the community in and of itself is very much seen as something self-contained (Christopher, gay male, 34, African American). Christopher continued to explain how he grew up in Chicago and there is a larger population of South Asian American men but they tend to be concentrated in the same part of Chicago. Christopher described that part of Chicago as, "Their cultural hub. Their kind of like, place where they feel culturally safe" (Christopher, gay male, 34, African American). Christopher also explained how South Asian Americans who live in diverse neighborhoods in Chicago usually associate with other South Asian Americans instead and so many people who are not South Asian American do not really perceive them as an option for romance as often.

Benno made another excellent point that was echoed in other participants who decided to differentiate Indian American men from Pakistani American men in their responses. According to Benno, "I don't think so. I think Indians have a higher chance than Pakistani men. But, in general I think that they're not sought out that much" (Benno, gay male, early

20s, Puerto Rican American). This quote along with the rest of Benno's interview revealed a couple of salient points that have been echoed in each chapter of this thesis. Firstly, as opposed to Indian American men, Pakistani American men are more associated with Arabs, Arab Americans, and Islam which subjects them to fear-based stereotyping due to the demonization of Islam in American films, television shows, news, and political rhetoric. Secondly, as Asher's response to this question also pointed out, LGBTQI+ participants are also just as likely to range from being suspicious of Islam to being extremely Islamophobic like their heterosexual counterparts.

When LGBTQI+ participants were asked about their thoughts of whether or not the level of romantic attraction towards Indian American and Pakistani American men varies for Americans of different racial or ethnic groups 11 LGBTQI+ participants said yes. According to Celeste,

> Yes, I think there's a problem there. I think that most white groups are pushed on this standard of beauty. They like that, because that's what they're taught., and nothing else is as good. Or will ever be as good. So, no one ever thinks to go outside of it. And if they are attracted to something that is not their plain, white, perfect beauty representation then they're like mocked for it or pushed out as an outcast. So, I think that there's, even if they are like, "That person's super-hot" they might not pursue them because of the social consequences (Celeste, pansexual polyamorous female, 27, white American).

Celeste's response was common among white American participants in general. Almost every white American participant, even if they live in large and diverse cities, mentioned social consequences when discussing interracial romantic relationships.

Benno offered a different perspective from Celeste by empathizing with Indian American and Pakistani American media representation based on his recollection on how he felt about Puerto Rican American media representations. According to Benno,

> I do believe so because some are more open to differences like, other's [race's or ethnicities]. Like, I've gone through hardships and know what it's [like] to be misrepresented in media. Know what it is to just be insulted [by others] because of who you are or where you come from. So, like, people like me that understand that are going to be more willing and accepting a person like them [as opposed to] someone that's never gone through that (Benno, gay male, early 20s, Puerto Rican American).

Benno's response indicates that people of color are more likely to be open minded than white Americans about having relationships with Indian American or Pakistani American men because they are able to empathize with media misrepresentation on a deeper level. However, based on the results of this thesis and the majority of participants' reactions to the interview questions who claimed to never really think about Indian American and Pakistani American representation before, seemed to be more critical of Indian American and Pakistani American male media portrayals. Remembering the characters, they have seen from childhood to adulthood revealed a pattern of exclusion and stereotypes that the majority of participants reporting being displeased with.

The next interview question asked LGBTQI+ participants if the level of attraction towards Indian American men was the same or different for members of the LGBTQI+ communities versus heterosexual women. Seven LGBTQI+ participants said they would be less likely. Six out of those seven participants were men. According to Benno,

> I think it's kind of funny because Pakistani men that I know of that are actually

homosexual or bi, they are very down-low about it. They don't really want to say anything because their culture has put it down so much. And, even if the people are accepting of it, it's more of, it's just kind of even hard to find one if you just don't know them previously. So, I don't think it's so much like, they're not accepting of it as more as, it's just really not something that's found in like, our gay culture to begin with (Benno, gay male, early 20s, Puerto Rican American)

Benno's pointed out an integral aspect of an overarching response from Indian American, Pakistani American, and LGBTQI+ participants. Each of these participant groups emphasized that being open about being LGBTQI+ in South Asian American communities is still a taboo in South Asian countries as well as in South Asian diaspora communities in the United States. Benno's response really highlights how rare an opportunity is to be in a romantic relationship with an Indian American or Pakistani American man in the LGBTQI+ community even if people in the LGBTQ+ community were very attracted to Indian American or Pakistani American men.

