THE ABCD CONUNDRUM:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A SOUTH ASIAN-AMERICAN WOMAN?

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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What Does it Mean to be a South Asian-American Woman?

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In this dissertation, I explore the perceptions of second-generation South Asian-American women about daily social practices in the U.S. and how they view themselves in comparison to broader American society. I do this by engaging in an eight-month long feminist ethnographic study with a cross-national sample of twenty-five women in the U.S. I spent a day in the life of each woman, eating, drinking, and talking about work, partners, families, food, clothing, and how they feel about being children of immigrants, among other areas of interest. In my work, I ask the following questions: What are the meanings of *ABCD* or *American-Born Confused Desi* - a popular term for second-generation South Asian Americans - in the U.S. racial and ethnic imaginary? How do these meanings travel through class, gender, sexual, and cultural hierarchies, both in the United States and transnationally? The notion of binary constructs within white, western, and feminist thinking is an important conceptual tool in this study. The oppositional poles of East/West, white/black, man/woman, and South Asian/American acquire social significance and meaning through Orientalist knowledge production - an assumed

experience based on dominant representation - rendering the second-generation as misplaced and cultural-conflict-bound. The testimonies reveal that such expectations do not wholly reflect the realities of my research participants' lives. While the women I interviewed experience "whiteness" and the oppressor role along class lines, they are also asked to distance themselves from their "whiteness" through imposed racial and cultural definitions, taking on the role of the oppressed, and at times not, vis-à-vis black people. With time and age, the women's self-definitions come to include manipulation and expressions of opposition as they grow to appreciate "their culture" while simultaneously owning whiteness and white spaces. Here, through the appropriation of Orientalist tropes, my respondents construct "resistant identities." The Orientalist dichotomies between East and West and tradition and modernity fall far behind the actual construction of the women's identities and dispersion of culture. The twenty-five women's oral histories speak to the gendered and sexualized discourses of assimilation, racism, and U.S. Orientalism, as well as the multiple points in which they break down. The conceptual insights gained from studying second-generation South Asian-American women are not limited. Here, I focus on broader theoretical or epistemological concerns – identity, identity grammar, and shifts in identity grammar. My informants reveal the process of identity-management and that it is not a uniquely second-generation South Asian-American enterprise. This study situates itself on the margins of both U.S. nationalism and South Asian-American cultural nationalism within the context of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and South Asian-American femininities.

DEDICATION

To my daughter Raneem, my magnum opus, you give me the strength to be a better

person and do something extraordinary.

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This dissertation, one of my largest and thought-provoking academic, professional, and personal endeavors and accomplishments, would not have been possible without a core group of people who supported me throughout the seven year journey.

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would have missed the complex racial and ethnic processes undertaken by my research participants.

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In November 2004, on an unusually warm weekday afternoon, I found myself ushering Rupa into my mother's suburban home in Burr Ridge, Il – one of my interview sites.[1] Our interview began in my mom's efficient home office, and after more than three hours of speaking to each other, Rupa and I desperately needed a small break to serve our depleted minds and bodies. We shared a steaming bowl of *matter paneer* (pigeon peas and small cubes of fried ricotta cheese simmered in a spicy tomatoe sauce) with *naan* (leavened bread), a meal my my mom had prepared that morning and left for us on her large cherrywood kitchen table. In-between silence and a bite of a home-made meal that only a mother could make, Rupa lifts her head and says to me,

> I currently embody everything that the majority of, at least eligible, voters hate. I am queer, Muslim, and brown. What else is there? I was born here [the United States] but there is part of me that feels like I don't belong here. I don't have that draw; that pull it is not the same. Of course, I come back to my senses…The last time I went to Bangladesh was seven years ago and it was the first time I had gone with hair this short…I was decked out in a sari…We took rickshaws to a *khala*'s [maternal aunt] house…and on the way all the men in the street were coming up to the rickshaw and leering in my face, [asking], *"Cheley na mey?"* [Boy or girl?]…There is an air about the way I walk or the way I talk, even when I am speaking Bengali. Someone even said eye contact marks me a little different, so I am "Othered" in that way [too].

In a single moment, during our "off" time, Rupa demonstrates to me how she volleys between notions of Americanness and South Asianness. Rupa's words put into motion a pertinent theme that became a part of my dissertation: she insightfully problematizes the East/West divide and the binary categorization between South Asian and American.

In my work, I explore the perceptions of second-generation South Asian-American women about daily social practices in the U.S. and how they view themselves in comparison to broader American society. I do this by engaging in an eight-month long feminist ethnography with a cross-national sample of twenty-five women in the U.S. I spent a day in the life of each woman, eating, drinking, and talking…talking about work, partners, families, food, clothing, and how they feel about being children of immigrants, among other things. In this dissertation, I ask the following questions: What are the meanings of *ABCD* or *American-Born Confused Desi* - a popular term for second-generation South Asian Americans - in the U.S. racial and ethnic imaginary ("desi," derived from the Hindi word "desh," meaning motherland, is a diasporic term used by South Asians in America to refer to other South Asians)? How do these meanings travel through class, gender, sexual, and cultural hierarchies, both in the United States and transnationally?

By asking such questions, I uncover that while Rupa's sense of social differentiation is a product of dominant discourses of white privilege (and male and heterosexual privilege) (see McIntosh 1988), and the women with whom I worked with locate themselves in a series of binaries (my research participants utilize binary categorization to express social differentiation), the general category of "Other," though relevant, does not work on its own. American Orientalism as a framework does not wholly explain the complex lives my participants lead.[2] I find that the women in my fieldwork articulate a complex process in which the categories "South Asian" and "American" are mutually constitutive and exist both as opposites and in unison or Naber's (2006) notion of "selective assimilation strategy" (88). My respondents

articulate their identities at the intersections of a constellation of loyalties that are

multiple, contradictory, constantly shifting, and overlapping; the women in this study

rupture Mohanty's (1988) theoretical "Third World Woman." And, throughout my

ethnographic research, the theme of female sexuality circumscribes the ways my research

participants imagine and contest culture, identity, and belonging (see Naber 2006, 87-88).

Hence, I situate the study on the margins of both U.S. nationalism and South Asian-

American cultural nationalism within intersecting coordinates of power – race, ethnicity,

class, gender, sexuality, and nation.

The conceptual insights gained from studying second-generation South Asian-

American women are not limited. Through my interviews, I determined that identity is

the issue that best captures the class of events. A central theme that emerged from the

data is how my respondents "perform" their identities as South Asian-American women.

The women's stories underscore the agency individuals have in asserting, enhancing,

maintaining, and reconstructing their identities. I focus on broader theoretical or

epistemological concerns – identity, identity grammar, and shifts in identity grammar

(see Brekhus 2003). This is focus of the dissertation, entitled *The ABCD Conundrum:*

What Does it Mean to be a South Asian-American Woman?

Experience/Theory

My academic endeavor stems from my autobiographical history (see Spivak 1988;

hooks 1990; Puar 1994a, b). Puar's (1994a) discussion about the experience/theory

divide, within which this dissertation is situated in, is invaluable. She writes,

> I…believe that the relationships between experience and theory are contingent,
> discontinuous, and contradictory…Just as readers are situated in multiple

discursive geopolitical positionings, I too, as an author, can situate and resituate my self and thus my text as reflective of my selves. (78)

Therefore, like Narayan (1997), "I…wish to suggest some *linkages* between the complexities of who I am and what I claim to know" (5). I take a moment to clarify my influences.

As a child and adolescent, I juggled and moved between my "South Asian" identity and "American" identity, which at times felt distinct to me. I remember going through a daily two-step ritual after coming home from elementary school (in Elgin, IL) that would transform me from an "American" into a "South Asian" (particularly a Bangladeshi). First, before entering the house, I would take off my sneakers – my outside shoes – in the garage and slip into my *bashar jootha* (Bangla/Bengali) or indoor sandals before entering the home. Second, I would shed my ESPRIT outfit, take a shower to cleanse myself of the day, and slip into a *shalwar kameez*.[3] This purification act, which consisted of a simple procedure of shedding, cleansing, and changing, allowed me to cognitively switch from a world of "American" friendship bracelets to one of "South Asian" gold bangles. As an adult, I separate my "South Asian clothing" from my "American clothing" in my closet and my Hindi and Bengali-language music from my English and Spanish CDs. In these examples, I use space and time for the purposes of segregation (Nippert-Eng 1995/1996). Implicit in the segregation is the idea of (symbolic) pollution (Douglas 1966/2001).[4]

Some of my identity categories, such as colored and South Asian, however, are not mutually-exclusive, but when they are coupled, they put me in a marginalized social position of Otherness. I am often asked where my homeland is, where I learned to speak English (without an accent or an American accent), and when I "arrived" to this country.

It is often unfathomable to many Americans, including immigrant Americans, my homeland is the U.S., and it is even harder to comprehend that I did not arrive here. At times when gender is highlighted, I receive questions such as, "Was your marriage arranged?" Clearly, the categories that I understand myself to belong in and that ways in which others see me carry social meaning. Power continues to cluster around certain (socially constructed) categories while exercising against others (Mohanty 1988; Sandoval 1991; Anzaldúa 2001).

Because some parts of my identity seem to be mutually-exclusive, while others can be coupled, creating a state of Otherness, I *am* "South Asian," rejecting my American identity, when the situation calls for it and is advantageous; and I *am* "American," consciously opposing my South Asianness, when my South Asian identity is a marginalized position. Jones (2001) is fruitful here. In her study, which focuses on how British immigrants in America use cultural practices in their daily interactions to negotiate their identities, one of her respondent's says, "I want to be English when *I* want to be" (7). Jones argues that identities are dynamic and individuals have some degree of choice over when to affirm and when to reject their identities.

I can recall several experiences growing up within a bicultural South Asian-American familial and communal context: *Amerikan ra* (Americans are) trash and immoral, *ar Bangali ra* (and Bengalis are) invested in family values and hospitality (see Naber 2006, 87). At Bengali parties, I am a "respectable South Asian woman" through dress, language, and behavior – the "desi virgin." I am in opposition to the average American woman – the "American(ized) whore" (Naber 2006, 88). The goal is to convey to the community that, despite being raised in the U.S., my parents protected me from the

"corrupt West." In the context of binaries, I am an imagined "true" South Asian woman. My parents make clear the cultural expectations they have of me as a South Asian(-American) daughter, though they eagerly highlight that I am different from my cousins "back home" in Bangladesh: I am an American, and, therefore, privileged. Hence, my husband's immigration status trumped his racial, ethnic, and religious status as a Bangaldeshi and Muslim at the time of our marriage. My parents indeed expected me to marry a South Asian Muslim man but they were concerned about their American daughter (citizen) marrying a man who was not born and/or raised in the U.S and did not even hold a Green Card yet. Similarly, when I purchased groceries in pre-dominantly South Asian areas, like Edison, NJ, I often pretended not to understand the cashier if s/he speaks to me in Hindi. I felt the need to underscore that I am not like the cashier: I am not an immigrant, I speak English with an American accent, and I belong to a professional and educated class. That is, I enjoy many "white" privileges. I strategically de-code my identity with binary language "South Asian" and "American," but these examples force me to confront the idea of an imagined "true" South Asian culture and a heterogeneous South Asian culture in the context of migration, assimilation, and racialization. My parents and I engage in such boundary-work because we are vested in a selective assimilation strategy in which the preservation of South Asian cultural identity and assimilation to American norms of whiteness are simultaneously desired (see Naber 2006).[5] And, the theme of female sexuality circumscribes the ways my parents and I imagine and contest culture, identity, and belonging (see Naber 2006, 88). Indeed, the ways in which individuals "do" their identities is constrained or facilitated by forces outside their social control (Jones 2001, 7).