Christopher took another approach when answering this question as shown:

I do. I really do. I feel like people who are in, how can I say this, like, LGBTQ. I think there's a lot of racism because even though someone might be LGBTQ, that doesn't mean they're not like, bigoted, or racist, or have their own crazy ideologies, or anything like that. So, I think, and another thing too. I can only speak as a person that identifies as male, or I think they call that CIS gender. Like, a lot of my experience has been on you know, my sexuality and my race are often married together (Christopher, gay male, 34, African American).

Christopher added to this by stating:

> I hate to say this but, I don't think there's a lot of multiculturalism in the LGBT community. And, for me to say that is just horrible. I feel bad. But like, even when it's like, pride. You know, I feel like even with pride parades it's still very segregated. It's still very like, "[one race or ethnicity] Over, here. [another race or ethnicity] Over here. [yet another race or ethnicity] Over here. [And a different race or ethnicity] Over here" (Christopher, gay male, 34, African American).

Christopher's response was mirrored by a lot of LGBTQI+ participants, particularly LGBTQI+ people of color. These findings demonstrate that while many heterosexual participants assumed people who were LGBTQI+ were less racist than their heterosexual counterparts, that was not the case. There were actually a sizeable number of LGBTQI+ participants, particularly ones of color, who thought it was actually worse since profiles on dating applications allow users to say things like, "No Blacks" and "No Asians".

Scarlett took another approach to answering this question by saying,

> So, I would guess that the common instinct in LGBTQ groups would be less because the environments that Indian and Pakistani men are coming from are seen as less tolerant of those lifestyles. So, there's more of an initial fear of approaching someone even if you find them attractive. Like, you might have preconceptions about like, how they feel about you or your community (Scarlett, bisexual polyamorous female, 32, white American).

This perspective also makes sense considering a couple of things. Firstly, as shown in the second chapter of this thesis, biased news coverage and political rhetoric centered around Pakistani people in particular, being violent did make a sizeable number of participants afraid of people they assumed were Muslim or Arab based on their phenotypical appearance.

Secondly, the hesitation for Indian American and Pakistani American men to be open about their LGBTQI+ sexual identities is indicative of their families not approving of any sexuality that is not heteronormative. From that aspect, it is not surprising that some people would be hesitant or afraid to have a relationship with an Indian American or Pakistani American man who is hiding his LGBTQI+ identity.

Four other LGBTQI+ participants said LGBTQI+ people would be more likely to be romantically involved with Indian American and Pakistani American men. Three out of those four participants were women. According to Estephan,

> I definitely think so. Simply because I believe when it comes to the people in the LGBT community they tend to be a little more open to experiencing things with different people. Whereas a lot of heterosexual or heteronormative individuals seem to kind of stay within their bubble and are less likely to branch out (Estephan, gay male, 27, Puerto Rican American).

Estephan's response is relevant as well and echoed participant's responses who said LGBTQI+ people would be more willing to be romantically involved with Indian American men, Pakistani American men, or be in interracial relationships in general because LGBTQI+ individuals are already ostracized for not following heteronormative romantic norms.

One other participant said that it doesn't matter because being LGBTQI+ is not accepted in broader American society. The remaining LGBTQI+ participant reported believing the attraction patterns between LGBTQI+ individuals and heterosexual people would be the same. According to Beckett,

> I would love to be able to clearly say, "yeah" to that. But, I'm not sure I can. I think the LGBT community suffers just as much from the sort of ingrained beliefs about

> race. And, there are plenty of people in the LGBT community who are just as insensitive and even intolerant of marginalized groups of other identities. So, I guess my guess would be if there's a difference, it's small (Beckett, bisexual polyamorous male, 24, white American).

Beckett's response is actually quite similar to other LGBTQI+ individual's responses. He discussed overt and subtle racism in heterosexual and LGBTQI+ communities throughout his interview. But, he did not think that the level or frequency of racism in LGBTQI+ communities was any worse than what he has seen in heterosexual communities.

All of the LGBTQI+ participants were also asked about their perceptions of whether it is easier, harder, or the same level of difficulty for Indian American and Pakistani American men to obtain hook-ups or deeper romantic relationships in person, through applications, or dating sites compared to American men of differing races or ethnicities. All 13 LGBTQI+ participants reported that it would be harder.

According to Celeste, "Probably much harder, especially with the political climate. Probably for anyone that isn't white right now. There was like, some, you know, phase where Latin men were considered a thing. But I just feel like, just anything that isn't white right now is not okay" (Celeste, pansexual polyamorous female, 27, white American). Celeste's response is telling because when she was interviewed, Donald J. Trump had just become president. As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Trump's racially charged and Islamophobic political rhetoric had what other scholars called the *Trump Effect.* Many people who were covertly racist began to feel emboldened to openly harass Americans who were not white.

Estephan responded to this question in a way that resonates with responses in

each section of this chapter by saying,

> I think they have it a little bit more difficult I think than probably a white person might. But, simply because like I said before, with not having enough exposure at least when it comes to you know, even dating apps. In my experience, I haven't had a dating app in a long time but, there weren't very many Indian or Pakistani men online that I've noticed. And, so I guess even having that platform to start off with I guess would be one reason why they're lacking in that regard you know, on top of [a] lack of image (Estephan, gay male, 27, Puerto Rican American).

Estephan, as well as the majority of participants form each category in this study, reported that real-life exposure to Indian American and Pakistani American men was the reason why so many Americans would be hesitant to be romantically involved with Indian American and Pakistani American men. Additionally, the vast majority of LGBTQI+ and heterosexual participants in each category reported not knowing even one LGBTQI+ Indian American or Pakistani American man in real-life.

Christopher's response gave more insight into how Indian American and Pakistani American men appear to look on dating applications. According to Christopher,

> "Usually when I see an Indian guy on any of those sites, he's not presenting himself like, 'I've got my shirt off' and a lot of people do that, right? A lot of people, because that's a way of attracting the same sex or the different sex" (Christopher, gay male, 34, African American).

Christopher was the only participant in this entire study to make this point. Many people who use hook-up or dating applications are strictly looking for sexual encounters. In those scenarios, it is common to see men or women show off their chests to gain more sexual

options. However, if an Indian American or Pakistani American man is using this application strictly for sexual encounters and does not tantalize potential matches by showing off some of his body, then it also makes sense that he will not obtain as many sexual options on these hook-up applications.

Scarlett made another essential point when answering this question by saying:

> I would guess harder. I think because of a lot of the things we already talked about like negative media portrayal. Because of what we believe about the culture that they're coming from or the people that they're spending time with. That they're basically less likely to be good and accepting people that like, will care about you (Scarlett, bisexual polyamorous female, 32, white American).

This particular response seemed to stem from fear and self-preservation which indicates having a lack of exposure to Indian American and Pakistani Americans.

Each of the LGBTQI+ participants were also asked their thoughts of whether not Americans perceive Indian American and Pakistani American men as having more, less, or the same level of masculinity compared to American men of differing racial or ethnic groups. Eight LGBTQI+ participants reported that Americans in general probably think Indian Americans have less masculinity. But, one of those participants also reported that Americans would think Pakistani American men were more masculine while Indian American men were less masculine.

Participants who said Indian American and Pakistani American men had less masculinity compared them to a Eurocentric standard of masculinity in different ways. For instance, Celeste said, "Less. Because, traditional American masculinity is tied to like, barbeque and football" (Celeste, pansexual polyamorous female, 27, white American). The

Eurocentric perception that preparing and eating meat is more masculine as opposed to having a vegetarian or vegan diet can certainly affect conservative Indian American Hindus and Jains since a part of Hinduism and Jainism is to not eat animals.