The ontological divide between "role" and "being" is central to the current discussion and framework of the dissertation. The ontology begins to rearticulate the ongoing debates about race and gender, which are especially consequential for the study. The debates allow us to think about the development of the theoretical Third World Woman versus "real" women, who have multiple and contradictory alliances (see Mohanty 1988).

Historically, race as a category of social differentiation has been the product of dominant discourses of (white) power (see Williams 1990). Consider a fragment of seventeenth century American history as a minute yet overwhelming example. When planters brought the first enslaved Africans and indentured white servants to the colonies, the Anglo elite strategically made use of the idea of a white race in order to create racial solidarity among the whites (Allen 1994). Indeed, providing the property-less white workers with racial privileges proved successful in securing their disassociation with the black slaves and their servitude to the dominant class, and the discourse around blackness fanned the myth of the monstrous Other. For most white people, the ideological belief in whiteness instilled strong feelings of allegiance to the race; the racialized ideology set the standard of Anglo-Saxons as the norm, leaving us, to this day, continuing to define race, assign individuals to racial categories, and establish the racial meaning of life, despite evidence that race is not a biological category (see Omi and Winant 1994).

Like race and racism, gender has taken on a similar and important mechanism of cultural production and reproduction in the United States. The mutual exclusivity of categories continues to be contentious. Sex role theory addresses men as aggressive, rational, dominant, and objective and sees them as naturally endowed with values of

power, competency, efficiency, and achievement in this construction; women are passive, intuitive, submissive, and subjective. Gender, as rightly presumed by gender proponents, is not a natural phenomenon. It is socially and performatively constructed, and the theory identifies the relationship between men and women in the context of power relations. Still, gender theory continues to function best within a binary perspective of male and female, lacking an articulation of gender as a continuum. Fausto-Sterling (2000) questions the naturalness of immediately assigning individuals as male or female at birth, and Gerson and Peiss (1985) argue that gender is not a reified or rigid category but is fluid. Indeed, there is little consensus and common understanding of the meaning of gender. One dimension remains resilient: gender signifies differences in power along binary terms (see Lopata and Thorne 1978; Kessler and McKenna 1985; Spain and Bianchi 1996; West and Zimmerman 1998).

Race and gender debates highlight the very real problems posed by western feminist discourse, the initial groundwork in which Mohanty (1988) pivots her work on the relationship between Woman – a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourse – and women – real, material subjects and their collective herstories. Mohanty provides a wonderful base in which to underscore one of the central trepidations against feminist scholarship in America: the discursive colonization of the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world and those who trace their heritage to the third world.

In November of 2001, Laura Bush, in her radio address to the nation in support of the war in Iraq (see http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011117.html), used essentialized East/West imagery to offer a discourse of salvation, advocating the

necessity, responsibility, duty, and the God-given right of Americans to save backward and trapped Muslim women from the practice of *purdah* or *hijab* or veiling (Abu-Lughod 2003). I am still perpetually dumbfounded when bombarded by articles published in popular mass-media magazines with titles like "Terrorized for being smart, young and female." Such an article was written in the June 2005 issue of *Glamour*:

> Since early 2004 dozens of young female Iraqis have been targeted and executed by extremist Islamic insurgents…all because they dared to be *modern* women …One woman once told me that before she would wear a veil, she'd cut her head off… (136) [emphasis added]

It would be a mistake to view these events as simply reactions to communism, terrorism, or an infringement of democratic ideals. Purdah or hijab is a cultural practice that, in and of itself may not raise questions of power and difference. When inserted into the hiatus between the East and the West, the practice of veiling or seclusion is part of an untroubled model of secular progressivism in which the veil can only be read as a trope of incarceration (see Mohanty 1988). When "culture" is read from brown women's bodies in such particular ways, gender is conflated with ideas and feelings about race, ethnicity, and the nation (see Narayan 1997; see Nagel 2003). Such category work informs collective and individual experiences and identities of not only migrants and their children in America, but also of hegemonic Americans.

As a consequence of discursive colonization, I was not "American" enough for my classmates in elementary school and I was too "Western" or "corrupt" for my immigrant parents (see also Maira 2002, 4). Similar to the Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), at times, I felt I had no bounded sense of self. These feelings of permeability and contamination came from the fact that I sensed there was no room to be both South Asian and American. In other words, this is a

"borderland" (Mohanty 2003). As indicated by Naheed Hasnat's (1998) essay titled "Being 'Amreekan': Fried Chicken versus Chicken Tikka," I could have both fried chicken and chicken tikka, but I could not have them together spatially and temporally. The composite single Third World Woman carries in the American imaginations the authorizing signature of western humanistic discourse, effacing the possibility that women of color may be vested in both "their" cultural identity and American norms of whiteness.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

As I think and write about my influences, and as the research progressed, I am encouraged to ponder the theoretical and methodological implications of my work, which I explore further in Chapter Two.

It has become clearer that the notion of binary constructs within "white, western, and feminist thinking" (see Puar 1993) provide an important conceptual tool through which I am able to evaluate the women's stories that are at the center of my research. The oppositional poles of East/West, white/black, man/woman, and South Asian/American acquire social significance and meaning through Orientalist knowledge production - an assumed experience based on dominant representation - rendering the second-generation as misplaced and cultural-conflict-bound (Puar 1994a, 23). The construction and maintenance of an oppositional South Asian stereotype that is mutually exclusive of the white American is facilitated by the reluctance of and dominant "white gazes" or "trope of the racialized gaze" (Fanon 1986) to acknowledge some form of interdependence on the other.

My research participants believe social differentiation to be a product of dominant discourses of white privilege (and male and heterosexual privilege) (see McIntosh 1988). Kelly (1998) illustrates the complex meanings attached to the "white gaze." The importance of the white gaze is that it allows a dominant group to control the social spaces and social interaction of all groups. The purpose of the gaze is that it should subdue those who receive it and make them wish to be invisible (19).[6] The term "white gaze" does not suggest that whiteness is monolithic, devoid of multiple ideologies and configurations, but, rather, I refer to the insistence of oppositional boundaries clearly marked and upheld as mutually exclusive realities that mythologize a cohesive white identity (Puar 1994a, 23). Consider the "model minority" myth. First, it elides the existence of refugees, undocumented workers, and working-class-immigrants, imbuing South Asian communities with a false homogeneity (Zhou 1997; Prashad 2000; Ngai 2004; Kwong and Miščević 2005). And, second, it reproduces the idea of Asian-American foreignness, thus denying sameness vis-à-vis white society and preventing drawing parallels across class and gender, for example (Puar 1994a, 23).

Puar (1994a) argues that the either/or equation freezes the South Asian Other without political or social agency or room to negotiate subjectivity, maintaining the focus on exclusionary politics by marginalizing those with multiple alliances (24-25). Within ABCD formations, fraught with American Orientalism, the "new second-generation" – those who are born in the U.S. or arrived to the U.S. by age four, and are the off-spring of post-1965 adult immigrants from South Asia (mostly India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal) – are thought to occupy a liminal zone. I consider here Layla's voice, the second-

generation protagonist from Samina Ali's (2004) *Madras on Rainy Days*, a fiction novel

with stellar reviews from publications like the *San Francisco Chronicle*[7]:

> I had faced this all my life, the way each country [U.S. and India] held a moral stance of the other. It was as though each nation had its own uniform and I wore the shirt of one, the trousers of the other, and both sides were shooting at me…They exchanged hamburgers for chicken curry, combined Ayurvedic and modern medicine, and swapped yoga for aerobic. I had never witnessed such confused and beguiled lovers. (26-27)

Consider in conjunction Zainab Ali's (1993) words in her essay entitled "Becoming

Agents of Our Identity":

> This is the first of many incidents in which I have felt like I am sitting on the border of two culture and religions. This position invariably forces me to into feelings of disjunction because I must choose between two cultural practices. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that I am able to choose to which side of the fence I want to jump: I have no choice. Rather, I am disjointed from both my Islamic culture and my Urdu language, and my – yes, it is *mine* also – Western culture and English language. Which do I use to express myself? Which becomes my identity? (238)

The second-generation are the ABCD conundrum!

I am certainly sympathetic to this as a theory of real ruptures in lived experience,

but this theory seems to be untenable as I probe the real dispersion of cultural experience

across situations within a set of lives. While I agree the either/or equation certainly

bounds agency, it does necessarily freeze agency and subject formation. On the contrary,

the twenty-five women I interviewed show how they enact agency and subject formation

from within an imposed either/or framework. The women I include in this study suggest

they do identity work in multiple, cross-cutting, simultaneous, and contentious categories

– primarily race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and culture. The study reveals that

the Orientalist expectations do not wholly reflect the realities of the lives of the women

who chose to participate in the eight-month long cross-national feminist ethnography.

What then are some of the questions that need to be asked in order to critique Layla and Zainab's words? What are some of the sites of contention within the quotes? First, it is absolutely imperative to consider what the division between America and South imply? The second question I ask, even more imperative than the first, is how does the division between South Asia and America effect the identity formations and performances of South Asian-Americans and particularly for the women in this study?

The central problem lies with Layla and Zainab's "torn between two cultures" rhetoric. Both the authors Samina Ali and Zainab Ali demonstrate a rigid socio-cognitive framework and their inability to break away from compartmentalizing bodies, reading bodies in multiple ways (see Zerubavel 1991, 121). Mani (1993) argues that the two-culture rhetoric has a long and complex history for "Third World" women and its consequences bear thinking through:

> Questions of tradition and modernity have, since the nineteenth century, been debated on the literal and figurative bodies of women. It comes as no surprise that the burden of negotiating the new world is borne disproportionately to women, whose behavior and desires, real or imagined, become the litmus test for the South Asian community's anxieties or sense of well-being… (34-45)

In this context, second-generation South Asian-American women are neither "American" nor "South Asian." They occupy a liminal zone, one between Layla's hamburger and chicken curry and Zainab's Western culture/English and Islamic culture/Urdu.

Layla, the protagonist in *Madras on Rainy Days*, is caught between parental desire for conformity with cultural norms that are at odds with her American peers' and her own uneasy integration into U.S. society; Layla finds herself struggling to know her place and her identity. Samina Ali frames Layla's journey from America to India (for an arranged marriage) to America (once the marriage fails) within the East:West/

Tradition:Modern discourse. Ali attributes Layla's self-questioning to her Americanness

and her sense of duty and family responsibility to her Indianness (see also Indu

Krishnan's documentary *Knowing Her Place* 1990). Oppositionally juxtaposed with her

pregnant cousin Henna, who is gang-raped during a city-wide *hartal* or government

shutdown in Hyderabad, India and meets an untimely death, Layla portrays the

anomalous "Third World Woman" (Mohanty 1988; Grewal 1993, 233). Samina Ali's

novel ends as Layla's husband, Samir, releases Layla from the marriage and she returns

to the land of the free (and individuality) with her American passport, ready to begin life

once again – a normal life: "The wind rose, lifting my veil like ravens' wings. Layla.

Darkness. So I was. My body hidden and safe under the chador [a long shawl],

belonging only to me" (307). Clearly, Samina Ali utilizes a Euro-American

epistemology to formulate the subject of feminism. Minh-ha (1989) calls this portrayal

one of "specialness" rather than one of difference, suggesting a division between "I-who-

have-made-it and You-who cannot-make-it" (86-87). The broader context in which

Layla embeds her unhappiness includes her role in the family as a conflict between South

Asia and America - South Asia is the ultimate site of failure and America is the one and

only answer to all problems.

The danger here is language used to produce literature extends experiences in

time and space. Brady (2002) writes,

> Literature attends to affect an environment; it uses space and spatial processes
> metaphorically to suggest emotions, insights, concepts, characters. It also shapes
> the way spaces are perceived, understood, and ultimately produced. Thus
> literature illustrates and enlarges the shaping force of narrative in the production
> of space, highlighting the discursiveness of space, its dependence on cultural
> mediation. (8)

Layla's body becomes a "transcolonial zone" for the reader. Layla reproduces a circulation of narratives across the Atlantic from East (production – the story-teller) to West (consumption – the reader), and she is the site of exchange between South Asia and the U.S. What is being written into the narratives is a story of cultural displacement which evades the specificity of gender and depends on stereotypic propositions about America and South Asia (see Mani 1993, 34). Mani (1993) once again voices, "Americanness in this context is simply an unambivalent index of cultural difference, even superiority" (36). This transcolonial transmission frames Rupa's opening words and the social placement of second-generation South Asian-Americans in problematic ways. Allow me to be even clearer, the rigid Orientalist discourse, which is often used to contextualize the lives of South Asian-Americans, fails to understand that entities are able to lie in multiple categories – that may even be contradictory – at the *same* time.

I do not attempt to mutilate the pains associated with being an American child of South Asian heritage. Neeta Puri (2004) shares childhood stories of Othering in Indiana. Puri describes a conversation with her teacher in grade school after a violent attack on Sikhs in India in 1984:

> "Where is your Uncle Goor-teep from?"
> I realized that I was angry at her for mispronouncing his name and my name, but I didn't know what to do. After all, what does a brown child say to a white woman with authority?
> "467 Lakewood Avenue."
> "Well, I didn't hear anything about that or read it in the papers," she said. "Are you sure?"
> I looked at her angry, and said, "Yes, I'm sure."
> …The teacher then asked, "Do you mean what happened in In-dee-yuh this past week?"
> "Maybe." I honestly wasn't sure.
> "Well, that's a completely different problem," she said, speaking slowly. Turning to the rest of the class, she said. "In-dee-yuh is a place where people are really wild. They kill each other all the time." (23)

Kamala Visweswaran (1993) is also no stranger to stereotypes, racism, and Orientalism (see 302). As a child of immigrant Bangladeshi-Muslim parents, I am far too aware of the restrictions involved growing up brown and Muslim in white suburbia (i.e. eating rice with the right hand, using a *lota*/*bodna* or watering can in the restroom for cleansing purposes, and taboos around dating). But, if we accept the conflation of modernity with America and tradition with South Asia, then it would not only be impossible to account for the various women's liberation movements in South Asia along with the struggles women in America face in keeping their families together, but it will also be difficult to account for my research participants' voices of struggles and losses and liberations and achievements.[8]

While the women I interviewed experience "whiteness" and the oppressor role along class lines, they are also asked to distance themselves from their "whiteness" through imposed racial and cultural definitions, taking on the role of the oppressed (see Puar 1993), and at times not, vis-à-vis black people (Prashad 2000, 2002, 2003). With time and age, the women's self-definitions come to include manipulation and expressions of opposition as they grow to appreciate "their culture" while simultaneously owning whiteness or hegemony. Puar (1994a) calls this form of "bargaining with racism" as "oppositionally active whiteness." She writes,

> Such a notion of identity suggests a complete alliance with neither South Asian nor white society; rather, it resists both. It is opposition in its unwillingness to be consumed by the white pole; activity in this arena results not from racism or rejection by white society. It is instead the product of critical evaluation and appreciation of one's own culture. (27)

My research participants (consciously) respond to oppression and manipulate the "terror of whiteness" (Puar 1994a), articulating an "oppositional consciousness" (Sandoval

1991).[9] Through the appropriation of Orientalist tropes, the women construct "resistant

identities" (Sandoval 1991). The Orientalist dichotomies between East and West and

tradition and modernity fall far behind the actual construction of the women's identities

and dispersion of culture.

As a glimpse of what is to come, I share with you a moment from one of the

woman's life, an instance we shall re-visit later on in the manuscript. Rita, a lawyer for a

non-profit organization in Chicago and in her late twenties, provides a telling story about

arranged marriage. She openly articulates why she allowed her parents to help her

choose a partner, "I have always had a very strong sense of duty to my parents, and I

know that my parents would not be able to click as well [with a non-desi]…" In the

context of Rita's words, I am disturbed with the redundant arranged marriage scene in the

opening of Samina Ali's (2004) novel:

> Suffering quietly in a room not my own. The door locked. The wooden shutters
> pulled closed and bolted. No breeze out there, nothing to rustle the leaves of the
> mango or coconut trees. Only stillness…The next morning, he hung the red-
> spotted cloth on the clothesline and it fluttered in the wind for everyone to see, a
> white flag of her surrender and his victory. (3)

The image of the arranged marriage in *Madras on Rainy Days* does not indicate the

diversity of actual marriage practices of the second-generation women whom I

interviewed.[10] Rita does not ignore the histories and nuances within the practice of

arranged marriage and boldly challenges the Orientalist conquest. Author Samina Ali, on

the other hand, denies the opportunity of structural change in the South Asian marriage

system, effacing the potential of arranged marriages for South Asian-Americans.

Rita clearly shows her alliances to South Asianness, but she also implicates

herself with stereotypical Americanized norms such as freedom, individuality, and falling

in love. Rita uses "falling in love" terminology to describe her first encounter with her husband, "We talked for two and a half hours…We talked about not very generic things. It was almost like we had known each other…I had kind of felt something." While Rita challenges the East/West dichotomy and marks herself as an Other, exhibiting her loyalties to South Asianness, Rita simultaneously underscores her alliance to U.S. nationalist culture. The desire of stereotypical "Americanness" is predicated on "South Asianness" as the crucial Other (see Naber 2006). Then, Rita shows, in the context of immigration, assimilation, and racialization, "South Asian" and "American" exist as both opposites and in unison – a persisting and central theme in the study.

Visweswaran (1993) expresses the nature of second-generation identities point to an "oscillation between post-colonial and racialized American subjectivities" (309). Unlike, the linear teleology followed by Samina Ali's Layla, the women break apart the ABCD conundrum and reject models of assimilation along with ethnic enclave identity models. Numerous immigration scholars, like Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut, point to the fundamentals of multiculturalism. They often artciulate a one-dimension identity model with assimilation on one side, and whiteness as the benchmark, and ethnic enclaves on the other side, discrete and divided ethnic and racial communities. I find that the question is not about assimilation, ethnic enclaves, or anything in-between. My research participants collapse the one-dimensional multicultural model by producing multiple identities simultaneously, both validating the categories that define human visibility as well as invisibility in public spaces. They struggle to fashion a space for themselves outside of this multicultural identity model.

In this study, the twenty-five women's biographies clarify my own notions of identity, guiding me towards a project of self-recovery and reconciliation with myself. The women taught me that I do not have one identity, rather, I can identify on many grounds – across race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality, etc. My identities are not constructed in isolation, they can be simultaneous and contradictory, they are not mutually exclusive, and they do not operate with equal importance in all situations. What began as feelings of isolation and the need for separation ended with a personal project of identity – a process of "front-staging" and "back-staging" of identity categories (Collins 2004) with multidimensional histories.[11]

One of the methodological insights is the hazards of definition and of the power play that is behind any attempt to box a living, breathing, and fragmented thinker. Therefore, my primary goal is to allow the twenty-five women I interviewed speak about their (auto)biographical experiences and be heard and represented through the dissertation.[12] Second, I wish to frame the experiences of the women within "objective" data processes, scientific analysis, and sociological theory. In this light, I do not claim that the twenty-five women's words are representative of the second-generation South Asian-American community at large or even that they are representative of themselves. The category South Asian is heterogeneous and like the category South Asian diaspora needs to be deconstructed. The phenomena of intersectionality cannot be generalized as taking on one singular form for all second-generation South Asian-American women; we must be cautious using the terms "South Asian," "South Asian-American," and "South Asian-American woman" (see Islam 1993; Mani 1993; Visweswaran 1993; Puar 1994a; Poore 1998). Naber (2006) argues that feminist theory and practice "should take the

specific ways that the coordinates of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and nation intersect in different contexts seriously" (91). Hence, the dissertation is not an analysis of *all* second-generation South Asian-American women. I use the words of the women whom I worked with to speak for myself and to facilitate my understanding of the women's lives, to think beyond misperceptions and stereotypes, and to make comments about the larger theme of identity, which best describes the class of events in the upcoming chapters.

An inter-disciplinary methodological stance was necessary to invoke the multiply layered and contradictory experiences. And it is precisely because I employ a host of methods from various disciplines – i.e. comparative-historical and feminist approaches – I am able to break down and deconstruct binaries, coming to the conclusion that no model of identity will suffice to explain the experiences of the twenty-five second-generation South Asian-American women who took part in this study.

Under-heard and Under-theorized Identities

This research is sociologically significant because it develops the concept of "identity work." It demonstrates the complexity of identity and the extent to which identity involves not just experience but also actual practices ("doing"). I do so through investigating the lives of second-generation South Asian-American women, a missing and marked population in academic research.

I concentrate on women because when emphasizing the opposition of men and women, the woman is the marked "Other" (Yegenoglu 1998), and masculinity is the "unmarked" or the normal (see Connell 1995, "The Social Organization of Masculinity"). In cases where men become the marked, such as Arab-American men in context of post-

September 11, 2001, women do not become the unmarked, but, rather, they disappear (Brooks 2004). Similarly, the media focus on homosexual acts of torture of male Iraqi prisoners at Abu Gharib obscures other forms of gendered violence, serving a broader racist, sexist, and homophobic agenda (Puar 2004, 522-523) (see also the Hindi-language movie *Chadni Bar* 2004). Consistently, there is a hierarchical margin between men and women.

Within this gender juxtaposition, the social treatment of women is problematic at best and deadly at worst around the world, but the issue has taken on a new dimension in the South Asian-American context. The task of raising girls under the umbrella of religion and culture is far more difficult in the eyes of immigrant parents than it is of raising boys. There are cases of families temporarily moving back to South Asia with their second-generation teenage daughters only to return to the U.S after the daughters are of age, and, like Samina Ali's protagonist Layla, adult daughters are at times taken to South Asia and entered into marriages to prevent cultural and racial contamination (Dasgupta and Warrier 1997). South Asian daughters are responsible for maintaining family honor and culture (while sons have the obligation of caring for their parents in their old age.) A daughter's husband is a benchmark for her own personal success as well as the family's, and she is required to procreate (Dasgupta and Warrier 1997; Shah 1997; Dasgupta 1989). A daughter's obligation goes beyond her own life, stretching out into society's expectations and far ahead into future generations in the context of cultural preservation.[13] Then, the ideal of reproducing cultural identity is gendered and sexualized and disproportionately placed on daughters. A daughter's rejection of an idealized notion of South Asian womanhood signifies cultural loss, negating her potential

as capital within this family strategy (see Naber 2006, 88). I find in this study that women's role in society is one of "carriers of culture," and the ideal of reproducing culture is highly gendered and differentially associated with women.

Women, particularly women of color, are constantly and commonly constructed as the "marked" "Other," where Othering is a practice of domination (Mohanty 1988; Sandoval 1991; Byrne 2000a, b; Anzaldúa 2001). But, as a category, women of color are often under-theorized (Yegenoglu 1998), and they can be used to understand the application of various larger trends.