Two LGBTQI+ participants reported that Americans perceive Indian American and Pakistani American men as having the same level masculinity as American men of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Two other LGBTQI+ participants reported that it depends on the geographical area someone was raised in. The remaining LGBTQI+ participant did not answer the question.

LGBTQI+ participants were also asked about their personal thoughts regarding if Indian American and Pakistani American men were attractive, unattractive, or average compared to American men of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds. Six LGBTQI+ participants said Indian American men were attractive while seven LGBTQI+ participants said Pakistani American men were attractive. According to Drew,

> It's funny that you asked that to me because I actually, I'm very much [into] an olive skin, dark haired guy, very attracted to that. And, I'm also attracted to high intelligence. And, from my own experience I have found again, going back to my, and some other men, a high level of intelligence. And, you know, I think at some point, I'm 42 years old, and I feel like I would rather be intellectually stimulated than sexually stimulated. And, I think there comes a point where that's really important. And, I don't know. For me personally I would absolutely date [them]. I think we talked about this earlier before, there's certain criteria for me. I'm very open. And, I believe that again because of my beliefs that I will meet somebody that loves me as much as I love them. And, that is there to be a mirror of what my high[er] power

> (Christian God) wants me to know how loved I am. You know what I'm saying? So, and I don't know what box that's going to come in. I don't know how that looks. And, if I keep closed minded about it, I won't even be able to find it (Drew, gay male, 45, white American).

The vast majority of participants who reported that they found Indian American and Pakistani American men romantically attractive, regardless of sexual orientation, racial, or ethnic background emphasized that they perceived Indian American and Pakistani American men to be highly intelligent. But, Drew was the only participant to emphasize his religion and say that it was important for him to keep an open mind about having an interracial relationship because God could just have easily made his soulmate white or any other ethnic or racial background.

Four LGBTQI+ participants reported that Indian American and Pakistani American men were average. According to Beckett,

> I think that as far as like hooking up goes, that's sort of like my assumption is that, that would fall along the same lines as what I have experienced as far as attraction in the past. I think for the other questions, that tends to be less relevant than how I get along with them. But in which case, they would be just as likely candidates. Possibly more likely candidates because I'm fed up with a lot of white men (Beckett, bisexual polyamorous male, 24, white American).

According to the findings of this thesis it was common for participants to say they were bored with dating white American men regardless of their sexual orientation. Although white American participants were less likely to say they were bored with dating white American men.

Three LGBTQI+ participants said they did not find Indian American and Pakistani American men attractive. According to Scarlett,

> I find them less attractive. Some of it is definitely cultural influence. Just my preconception of [what] these people are likely to be like. I think some of it has to do with grooming and facial hair stuff. Just like, are people more likely to have full beards or mustaches. Like, do they take care of themselves and in a way that I'm used to seeing around me a lot (Scarlett, bisexual polyamorous female, 32, white American).

Based on this response, there seem to be two key things. Firstly, that some South Asian cultural taboos are a form of homophobia and that can be frightening for people who have not met South Asian American families who are accepting of LGBTQI+ people. Secondly, facial hair can actually be a major factor in determining attractiveness which has been shown in this thesis as well as other studies (Dixson & Brooks 2013: 237-239; Valentova, Varella, Bártová, Štěrbová, & Dixson 2017: 244-247).

All of the LGBTQI+ participants were also asked about their personal ranking of Indian American and Pakistani American men as a top, in-between, or lower choice for hook-ups, dates, or marriage compared to American men of differing racial and ethnic groups. Eight LGBTQI+ participants reported that they rank Indian American and Pakistani American men as an in- between choice. According to Benno, "Oh God! I would say medium because my top priority, if everyone was exactly the same, would be someone that speaks Spanish. Just because that way, when I cannot produce words in English, I can go back to Spanish and they understand me" (Benno, gay male, early 20s, Puerto Rican American). Benno's thoughts on linguistic capabilities as being a part of romantic attraction was quite common for bilingual participants. For some participants who were more self-conscious about their English or

would be confident in their English-speaking capabilities but know they do not know the whole language, tended to want a romantic partner who could always understand what they were saying. But, this was not a reported preference for people who only knew English.