I focus on South Asians because even though they are a relatively newly arrived ethnic group compared to African Americans, Hispanics, and even the Japanese and Chinese, South Asians are one of fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States. Recent decades have seen massive population movements of South Asians – mostly Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis – from South Asia to the United States. The major influx of South Asian migration began after the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965.[14] The South Asian community expanded from 50,000 before 1965 to 815,000 by 1990, and by 2000 had reached 1,687,765 (Hing 1993). However, according to the United States Department of Justice (1999), South Asians, especially women, are one the most "under-served" immigrant communities in the United States. Even though government and public policies place various community and social services as a priority on their agendas, this attention has not been focused equally on all communities. To a large extent, ethnic minority and immigrant communities in America have escaped "social watchfulness" and suffer from a lack of services and resources. The South Asian community, as a recent immigrant and ethnic minority, critically suffers from this

oversight. The lack of social watchfulness is in part due to the dearth of research on social problems affecting the South Asian-American community. For example, due to the paucity of research, there is little reliable statistical data on the incidence rate of gender-specific abuse in the South Asian-American community, leading to the widespread belief that gender-based violence (i.e. spousal abuse) is not a serious problem among South Asians in America – the myth of the model minority (see Dasgupta and Warrier 1997). Additionally, in the wake of America's war on terror, South Asian groups have become targets of overt racist attacks, while the current administration gives rise to ethnocentric government programs such as the U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology, calling into question who is an American and who is not.

The influx of South Asian immigrants also raises several scholarly questions, such as what changes occur in South Asian immigrant families when they move to the U.S., that a growing number of researchers are addressing (Fisher 1980; Gibson 1988; Agarwal 1991; Lessinger 1995; Mukhi 2000). However, less visible in the media and scholarship are the children of these immigrants. The off-spring of the post-1965 immigrants began to come of age during the late 1980s and 1990s, but the stories of these South Asian-Americans have not yet adequately been told and incorporated in the larger narratives of the United States (see Maira 2002, 2). The children of these immigrants represent a critical generation determining patterns of race, ethnicity, culture, economy, and politics in the United States. Maira (2002) writes, "Immigrant youth culture raises questions about the relationships of immigrant communities to the nation-state in which they live and the one they ostensibly left behind" (21). A central question, therefore, is, what kinds of identities are second-generation South Asian-Americans forging?

I examine perceptions and daily social practices because earlier studies on South Asian populations (Fisher 1980; Gibson 1988; Agarwal 1991; Lessinger 1995; Mukhi 2000) have not paid sufficient attention to the manner in which that population views themselves in comparison to broader American society. The literature on the second-generation frequently underscores the process by which they are adjusting to American society (see Prashad 2000; Maira 2002; Purkayastha 2005). Two main theoretical perspectives - assimilation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001) and pluralism (Conzen 1991) - have commonly been the basis for examining that adjustment process. Central to the assimilation perspective is the assumption that there is a natural process by which diverse ethnic groups come to share a common culture and gain equal access to opportunities (Gordon 1964). Alternatively, the pluralist perspective perceives American society as consisting of a harmonious collection of culturally distinct ethnic and racial groups (Zhou 1997). I am concerned with the aspect of social life that the two perspectives tend to downplay. While the perspectives are often characterized as different, they have two features in common that have not yet been sufficiently transcended. In both instances, the research on second-generation populations focuses on outcome: on the one hand, the result is assimilation, and, on the other hand, it is a form of power sharing. Beyond their emphasis on outcome, however, both positions are fundamentally focused on the extent to which those outcomes serve to diminish social conflict within society. The "outcome" focus can then be seen as oriented towards the absorptive ability of the social system as a whole.

The ability of the social system to adapt to diverse populations is a valuable research agenda. However, it does not provide an understanding of the equally valuable

research concern with the inner workings of the individuals. Grewal (1994) writes, "The debates on assimilation and nonassimilation might elide the important projects of complicity with and utilization of difference…" (53). This study indicates that second-generation individuals are engaged in the complicated process of simultaneously mediating the culture of their parents and the culture of their new society. Moreover, because of the influence of the women's movements in the U.S. during the second half of the twentieth century, a new set of social circumstances have come into this first decade of the twenty-first century. It, in turn, has provided a fresh set of cultural phenomena for those engaging in society.

Finally, the study presents the narratives of race, ethnicity, color, gender, nationality, and citizenship from the (auto)biographical recounts of second-generation South Asian-American women. Narratives of gender are often based on the white, middle class, female experience, while the narratives of race are based often on the black male experience (Crenshaw 1991). Nationality and citizenship discussions produce an epistemological discourse that center around white, heterosexual, and generally male histories (see Waters 1990; Brodkin 1998; Ignatiev 1995; Gugielmo 2003). There is an urgent need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed (Crenshaw 1991; see Mohanty 2003, 244). Hence, in this research, I illuminate the process of identity work from the voices of second-generation South Asian-American women.

In Chapter One, I seek to review the small body of immigration literature on contemporary South Asian-Americans and their children – the "second-generation." My goal is to develop a historical framework in which to contextualize how the twenty-five

second-generation South Asian-American women in this study perceive and engage in daily social practices in the U.S and how they view themselves in comparison to broader American society. In Chapter Two, I explore methodology, feminist approaches, and research implications. This chapter examines the process of my research from the point of imagining the study to completion. I clearly outline how I begin to approach my research process. Here, I not only interrogate knowledge-production, particularly as a researcher, but I also contemplate what the women's stories methodologically suggest. Next, racial and ethnic projects have an enormous effect on the production of space and the process of producing space has an enormous effect on subject formation (see Simmel 1950; Brady 2002). In Chapter Three, I probe the ways in which South Asians in America are racialized and they ways in which they respond to U.S. racial projects, including how the women in this study use racial and ethnic labels. I find that the women sort themselves by contesting notions of race – "Asian" – and appropriating ethnic discourse – "Bengali" and "South Asian." However, their refusal to identify solely as racial subjects ("ethnicity paradigm") does not mean they wholly reject the existence of race, nor does it mean that they get to absolve themselves from racial categorization. In Chapter Four, I have a discussion about the meanings of "culture" and "cultural identity" through the eyes of the women in this study. I find that while the women I interviewed express the theme of culture within binaries, positioning South Asianness in strict opposition to Americanness, they simultaneously engage in assimilatory acts, protecting the boundaries of U.S. nationalism and hegemonic discourse, which is predicated on dilienating South Asian from American through the discourse of Orientalism and Otherness. In this discussion, my research participants' distinction between being "South

Asian" and "American" often break down, suggesting that the South Asian community is not altogether a different conception of spatiality.

In Chapter Five, I present five discursive sites – language, holidays, religion, cooking and eating, and clothing – that my research participants collectively identify as spaces of cathexis in which they produce and consume culture daily. I call the five sites "territories of the self." The discussion is significant because my respondents suggest that through the five discursive sites of cultural production, they (re-) negotiate their identity performances continually and consistently. Meaning, the women I interviewed reject hegemonic conceptions of a unitary self. In Chapter Six, I focus on the role marriage plays in my research participants' lives. I explore how the women in this study respond to their families' expectations of their marriage along with the women's own expectations of marriage within the context of hegemonic U.S. nationalism, pressures of assimilation, gendered racialization of South Asian women (and men), and localized imagined "true" South Asian culture. I find that heterosexual ethno-religious endogamous marriage is a key demand of South Asian-American womanhood. In Chapter Seven, I continue to develop the concept of identity work, the complexity of my informants' identity, and identity involves not just experience but also actual practices by focusing on queer-identified second-generation South Asian-Americans. I share two of my respondents' stories here: Rupa and Ronica. I extend scholarship on the South Asian Diaspora by underscoring areas of weakness in queer theory and literature on migration/U.S. identity formation. Finally, in Chapter Eight, I discuss some of the sociological lessons learned: the theme of identity and shifting identity best captures the class of events described in this research. Here, I challenge a rigid socio-cognitive

framework or the inability to break away from compartmentalizing bodies, by reading bodies in multiple ways. And I offer some solutions to rigid-identity work.

In sum, in this dissertation, I explore the perceptions of second-generation South Asian-American women about daily social practices in the U.S. I examine perceptions and daily social practices because earlier studies on second-generation populations have not paid sufficient attention to the manner in which that population views themselves in comparison to broader American society. I concentrate on women because they are an under-theorized category in (im/migration and U.S.-identity) research. I focus on South Asians because they are one of fastest growing ethnic groups in America who are often overlooked (by public policy agendas) because of their "model minority" status.   I emphasize second-generation because the stories of the children of post-1965 immigrants have not yet been told and incorporated in to the larger narratives of American history.

My research participants' oral histories speak to the gendered and sexualized discourses of assimilation, racism, and U.S. Orientalism, as well as the multiple points in which they break down. Following in the footsteps of Naber (2006), this study argues for an anti-essentialist approach to South Asian and South Asian-American studies that take historical and localized conditions seriously. I situate my research on the margins of both U.S. nationalism and South Asian-American cultural nationalism within the context of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and femininities.

The dissertation not only addresses the dearth of research needed to ascertain an ever-growing community's social needs, but it is also timely. It contributes to a better understanding of im/migration studies; intersectional studies; comparative racial and ethnic structures; nationhood, nationality, and citizenship; colonial and post-colonial

studies; gender and women's studies; feminist and queer theory; sociology of the self; and South Asian and urban American studies.

CHAPTER 1

Impossible Subjects:
(Re-)Collecting South Asian-American Im/migration

Because literature on second-generation South Asian-American women is scarce, I mostly concentrate on literature about contemporary South Asian-American immigrant communities and second-generation youth communities. A review of the history of arrival of South Asians will help to clarify the racial projects immigrants are inserting themselves into, and, subsequently, the ways in which they see themselves in their new homeland. My goal is to draw upon these works to develop a historical framework for contextualizing how the twenty-five second-generation South Asian-American women in this study perceive and engage in daily social practices in the U.S and how they view themselves in comparison to broader American society. Here, I clarify the link between the normative power of discourse and the history of marginalized groups in America.

Welcome Desis…Not!: 1965 to 1990

In 1965, U.S. law revised the half-century-old- policy of discrimination against Asian immigrants. The USSR's launch of *Sputnik I* and *II* in the late 1950s threw the U.S. into panic. In their desire to compete with the Eastern bloc's technological advancements, the U.S. government tried to promote the study of science and technology through a better funded National Science Foundation and by local projects such as the "math bees." The development of U.S. science, however, relied on immigrants from the 1940s such as Einstein and Fermi. The U.S. began searching for medical personnel to fill the increased demand of doctors due to the legislated Medicare and Medicaid programs, as well as natural scientists who could promote U.S. scientific study. On July 23, 1963,

President Kennedy informed legislature that he wanted to see the immigration system overhauled so that "highly trained or skilled persons may obtain a preference without requiring that they secure employment here before emigrating" (Prashad 2000, 74).

The Immigration Act of 1965 is a watershed legislation of the Kennedy-Johnson era. The amendments represent one of the most important revisions of immigration policy in the United States since the First Quota Act of 1921. Under the old Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, officials would allow a certain percentage of the total number of immigrants from a given nation already residing in the United States. In lieu of the considerations of nationality and ethnicity, the 1965 amendments established a nation-state based quota system on reunification of families and needed skills. Individual visas were granted with priority given to family reunification, attracting needed skills to the United States, and refugees (see Ngai 2004). Since 1965, sources of immigration to the United States have shifted from Europe to Asia and other parts of the developing world.

The new law had profound affects on the third world in particular, creating greater opportunities for migration from Asia. The 1965 Act made the annual maximum quota of Eastern Hemisphere immigrants 170,000 and no more than 20,000 per country. The new opportunities to migrate allowed highly qualified South Asian (mostly Indian) technical workers to respond to the labor call, quickly establishing themselves in the U.S as highly educated, middle- to upper-middle class skilled professionals (Agarwal 1991). Ngai (2004) writes, "[The] signal achievement [of the 1965 Act] was that it ended the policy of admitting immigrants according to a hierarchy of racial desirability and established the principle of formal equality in immigration" (227), increasing the

possibility of migration opportunities from Asia (and Eastern and Southern Europe, the principle object of exclusion in the Immigration Act of 1924). As such, the Immigration Act of 1965 "has been canonized in history and social sciences as the apotheosis of postwar liberalism, cultural pluralism, and democratic mobilization…" (Ngai 2004, 227).

The narrative surrounding the birth of the 1965 Act recognizes that America comprises diversity of ethno-racial groups and of growing political support for cultural pluralism, but many believed the law was not about equality. Lawmakers' intent was to continue preferential treatment of whites' entry without using racial language. Hence, they used the family reunification. The presumption was that whites previously admitted would bring their relatives. They did not count on other people of color using this to the degree that they did.

Despite the liberal inclusionary narrative, the Immigration Act of 1965 is comprised of exclusionary features, modeling a developmentalist nation-state discourse. Alongside the "liberalization" of quotas assigned to the Eastern hemisphere, the new ceiling of 120,000 on annual immigration from the Western hemisphere, which went into effect in 1968, put great pressure on Mexico and Canada, the largest sending countries in the hemisphere. For Mexico in particular, the imposition of an annual quota recast Mexicans migrants as "illegal."[15] Ngai (2004) argues, "Indeed, the persistence of numerical restrictions in the postwar period…suggests that in some respects immigration reform only hardened the distinction between citizen and alien" (229). The tenor of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act is not much different than the Contract Labor Law of 1864, which legalized American contractors to recruit low wage workers from Europe and Asia.

Throughout U.S. history, immigrant workers have been used as docile and cheap manual labor and technical workers – the bulk of South Asian migration before 1965 were the latter. The 1965 law introduced H-1B visas – temporary, high skilled work permits; with these, there was no expectation that the technical category of migrants would later use their citizenship to bring their families into the U.S. The question of citizenship was thus an ambiguous and problematic variable in immigration policy and reform discourse. When immigration reformers spoke of "rights," they referred to the rights of existing Americans – the ethnic Euro-Americans – and not the rights of migrants (Ngai 2004). Ngai (2004) expresses, "The Hart-Celler Act furthered the trend of the 1920s that placed questions of territoriality, border control, and abstract categories of status at the center of immigration law" (264).

By 1976, the U.S. tightened the legislation of 1965 as a response to long-term migration patterns. The Immigration and Naturalization Act Amendments and the Health Professions Education Assistance Act of 1976 required migrants and health workers to show proof of employment before immigrating to the United States. These restrictions slowed down the entry of South Asian technical workers, but it did not cease the entrance of family members through the family reunification program, which was intended to reunite U.S.-resident Europeans ethnics or whites. A third wave of immigrants came in the 1980s and 1990s; many of those who came in the third wave were less affluent and less educated. Representative of these are the Gujaratis who run the newsstands, Pakistanis who drive yellow cabs, and Bangladeshis who are waiters in South Asian restaurants, all visible and integral members of many U.S. cities (Maira 2002, 10). Some,

however, came through the Immigrant Visa Lottery, which was part of the 1990 Immigration Act (Leonard 1997).[16]

Modern immigration policies helped to construct a bi-modal distribution of the South Asian population – the post-1965 group consisting of highly educated and financially successful members, and the post-1980 group largely working-class, including undocumented workers (Das Dasgupta and Warrier 1997; Prashad 2000; Maira 2002) – and subsequently the myth of the model minority. The notion of "model minorities" is tied to the end of the Asiatic exclusion, the post-1965 influx of Asian immigrant professionals, and, more recently, the arrival of wealthy elites from Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore (Ngai 2004).

Part of the myth is sustained by the small group of second-wave immigrants who have done extremely well (Zhou 1997; Prashad 2000; Ngai 2004; Kwong and Miščević 2005).[17] The image of the model minority is a politically and historically contingent social construction and cannot be spoken of as an essentialist category that adheres to the Asian American category (Bashi 1998, 960). The image of the model minority is contingent upon the class status and educational achievements of a privileged cohort of the overall immigrant group (Maira 2002). The model minority image persists because most desi immigrants tend to disregard racism in civil society and hey follow an old tradition that group Indians with "whites" in a racial family called "Aryan" (Prashad 2000). Additionally, South Asian immigrants firmly believe that education and hard work wash away structural barriers to success. Like Bashi (1988) found among West Indian immigrants, South Asians who have a social referent of what it was like "back home," and participate in a strong social network have resources that mediate the effects

of racism and racial stratification. Desis feel that they do not "earn" racism like blacks and Latinos in the U.S. (Prashad 2000).

Ignoring anti-immigrant sentiments and the myths about American success, opportunity, and mobility, like the Punjabi pioneers (see Leonard 1992, 1997), many post-1965 immigrants, who arrived in the U.S. on H-1B visas, remained to raise their families in America.[18] The ways in which immigrants enter U.S. history affects the ways they view themselves and their relationship to the "host" country and the identity construction processes of future generations (Kibria 1993; Portes 1995; Waters 1996; Zhou 1997). For most post-1965 immigrants, feelings of not belonging to America are rampant (Prashad 2000). The desire for community draws desis to socialize with each other almost exclusively (Prashad 2000). And, unlike the Punjabi pioneers, many new South Asian immigrants gained the privilege of citizenship, which has profound impact on the ways in which South Asian immigrants and their children maintain ties to the "homeland." The vision here among many South Asians is to make enough money, educate the children, and then return to their homelands for retirement (Prashad 2000). The ability to socially detach from "American life" also justifies withdrawing from American political life (Prashad 2000).[19]

South Asian immigrants are acutely aware that they are here for their labor and not to create their lives (Prashad 2000). First-generation South Asian-American immigrants, commonly known as "Fresh Off the Boat" or "FOB"s, actively reject "American culture" while austerely holding on to "South Asian traditions" in an attempt to create an identity niche in their new homeland. Grewal (1993) points out,

> While for some the belief in modernization leads to a rejection of anything associated with what is seen as "tradition," for many South Asian

immigrants…the belief in a tradition, supposedly static and authentic, remains important for the struggles against racism and assimilation. (228)

In effect, cultural time freezes for South Asians from the moment of migration and time remains eternally frozen for them. The social groups in their homelands, however, move forward in time, adapting to it. As a result, South Asian communities built in the United States are based on a set of ideologies different from those in South Asia. South Asians living in South Asia are concerned with reproducing an ideal South Asian family – a hierarchical order that extols the virtue of patriarchal system. First-generation South Asian-American immigrant society in the U.S. is based on a code of moral rules directed towards one's behavior in the world outside the family and community. The focus of the code is to ensure protection against "Western" values for South Asian children, especially daughters.

Desi migrants bifurcate the world in two: the outside world (the workplace) and the inside world (the home). The external world is a world of capital which must be exploited and the internal world is a world of culture which must be protected (Prashad 2000)[20] – they subscribe to the idea of the Occident versus the Orient, but the desis characterize the "West" as culturally empty, without morals, and capitalistic. There is a different link here between Orientalism and culture than the one described in the context of Laura Bush's radio address: first-generation desis use an Orientalist discourse to read the East/West divide as culture/no culture rather than using the Orientalist framework to decode particular cultural practices as backward or modern. The desi woman emerges within this logic as the bearer of tradition (Ganguly 2001; Maira 2002). (Even though the South Asian-American community expresses the theme of culture in binary terms and perceives their cultural location within a dichotomy of South Asianness and

Americanness, unlike their Punjabi predecessors, the goal of newer immigrants is

"strategic assimilation" – manipulate and mazimize the (potential) power of

powerlessness subversively (Puar 1994a, 48) – to preserve an idealized South Asian

culture constructed within hegemonic U.S. nationalist boundaries. (In later chapters, I

critique that the construction of a binary opposition between South Asian and American

culture is a false dichotomy that disguises political issues (see Naber 2006). I argue that

the oppositional theme is a discursive mechanism for explaining complex processes that

implicate first-generation (and second-generation) South Asian-Americans for upholding

an imagined "true" South Asian culture within the boundaries of U.S. hegemonic

nationalism and a desire for "Americanization").

<u>Im/migration and The Second-Generation</u>

Maira (2002) writes, "Immigrant youth culture raises questions about the relationships of

immigrant communities to the nation-state in which they live and the one they ostensibly left

behind" (21).[21] Portes and Rumbaut find (2001) the second-generation is an inspirational

success story (Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study or CILS). By any measure, they are

outperforming their parents and appear to be set on just the kind of upward course that would

spell success in America (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). For example, the percentage of second-

generation Chinese-Americans who aspire to gain an advanced degree is almost equal to those

that expect to receive a degree (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). However, to a greater extent than in

the beginning of the twentieth century, the second-generation confront an increasingly pluralistic

and fragmented environment. The second-generation respondents in CILS voice high aspiration

for a college or a post-college degree, but there is a wide disparity in those that feel that they can

actually achieve an advanced degree and upward mobility. Mexicans, for instance, aspire for a degree but less than half feel they will realize their aspirations.

In the present historical context, there are two major challenges to second-generation success and career attainment. The first is the persistence of racial discrimination. Many first-generation immigrants are oblivious to the ways in which race works in the U.S. and, therefore, remain adamant that education and hard work are the key to overcoming any barrier.[22] The second challenge is a growing inequality in the American labor market (Portes and Rumbaut 2001): a high market demand for unskilled workers and high-end professionals with little opportunities in between.[23] With diminished industrial opportunities and blocked economic mobility, many second-generation drop out of school, join youth gangs, or participate in drug subculture. There is a growing "oppositional culture" among new young Americans (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Government policies toward a particular immigrant group, local labor market conditions, local social relationships, and characteristics of the immigrants themselves (access to human capital before arrival) – "context of reception" – determine how the second-generation adapts or fails to adapt to the normative culture, thus also directly affecting identity formations (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).[24] Context of reception greatly affects intergenerational acculturation patterns or "cultural dissonance," the level of alienation of second-generation children from their immigrant parents (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). For instance, in communities where first-generation immigrants have negative context of reception, the second-generation is more likely to experience cultural dissonance. There are three ideal-typical acculturation modes: dissonant, consonant, and selective. Dissonant acculturation takes place when a child's learning of English and "American ways" and simultaneous loss of immigrant culture outstrips their parents'. Here,

parents lack other means to maneuver in the host society except through the help of their

children. Consonant acculturation occurs when the learning process and gradual abandonment of

the home language and culture occurs simultaneously between the parents and children.

Selective acculturation takes place when the learning process of both generations is embedded in

a co-ethnic community, allowing partial retention of the parent's tongues and norms. There is a

relative absence of intergenerational conflict and achievement of full bilingualism in the second-

generation here.

Contemporary immigrants differ along two main dimensions: first, their individual

features, which include age, education, occupational skills, and knowledge of English; and

second, the social environment that receives them, which include policies of the receiving

government, attitudes of the "native" population, and pre-existing co-ethnic communities (Zhou

1997). South Asian-American migration has included government policies that range from

open-arm welcome, the provision of legal status and benefits, to rejection of arrivals as illegal

immigrants with massive repatriation efforts. Clearly, any effort to generalize about the second-

generation is difficult, especially because diversity in national origin, education level, and

socioeconomic status, have become salient features of the new second-generation (Zhou 1997)

(i.e. CILS: nearly ninety percent of Chinese parents expect their children to finish college versus

fifty-five percent of Mexicans; about eighty percent of Filipinos live in intact families, while

West Indians are half that; the Hmong do far more homework than anyone else, two and three

times what Hispanic kids manage).