Three LGBTQI+ participants said Indian American and Pakistani American men would be a top choice for hook-ups, dates, or marriage compared to American men of differing races and ethnic groups. According to Drew,

> For me I think it's top, you know? Just because of you know, education and I don't know. I'm an underdog kind of guy so I, you know. And, the other thing and I know this again sounds terrible. There's certain cultures where being heavy is ok. And, I find within the Portuguese, with some of the Pakistani[s] that being a heavy Caucasian person is actually more desirable to them, do you know what I'm saying? So, I kind of fall under that like, criteria of because I have a belly or because I'm a little feminine I'm not going to necessarily be dis-included in what their wants and needs are. Does that make sense? So, because I'm not, you know, cause I'm accepted in that culture of course I'm going to open myself up to where I'm accepted (Drew, gay male, 45, white American).

Drew gave some insight that no other participant had. He relayed how Indian American and Pakistani American men did not body shame him and were less likely to perceive his femininity as a negative trait. The remaining two participants reported that Indian American and Pakistani American men were a lower choice for hook-ups, dates, or marriage compared to American men of differing ethnic groups.

Another question participants were asked was if they have ever hooked-up, dated, or married an Indian American or Pakistani American man. Only three LGBTQI+ individuals

had hooked-up with an Indian American or Pakistani American man. Two LGBTQI+ individuals dated an Indian American or Pakistani American man, and none of the LGBTQI+ participants had ever married one. Interestingly, the only people from the LGBTQI+ community who were ever romantically involved with an Indian American or Pakistani American man were gay men.

Chapter IV.

Research Methods

This thesis inquires if peoples' real-life romantic attraction levels toward Indian American and Pakistani American men are affected by the way Indian American and Pakistani American men are portrayed in American television shows, films, politics, and news coverage. Initially, I made two sets of questions for participants. The first set of seventeen questions were made for Indian American and Pakistani American male participants and gave insight into the following: 1) In- depth descriptions of Indian American and Pakistani American male characters they remember from their childhood until now. 2) In- depth descriptions of how India and Pakistan are portrayed in American news coverage and politics. 3) In- depth descriptions of whether or not they believe the media influences how other Americans perceive them before talking to them, while talking to them, and romantically. 4) What ways they would change portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men if they could. The themes for these questions are essential to gauge if media coverage effects Indian American and Pakistani American men's romantic and other social experiences.

The second set of nineteen questions were made for heterosexual women and individuals from LGBTQI+ communities who are romantically attracted to men. These questions were focused on: 1) In depth descriptions of Indian American and Pakistani American male characters they remember from their childhood until now. 2) In depth descriptions of how India and Pakistan are portrayed in American news coverage and politics. 3) Whether or not they are romantically interested in Indian American and Pakistani American men compared to other American ethnic groups. 4) If Indian American and Pakistani

American men had more romantically desirable roles would they be more inclined to be romantically attracted to Indian American and Pakistani American men in real life. 5) What ways. 6) How they would change portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men if they could.

Each of these questions were open ended so each of the interviews were structured and unstructured in order to facilitate a deeper discussion. The majority of interviews tended to last between thirty-three minutes to an hour. However, since there was not a time limit for these interviews, some participants' interviews lasted for two hours. Each participant had an option of opting to do either an in-person, Skype, FaceTime, or phone interview. However, there was one exception where a participant had to tend to a personal matter during a phone interview and answered the remaining questions later that evening on a Microsoft Word document.

Outreach strategies included making flyers, announcing that participants were needed on Facebook, sending emails to various academic clubs, using the *snowball method* which allows interviewees or even people who were not participants to refer others to participate in the study, and face-to-face recruiting.

Each of the interviews were audio recorded and less than half of those interviews were also video recorded for transcription purposes. Each participant was briefed twice before participating in the study. First, the participants were briefed via email or Facebook messenger about the general topics the thesis questions covered, how long the interviews generally took, and whether or not they would be comfortable being audio and video recorded. Once participants were about to be interviewed, the same briefing process happened one more time before recording. Each participant consented to being recorded; however, there was one

participant who agreed to be recorded only if the recording was deleted right after the transcription was completed so that particular audio file was deleted right after the transcription was complete.