There is much literature available on im/migration and its affects on second-generation

communities, and the available theoretical models on im/migration is full-bodied and well-

developed. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) are clear that there is no single assimilation path

detectable in the second-generation, and, therefore, segmented assimilation theory is useful in explaining different groups' different outcomes. But implicit in the theoretical model is that there is a single, "right" way for all second-generation children to adapt to American life (the most successful of the second-generation are not those who quickly learn "American ways," who switch from their parents' language to English, and fit in seamlessly at school, but rather those who grow up under the umbrella of an ethnic community and nurtured by old-country customs and traditional mores). But, the arrival of large number of new immigrants from South Asia after 1965 alters some of Portes (1995, 1996, 2001) and Rumbaut's (2001) findings. The literature on South Asian-Americans reveals the persistent web of connections that link diasporic communities to the "homeland." Appadurai (1990) foregrounds the centrality of memory to the construction of diasporic identities. The politics of homeland continues to shape South Asian-American constructions of self and their relationship with each other. I find in this study that the question is not about assimilation versus ethnic enclaves; no model of identity is adequate in helping us to understand the complexities of the women's lives. In the upcoming section, I explore how second-generation South Asian-American subjects forge identities and coalitions based on politics of location. Prashad (2000), Maira (2002), and Purkayastha (2005) provide a wonderful body of literature.

<u>ABCDs and (Constructed) Manifest Contradictions</u>

What are desis, and what are their values in the context of America?

The perceived bifurcation of family/South Asian tradition from civil society/U.S. modernity has a profound effect on the second-generation psyche (Maira 2002). The false Orientalist divide between South Asia and America allows for little sense of

complex cultural production from multiple lineages, making dissent impossible if youth

want to retain their desiness, and this is precisely the problem. Mani (1993) warrants,

> Critical questioning becomes aligned with negation of Indianness. As a strategy
> for managing dissent it is especially chilling, since challenging parental authority
> and aspirations leads to a troubling sense of inauthenticity. Women, made
> responsible…for upholding tradition, are particularly vulnerable… (35)

And Prashad (2000) argues,

The failure to offer a better account of cultural capacity of *desis* in the United States leads
[the second-generation] either to [a] form of acultural individualism or else to a turn to a
fetishized U.S. or desi culture. (125)

Desi culture, then, is treated as an ahistorical trait and as a fixed, static, and boundaried

state of identity. The belief that there is a coherent South Asian family tradition apart

from the travails of modernity allows desis (and non-desis) to disregard modern

dilemmas of family struggle and adolescence, i.e. drugs and gang-related violence

(Prashad 2000). The assumption that South Asian women are subordinate is also

widespread (Poore 1998). How then do the second-generation decide or make choices

about identities when they do not have stories filled with different versions of the past?

The literature points to the "economic resources, class aspirations, and financial

anxieties that second-generation youth inherit from their parents significantly influence

their reworking of racial, ethnic, and gender ideologies as they move through

adolescence" (Maira 2002, 10). And the second-generation's attempts to work out their

aspirations for social mobility are intertwined with the bifurcated economic trajectory of

South Asian immigrants (Maira 2002, 10). Prashad (2000) discovers that many young

desis do not find the model minority category useful in their lives. Children of the

techno-professionals are expected to identify with "white," bourgeois values, while the

working class with "black culture." Feeling more like people of color than white, hip-

hop has become a medium of living and expression for many second-generation (middle-class) desis. Young desis in North America have fashioned their cultural politics around several of the icons of the black diaspora. The *Punjabi bhangra* (a North Indian and Pakistani music and dance with a distinctive beat), jungle, and reggae, are heavily infused in the music of South Asian-America re-mix artists such as DJ Rekha, filling the airwaves and clubs of New York City on a regular basis.

Maira (2002), in her study of second-generation Indian-Americans in Manhattan in the mid-1990s, attempts to discover the deeper meaning that this distinct "remix" Indian youth subculture characterized by music and dance combining Hindi film music and bhangra with American rap, techno, jungle, and reggae has for young South Asian-Americans. And the role it plays in helping them to define their ethnic identity and gender relationships.[25] Maira uncovers that the youth are eager participants in conservative and hegemonic politics of cultural authenticity. Most of her interview participants self-identify as "Indian" rather than "American" or even a hyphenated "Indian American" (3). And a "good" Indian American is a person who watches and enjoys Hindi films, demonstrates some fluency in an Indian language, socializes exclusively with other Indian Americans, and embraces a Hindu identity ("politics of ethnic authenticity") (11). Underlying these cultural practices of the second-generation is a collective nostalgia for India as a site of "tradition" and authentic identity (12). The "Indian party scene" is a major component of Indian American youth culture in New York City and a significant context in which social networks are created along with the production and refashioning of ethnic, racial, and gender ideologies (12). It is an ethnically exclusive space and

reflects college youth who participate in the "desi scene" and identify as "truly" Indian or South Asian.

But, the subculture also helps to produce a notion of what it means to be "cool" as a New York youth that is worked into the nostalgia for India. In other words, youth subcultures are embedded in the dialetic between presumably divergent pathways of assimilation and ethnic authenticity (16). Indian-American youngsters are trapped in a dialectic between the "coolness" of a remix subculture and the need to be authentically ethnic.[26] Both the "politics of cool" of the remix culture and the "politics of nostalgia" are deeply gendered (46). Women combine the sexually provocative femininity that Indian-American men find attractive at the remix parties with the chaste, submissive womanhood expected of them as candidates for marriage. Similarly, men manage a "hoody," tough, macho mystique at the parties with the requisite professionally-bound image. The role of remix music is a critical site in which ethnicities are reinvented and gender roles and class aspirations are enacted. What the stories begin to hint at is ethnic identity need not be a totalizing identity and can be critically and selectively reconstructed (4).

Prashad and Maira intelligently explore the place of collective struggle and multiracial alliances in the transformation of self and community in order to make larger comments on how Americans define themselves. They demonstrate the inadequacy of current categories and theoretical perspectives. Both vehemently argue that the term "American-Born Confused Desis" or "ABCDs" is a pathologizing term, and are critical of Portes, Zhou, and sociological theories of segmented assimilation that portray urban youth of color as part of a maladaptive culture.[27] Prashad and Maira offer

interventions countering the focus on ethnic authenticity and assimilation narratives by uncovering that the second-generation display multiple, situational identities that are fluid, complex, and hybrid. Both Prashad and Maira are additionally troubled by the ultra-femininities and masculinities that are enacted by many second-generation. Maira, especially, argues that notions of ethnic authenticity are sexualized and gendered. Ideas of cultural purity are embodied in a virtuous, heteronormative sexuality that is projected especially onto women, and other performances of ethnic identity, including queer identities, are seen as promiscuous and dangerously inauthentic.

Purkayastha's (2005) study on second-generation South Asian-American men and women is another important contribution to the continued discussion on ethnicity and racialization in contemporary America.[28] She emphasizes that racial and ethnic identifications, even when there is no room to be without a racial identification in the United States, are contextual and negotiable and part of a labeling process. Purkayastha vividly describes how ethnic identification is negotiated by her participants through the invention of "traditions" and participation in voluntary societies, for example. Like Ganguly (2001), Purkayastha astutely uncovers "states of exception" (not to be read as "crisis" in Purkayastha's findings) within a relatively comfortable and protected lifestyle offered to her participants. While Purkayastha's findings are a groundbreaking contribution to the literature on South Asian-Americans, and my dissertation comes across similar findings (i.e. consumption of ethnic products – Maira also offers an analysis of commodification of Indian cultural forms and practices), I am concerned with two over-lapping issues: the ontological frame and epistemology.

The pedagogy with which Purkayastha frames her study warrants some trepidation. The foundation of her ethnography relies on using whiteness (American mainstream culture) and Portes' assimilation model as the benchmark. Purkayastha uses not white/nor Asian and black/white constructs to investigate how second-generation South Asian-American men and women shape their racial status. As a result, she traps herself into the pitfall of indistinguishing her participants from white mainstream American culture (read as white) on one hand, while linking their racial experiences to blacks on the other hand (26-27). In effect, Purkayastha exoticizes her subjects' racial status and ethnic experiences, placing the forty-eight South Asian-American women and men in a liminal zone.

Next, even though Purkayastha appropriately extends the conversation on multiculturalism, I am apprehensive with her conclusion of a "pan-ethnic" identity. Kibria's (2002a, 2002b) research on second-generation Chinese- and Korean-Americans coupled with Purkayastha's study uncover similarities between South Asian-Americans and Chinese- and Korean-Americans. Kibria's insights include hyphenated identities as points of assimilation and homogenized definitions of Asian and South Asian values (i.e. family, education, and work) that dovetail with middle-class, white America's idealized notions of itself. Yet, as many of my informants tell me, there is a strong distinction between "Asian" and "South Asian" in the U.S.

Min and Hong (2002) and Min and Kim's (2002) essays based on original ethnographic research on Asian Americans shed some light. Min, Hong, and Kim extensively map the contours of ethnic self identities among second-generation Asian Americans. The authors show that primordial ties and socialization, in addition to

cultural, social, and political integration, are instrumental in structuring ethnic identity preferences among Asian Americans. As whole, the essays confirm ethnic identity is a fluid, malleable, and layered phenomenon that depends on context. Song (1998) examines how race and ethnic boundaries intervene in the process of building pan-ethnic identities. Analyzing Pakhar Singh's killing of two white agents and the aftermath of the incident, Song points to institutional reasons why no Japanese-Indian coalitions – a truly pan-ethnic formation – developed even though the two groups were subject to the same discriminatory laws.

Purkayastha lucidly and rightly illustrates the negotiations of ethnic identity and the meanings of pan-ethnic labels. Through data gathered from forty-eight in-depth interviews, Purkayastha continues the debate on ethnicity as an ascribed reality versus a choice and construction. But, I suggest in this dissertation that the debates on multiculturalism, while important, if used to contextualize data on identity work will only serve to bring us back to Orientalist tropes and reinforce assumptions about South Asians.

Community, media, and psychological discourses continue to pathologize second-generation South Asian-Americans through the notion of ABCDs. ABCDs do not represent a clear or legitimate category. They are in-betweens straddling the Occident and the Orient and they are marked by confusion, as the acronym suggests. The fundamentals of multiculturalism are important here: the one-dimensional model indicates that responses are formulated specifically so that one has to situate oneself with respect to the presumed unity of the social worlds (extreme assimilation/the melting pot) versus the alternative conception of society as a collection of discrete and divided ethnic and racial communities (extreme multiculturalism) (see Hartmann and Gerteis 2005,

220). The term ABCD can only make sense then within a rigid socially-constructed cognitive framework, one that demarcates the "American" – the Us – from the "South Asian" – the Other – as mutually exclusive. Why else would the term "Confused" be placed in-between "American-Born" and "Desi?" ABCDs are what Park would call the "marginal man" or "cultural hybrid," "one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures" (in Stonequist 1937, xviii). As such, ABCDs are between the immigrant world and the world of hegemonic Americans – an ambiguous, hybrid space.

Puar (1994a) points out dominant white gazes facilitate the discourse of relational differences between American and South Asian along cultural lines. The deployment of Orientalist categories in contemporary American society by both normative Americans (the white gaze) and South Asian-Americans (the model minority myth) implies an unbridgeable cultural divide based on racial and ethnic structures and is subjectively experienced by second-generation South Asian-Americans. Park (in Stonequist 1937) would insist here that while all of us experience periods of transition and conflict, the period of crisis for the marginal man tends to become permanent. Stonequist (1937) follows, "marginal personalities" occur wherever there are cultural transisitions and conflicts. This is most typical when race or nationality enters the picture. Clearly, for Park and Stonequist, marginality is a function of racial and cultural hybridity (see Green 1947). The assumption in this Eurocentric view is that polarized identities are experienced as mutually exclusive and anyone struggling must choose a single side. The binary categorization is not only between American and South Asian, but also includes masculine and feminine (gender plays a major variable in the binary equations, but

sexuality is often a missing category; I address this gap in Chapter 7 through a discussion of queer South Asian-American women).

Gupta (1998) writes that colonial discourses "bequeathed a set of dichotomies that were unusually 'productive' in a Foucauldian sense because they enabled the construction of a sociology built on them" (9). The problem still remains, as Puar (1994a) aptly points out, the deployment of Orientalist categories overlooks that generational conflict exists in all cultures and across cultures and supports monolithic experiences for second-generation South Asian-Americans. Along similar lines, Green (1947) comments, "Stonequist's development of the concept is hardly rigorous: the marginal man appears as the result of a personal crisis, which, in turn, results from 'cultural conflict'" (167) (see also Wright and Wright 1972). Moreover, Maira finds the processes of gendered conflict resolution reinforce gender ideologies. Despite advances brought through the feminist movements since the sixties, we as a society continue to struggle with the expression of sexuality and gender practices. The rage around Janet Jackson revealing her bare breast on television during Super Bowl half-time (2004) speaks to this struggle. Maira's findings on gendered practices highlight conflicted beliefs about a woman's sexuality along with what an appropriate and acceptable expression of the feminine persona is: submissive and obedient versus the seductress. Clearly, the choices and tools available within Orientalist practices are not neutral and unidimensional technologies.

I redirect the debate on the role of race and ethnicity within the South Asian-American community. This study indicates that the experiences of my research participants are inadequately reflected by the rigid opposition between South Asia and

America. Hartmann and Gerteis (2005) are astute in challenging the one-dimensional

multiculturalism model with unity or assimilation on one end of the continuum and

diversity or fragmentation on the other:

> There are, in our view, a number of connected problems with this negative, one-dimensional conception of multiculturalism. One issue is the static and narrow conception of social order that it implies. At the same time, it becomes difficult (if not impossible) to appreciate the values, benefit, and even functional necessity of difference in modern societies. (220)

My research participants compartmentalize their identities only to reflect more complex

processes of sustaining both an imagined South Asianness and U.S. assimilation. The

women, additionally, use front-staging and back-staging (see Collins 2004) tools to create

a unified self-identity, highlighting certain aspects of their identities in particular spatial-

temporal locations while de-emphasizing other portions. This allows them to actively

underscore their multiple alliances/hybrid identities and shed some of their mestizaness at

times (Anzaldúa 2001). This self-conscious exploration of ethnic identity leads to what

Gans (1979) would call "ethnic revival" (see also Maira 2002, 3-4).

The women who emerge out of this study are neither atomized individuals nor are

they "structural dopes." Like the Bangladeshi women workers in Kabeer's (2000) study,

the twenty-five women I interviewed are individuals whose preferences and priorities

reflect their own unique subjectivities and histories (self-identity), but also bear the

imprint of their own complex social relationships (social-identity) which determine their

place in society (see 327; Byrne 2003, 4). I find in this study that my respondents

express their identities in binary terms and perceive their cultural location within a

dichotomy of South Asianness and Americanness, but I also uncover that the second-

generation women are involved in complex processes that uphold an imagined "true"

South Asian culture within the boundaries of U.S. hegemonic nationalism and a desire for "Americanization.[29] A fuller conception of multiculturalism must begin by breaking down the weak and inchoate opposition between unity and difference and between solidarity and diversity (see Hartmann and Gerteis 2005). Jain (2005) uses the term "cosmopolitan post-humans" to describe the imagination of oneself beyond a fixed identity (4). The question then is not about assimilation versus ethnic enclaves: I find that that no model of identity is adequate.

The pressure to be American or South Asian, including the coerciveness of being ultra-feminine and ultra-masculine, is a general strand that can be drawn from earlier studies. I do not wish to distance my research from scholars like Prashad, Maira, and Purkayastha. Rather, I hope to extend their works, using it as a platform to talk about the women in this research. There is minimal discourse for thinking about women who are South Asian-Americans, but the literature provides a fertile framework in which I can astutely articulate how much more difficult life becomes for second-generation South Asian-American women.

CHAPTER 2

From Research to Process:
Social Research, Feminist Scholarship, and Women's Subjectivities

This chapter attempts to explore the *process* of my research. I use the term

"process" because from the point of imagining the study to the point of completion, how I

envisioned the design of the study and myself in the role of the "researcher" changed

dramatically (see Puar 1993). Here, I contemplate, what do the women's stories

methodologically suggest?

As the "data collection" progressed, I became acutely aware that, literally, the

testimonies of the twenty-five women I worked with over a course of eight-months are

coming from their hearts and bodies. The women's testimonies are living proof of

history (see Brooks 2007, In press). As I write about and circulate these testimonies, I

begin to grapple with some of the problems of not only my role as a story-teller but also

how narratives get told by academics, along with the media, popular fiction writers, and

the cinemas. For instance, the use of the category ABCD automatically dictates a

staccato (auto)biographical trajectory (see Hidier 2002, Lahiri 2003, M. Ali 2004, S. Ali

2004). In the ABCD framework, diasporic spaces are defined by difference: South Asia

is perpetually seen as a site of the problem, the "second-generation" as a site of confusion

and transition (into assimilation), and, as in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), the

U.S. and freedom are nearly synonymous.

My concern is with knowledge-production, particularly as a researcher.

Mirchandani (2004) notes:

> The difficulties of attaining knowledge because of the assumption-bound nature of science, the difficulties of communication knowledge because of representational quality of the language we use to describe it, and the difficulties generally in the search for universal, well-founded truths. (109)

I am apprehensive about how I may affect the subjectivities and identities of the twenty-five women I interviewed (see Brooks 2007, In press). How are the women's subjectivities summoned and then dissipated? How can I tell their stories without causing violence to their words within the context of theory? By asking such questions, I am implicating myself – as a woman, as a second-generation, as a South Asian, as an American, as a confidant, as a friend, as a fictive kin or sister, and finally as a researcher – with the women's telling of history. That is, I locate myself in the context of multiple and contradictory loyalties (see Naber 2006, 89).

Researching (Dis)located Women

Feminist scholars have raised profound questions about the standard practices of social research. Arguing that established methods too often ignore and obfuscate social oppression, feminist researchers search for approaches that will more adequately represent marginalized groups and the social processes that organize their lives (DeVault 1999). In thinking about social research, feminist scholarship, and women's subjectivities, I ask, how do I begin to approach my research process?

In similar fashion to Brekhus (2003), the approach I adopt in my fieldwork lies in "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The grounded theory perspective requires data-driven analysis rather than a priori hypothesis. Moreover, research questions do not shape the data. Rather, research questions are formal neutral questions without a theoretical agenda (Glaser 1992). That is, I use a "bottom-up" approach (á la Simmel),

asking how various forms of identity are experienced and understood by individuals, and focusing on the words and labels my respondents use to describe their identities. Jones (2001) writes,

Identity, after all, provides an answer to the perennial human question, "Who am I?" Because…identities are social constructions, empirically examining the role individuals play in constructing…identity makes sense. (6)

When I began interviewing second-generation South Asian-American women in the summer 2002, I employed types of open-ended questions that would allow my interviewees to dictate the substantive topics of the interview (see Jones 2001; Brekhus 2003). Classical ethnography assumes for researchers the power to define and represent without challenge from the research subjects (DeVault 1999, 188). An advantage of an open-ended approach is that issues emerge directly from respondents themselves. In this research design, I listen to women speak to learn about them and I engage with them to learn about myself. This process is called "collaborative interviewing" or "social relationships" (Byrne 2000a), "reflexive talks" (Giddens 1991), and "emancipatory research" (Spivak 1988; bell hooks 1990). In this way, I uncover how women are silenced and can speak up and I recover unrecognized or suppressed aspects of women's experience (DeVault 1999).

I additionally utilize an "analytical fieldwork" perspective (Zerubavel 1980). This requires me to theoretically think beyond factual peculiarities of my research or the narratives generated from the women I interviewed, engaging in abstract generic patterns. It became clear to me that a central issue among my informants, as adults, was how much they disassociated from the public image of a second-generation South Asian-American – the ABCD. A main concern of my subjects was the cultural representation of not only

second-generation South Asian-Americans but of second-generation South Asian-American women, the composite Third World Woman who is oppressed and forced into arranged marriage. How the women in this study organized their identity across time and space also emerged as a significant issue. From here, I was able to determine "identity grammar" and "shifts" in identity grammar were important to my twenty-five informants (see Brekhus 2003). This class of phenomena clearly belongs to an issue of identity.

Though, in staying with the meaning of a feminist sociological research model (see DeVault 1999), unlike Brekhus (2003), I avoid constructing typologies about the interviewees' identity constructions and/or presenting the sum of results in a tabular format. Similar to Jones' (2001) study on English immigrants in America, the contradictory evidence in the following sections shows my respondents' identity grammars were often highly ambivalent and drew on overlapping and different discourses to conceptualize their relationships to South Asianness and Americanness. The same person's words often emerged on both sides of an issue, and therefore it was difficult to create typologies and/or showcase the results by providing an inductive analysis in tables that generated empirical categories - grouping similar instances of social phenomenon - and explanatory concepts - the components of the analytical frame (Ragin 1994). Hence, I report my analyses in a thematic way rather than attempting to account for differences among them (see Jones 2001).

The lives of my respondents are more complex than what Orientalism can explain. That is, my data is about individual identities (micro) while Orientalism as a framework is based upon collective identies (macro). I have detailed data about how my subjects are adjusting to a global and gender conscious society, and the data provides a

wonderful opportunity to experience the complexity of their lives. Here, I consciously choose to use a feminist model, which is a collaborative and non-oppressive research design, building on the researcher-researched relationship. In this project, I use an intersectional approach and anti-categorical complexity (McCall 2001) - a cutting edge method used by feminists and other social scientists to manage complexities produced by non-linear, intersectional research instruments - as a methodological tool to examine the lives and perceptions of second-generation South Asian-American women. Feminists of color have come to realize that there is one thing that all women have in common – multiple oppression. Some women are oppressed because they live their lives within binary categories and others are oppressed because they do not fit into dichotomous categories. But all women exist on multiple identity axes. Mohanty (1988, 2003), Anzaldúa (2001), and Sandoval (1991) agree to challenge the rigidity of identity variables and focus their attentions on the politics of difference as inflected by hierarchical arrangements. An intersectional approach is critical in understanding what it means to be a woman. An intersectional analysis allows one to recognize that women, regardless of geo-political location, experience discrimination because they stand on multiple identity axes simultaneously (this dissertation contests an additive analysis of identity and oppression and embraces a multiplicative one.) An anti-categorical approach has the added benefit of managing complexities of multiple axes that are contradictory. It emphasizes a range of diverse experiences from multiple identities that do not fit into rigid categories. The assumption is that identities do not fit into neat little categories unless forced to do so by imposition of normative orders, such as gender and race (McCall 2001). I wish to stress that multiple dimensions of identity cannot be

understood as autonomous and mutually-exclusive components, but rather, they should be understood within a dialectical framework, each identity variable feeding off of each other and feeding into each other (Anzaldúa 2001).

This ethnographic research helps to deconstruct artificial normative social categories and power relations. The research process allows me to bring the twenty-five women I interviewed from the "margins" to the "center" of academic discourse by, first, reflecting theories of power and domination; second, undoing the construction of women as silent and inferior; third, theorizing from the position of the Other; and fourth, embodying and enacting agency and subjectivity by collaborating with women similar to me and writing about our common experiences. Here, unlike many feminist scholars who outline agency as social or group solidarity and resistance, I define agency as conscious or unconscious techniques women use to define and create their own lives (see Freeman 2000). Finally, as part of the collaborative research model, like Byrne (2000b), I invite respondents to read and evaluate the completed product (see Appendix A). A collaborative research model does not mean that I give research participants control over the research and the research product (see Byrne 2000b), which is an ethnographic text. I am the sole author and I take responsibility for the interpretation.