Audio recordings were done using an iPhone application called *Voice Memo* and video recordings were done using my personal camcorder. In order to transcribe these recordings, they were uploaded onto my personal laptop or trusted on-campus computer lab machine in order to traditionally transcribe them using iTunes. Every time I left the on-campus lab machine for the day, the voice recordings were deleted from the machine.

In order to protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms were given to each participant and the only biographical data collected from them consisted of their name, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and race or ethnic identity.

After I had completed transcribing and taking notes on the audio recordings, note taking while listening to the audio was completed, I manually coded the transcriptions ensued in order to find patterns regarding the Indian American and Pakistani American male characters that participants remembered as well as participant's' general perceptions of them, the types of political and news coverage participants were exposed to about surrounding Indian American and Pakistani American men or even just India and Pakistan in general, their romantic preferences, and how they would change the portrayal of Indian American and Pakistani American men in American media if they could.

Chapter V.

Research Limitations

My research focused on the portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men because South Asian American roles are predominantly Indian and Pakistani as opposed to their Bangladeshi, Nepali, Afghan, Sri Lankan, Bhutanese, and Maldivian counterparts. Also, there is less work about South Asian American men's perceptions of their portrayal in the media and how it affects their romantic lives in comparison to East Asian American and Arab American men. Therefore, the majority of the sources used in this thesis were from studies focusing on the representation of East Asian, East Asian American men, Arab, and Arab American men in American media. The sample did not include enough Pakistani American men, Arab American women, and LGBTQI+ South Asian Americans because of their conservative cultures.

Conclusion

Since these 42 interviews used to conduct this research were so personal, the first part of this conclusion will be dedicated to popular suggestions of what should be changed about Indian American and Pakistani American male characters in American television shows, films, news, and politics. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if there was anything they would change about the portrayals of Indian American and Pakistani American men in American television shows, films, news and politics. The overarching suggestion participants gave for television shows and films was to include more Indian American and Pakistani American characters that are multifaceted and accurate. One of the first steps is to no longer perpetuate *whitewashing*, *ethnic-washing* and *brown-voice* performances. Participants also noted that *brown-voice* included Indian American and Pakistani American actors forcing exaggerated foreign sounding South Asian accents instead of using their authentic voices.

The more complex measures participants wanted to see American filmmakers and producers take, is to have multifaceted characters who have a variety of jobs that are not just blue-collar store clerks or white-collar doctors. But most importantly, these participants do not want to see the same prototypical terrorist roles. The participants want to see Indian American and Pakistani Americans portrayed as fine artists, musicians, cops, lawyers, CEOs of top notch businesses, superheroes, American presidents, etc. Furthermore, participants want a range of personalities for Indian American and Pakistani American characters and for the men to be sexualized. In fact, participants want to see Indian American and Pakistani American men in interracial as well as endogamous relationships. As for religious portrayals, participants grew tired of seeing Islam demonized and do not want character's entire

identities to be surrounded by religion. Participants want to resonate with more Indian American and Pakistani American characters and have grown tired of hearing that audiences will not be able to relate to diverse casts or movies exclusively about Indian Americans and Pakistani Americans.

Additional Recommended Research

Additional research needs to be done in regards to media representation. Firstly, studies about Pakistani American media representation are currently lacking even more than studies about Indian American media representation, which are still sparse. Furthermore, participants frequently mentioned how it is difficult to find LGBTQI+ Indian Americans and Pakistani Americans who are willing to be open about their sexuality because it is still considered taboo in many South Asian American diaspora communities. Even though finding those communities could prove to be challenging, it would be valuable to research LGBTQI+ Indian American and Pakistani American perceptions about American media representations as well as their experiences about how they navigate between their sexual identity and conservative South Asian American cultures. Throughout this study it also became apparent that interracial couples' perceptions of interracial couples in American television shows and films should be studied more as well. It also worth inquiring about the age that media begins to affect people's identity because so many participants cited being influenced by media portrayals early on in their lives.

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