In this way, I engage in small-scale interviews within a feminist research model in the tradition of sociology. While the methods I employ - small-scale interviews with a sample size of twenty-five - do not get me to understand American society and make broader claims about South Asian-American collective identities, it does point me in the direction to question modernity and Orientalism, and assess how identity is found in a "liquid modern" era (Bauman 2004).

<u>Exploring the Unexplored</u>

In this research, I conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with twenty-five second-generation South Asian-American women across the nation to capture their life experiences. Each four to six hour interview spanned over a single day to include meal breaks. Therefore, the women and I spent a considerable amount of time together outside of the actual interview in which further exchange took place. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed primarily in English with Bengali words and phrases sprinkled within the conversations (I did not use Bengali words or phrases to describe situations unless a woman used Bengali first or she gave me a cue that she understood Bengali and she was comfortable speaking it and being spoken to in it).

The semi-structured interviews covered multiple areas of concern from coupling to work to families to food to clothing, among other things (see Appendix B). Although the guide was used loosely, throughout the interviews I attempted to empirically unpack my respondents' perceptions about their daily social practices in the U.S. and to the manner in which they view themselves in comparison to broader American society. Implicit in my interview questions are the notions of *self-identity* and *social-identity* (Stryker 1980; Tajfel 1981). Self-identity theory and social-identity theory link the individual to the social world through a series of self-composed social identities. The former is often understood to focus on roles and the latter on social groups. In self-identity theory, identity refers to various meanings attached to oneself by the self and others, locates the self in a social space through relationships (Gecas and Burke 1995), and is often tied to hierarchically-linked structural roles (McCall and Simmons 1966). In social-identity theory, identity focuses on "commonalities among people within a group

and differences between people in different groups" (Hogg 2001, 131). In sum, identity has two aspects: self-identity and social-identity. Similar to Mead's (1962/1967) "I" and "Me," these two aspects of identity are linked by the concept of self (Giddens 1991; Jenkins 1996). As the data collection process progressed, I chose to leave off asking those questions that did not speak to how the women deal with socially constructed categories, the process of categorization, concrete effects of the intersections of these so-called categories, and the extraordinary range of experiences among people. For example, I threw out the questions listed under "Miscellaneous": "When you moved in your place of residence, what things did you do to make you feel more at home here?" And, "What are a few things you do to cheer yourself up when you feel down or lonely?" Neither did I continue asking questions that further reified categories, like "how do you think any of what we have talked about today would be different if you were a man? Could you just speculate? How about if you were not a child of immigrants? What about if you were not (race/ethnicity/heritage she identifies, if any)?

The questions serve as a vehicle in which I give voice to my respondents, provide them with a "safe space" to express themselves, and uncover how they see themselves within contradictory forces of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality and citizenship dimensions in the U.S.

Bengalis in the Limelight

The interview participants were women who were born between 1965 and 1985; primarily lived in the U.S. from at least the ages of four to twenty-one; and have Bengali-speaking mothers who were born and lived in South Asia until at least the age of eighteen. I delimited my sample set along these central features to create a fairly

homogenous group in which there would be "mutual points of unity" between the women – the researched – and me – the researcher – along multiple variables.

South Asia is mainly comprised of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal (Dasgupta and Warrier 1997). Others, like Ludden (2002), include Sri Lanka and Bhutan. In the study, those I interviewed primarily identified themselves as Bengali-speaking (or at least Bengali-understanding), regardless of religious designation or ties to a particular geographical location. For reasons of limiting the sample, I focused on Bengali-speakers only. Even though there is a hierarchal distinction made between Bengalis (Bengali speakers from Calcutta - Indians) and Bangladeshis; and between *Bangals* – Hindu-Bengali speakers who migrated to Calcutta – and *Ghotees* – Hindu-Bengali speakers originally from Calcutta, in this study, I use the term "Bengali" to encompass anyone who comes from a Bengali-speaking background and share a comparable cultural background. This gives me access to a group of people who have analogous cultural and linguistic practices, thus controlling my sample, but it also allows me to diversify my sample by crossing multiple countries and religions.

Indeed, I collapse categories in the ethnography but I do not underplay religious, cultural, and geopolitical differences (which continue to ignite riots and hatred in places like Gujarat, India and even outside the South Asian region), nor do I ignore the hierarchal differences between Bengalis and Bangladeshis, and Bangals and Ghotees. But, a common mother tongue and cultural practices can on certain occasions supercede hierarchical differences.[30] This is especially true in the American context because it becomes crucial for immigrant groups to find similarities on which to base solidarities. Prashad (2000) notes that the creation of a pan-ethnic group "South Asian" in the late

1980s as a new racial subject resulted from the bridging of ethnic subgroups (Indians,

Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Nepalese, Sri Lankans, and Bhutanese) from South Asia.

Mohanty (1993) writes,

> In North America, identification as South Asian…takes on its own logic. "South Asian" refers to folks of Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Kashmiri, and Burmese origin. Identifying as South Asian rather than Indian adds numbers and hence power with the U.S. State. Besides, regional differences among those from different South Asian countries are often less relevant than the commonalities based on our experiences and histories of immigration, treatment and location in the U.S. (352)

The history of Asians in the United States involves the inter-ethnic mixing of sub-

populations in the hope that inter-ethnic competition would not occur during labor

organization. The annual *North American Bengali Conference* (NABC) is one of the

largest South Asian groups in the U.S conceived in the early 1980s. Even though the

NABC organization committee often consists of Hindu-Indian members and the

Bangladeshi segments of the weekend-long programs are clearly designated, the

conference uses the Bengali language to create a space for all Bengalis to come together

and form alliances. The platform is Bengali art, music, and short plays.

I restrict the sample through birth from mid-1960s to mid-1980s to capture both

the post-1965 and post-1980 migration flows. Research shows that the South Asian

population in America is bimodal, with the post 1965-group – the second wave –

consisting of highly educated as well as financially successful members, and the post

1980-group – the third wave – largely working class (Prashad 2000). I am interested in

examining the bi-modality, gauging differences in class, educational background, and

careers. Despite potential demographic differences, many second-generation South

Asian children in general grow up with the commonality of both Bengali folk and

Bollywood (the movie industry in Mumbai) song and dance. There were not many desi cultural sources available to immigrant parents between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s other than oral tradition and the movie industry. Only within the last five years, the arrival of an affordable Super Dish Satellite has brought in an influx of local channels directly sponsored from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in real time.

I do not restrict my sample to American birth. Immigrant children are generally known as "one-and-a-half generation" (Rumbaut and Portes 2001) to characterize children who straddle the "old" and the "new" worlds but are fully part of neither. But the emerging literature on the "new second-generation" discusses contemporary immigrant children who have arrived in the United States before they reach adulthood, alongside U.S.-born children (Portes 1996). Clearly, usage of the term "second-generation" is not consistent. Depending on social, historical, and immigration processes and which nationalities are being studied, second-generation is sometimes broadened to include foreign-born children arriving at pre-school age – zero to four years – because they share linguistic, cultural, and developmental experiences similar to those born here (Zhou 1997). The one-and-a-half generation is sometimes broken down into two cohorts: children between six and thirteen and those arriving at adolescents – thirteen to seventeen – who are similar to first-generation children (Zhou 1997). Even though the literature varies in the ways "second-generation" is defined, scholars have agreed that there are important physical and psychological developmental differences in the socialization processes between children of different cohorts. In this dissertation, I define "second-generation" to refer to those women who are U.S.-born or arrived to the U.S. by the age of four, and have at least one foreign-born parent.[31]

Finally, I situate my study to Central New Jersey, New York City, Central Illinois, and Northern California. In my search for participants, I opened up the study cross-nationally, but I received an overwhelming response from NJ, NY, IL, and CA. Before moving to San Jose, CA in August 2005, I lived in central New Jersey for almost a decade to pursue graduate work; while living in New Jersey, I was involved in various community groups in New York City, like Asia Society; I was raised in a suburb of Chicago and my parents continue to reside in Illinois; and I am well connected to the second-generation South Asian-American community in California due to my involvement in various second-generation, Bay Area-based e-communities. Perhaps my structural access to the South Asian communities in these particular geographical locations skewed the population response.

The four geographical sites are large metropolitan areas with long-standing organized first-generation immigrant South Asian-American groups. Between 1990 and 2000, the South Asian-American population in New Jersey and New York increased from 79,400 to 169,180 and 140,985 to 251,724, respectively (Census 2000). New York City is still the most popular destination for many South Asian immigrants (Maira 2002). Similar population growths took place and continue to take place in Chicago. Like New Jersey and New York, the dramatic growth of the South Asian community in Chicago since 1965 helped to create large ethnic neighborhoods like Devon Avenue, the biggest marketplace for South Asian goods and services in all of North America teeming with grocery stores and restaurants, video and gift shops, and sari (a long piece of material, usually six yards in length, wrapped around a women's waist, with some material pleated. The remaining material is draped across the chest over the left shoulder) and jewelry

stores. Even before the arrival of large settlements of South Asians in New Jersey and New York and the greater Chicagoland area, the most sizeable wave of pioneering South Asian migrants were the Punjabi Sikhs who established agricultural communities in the early twentieth century in California (Leonard 1997). Therefore, California not only houses recent immigrants, but it is also home to "older" generations of South Asian-Americans.

Within the outlined sample requirements, twelve women reside in New York, five in New Jersey, five in Illinois, and three in California. The women in the study range in age from nineteen to thirty-three. Twenty-three of the women were born in the U.S., one was born in Bangladesh, arriving here at age two, and another was born in India, arriving here at nine months. Out of the twenty-five women I interviewed, seventeen of the women's parents emigrated from India (mostly Calcutta), seven identify Bangladesh as their heritage, and one woman traces her heritage to both India and Nepal. All of the women's fathers are in the medical profession or IT field, or hold PhDs and work in academic institutions or the private sector. The women's mothers' careers span from being a full-time homemaker to part-time teacher's aide to a small group of women holding professional careers in medicine either as practitioners or administrators. Interviewees who are children of doctors, with the exception of one woman whose parents arrived to the U.S. post-1980, were raised in upper-middle-class neighborhoods (wealthy and white suburban communities). Children of the technocratic and academic professionals were raised in middle-class and "somewhat diverse" neighborhoods. Consequently, almost all of the women primarily grew up in "white suburbia."

Eight of the women are married, ranging from newly-weds to being married for five years. Out of the eight, one woman is filing for divorce and another woman recently had a child. Of the remaining seventeen women, five are in serious and committed relationships, three are engaged to be married, and nine are single (not seeing anyone) or are in fleeting relationships. Out of the twenty-five women I interviewed, only two women identify as gender-queer, while the others self-identify as heterosexual or primarily heterosexual.

Educational completion varies. All completed high school. Some are in undergraduate programs with undecided majors, others were enrolled in masters, professional, or doctoral degree programs. College graduates' careers include artist/poet, advertising consultant, consumer analyst, acupuncturist, text book editor, doctor, bank teller, social worker, corporate lawyer, and elementary school teacher. One woman recently quit her job scheduling medical services and dealing with medical insurance agencies to take care of her husband who was diagnosed with a medical condition.

<u>Access Granted</u>

As a second-generation South Asian-American woman, I began contacting potential women for the study by using both snowball and convenience sampling. In January 2004, I first approached friends, via e-mail and telephone, who I thought would be able to introduce me to potential respondents from their social networks that I was not a part of or had little connection to. My second source was e-mailing acquaintances whom I had met through professional and cultural networks from across the nation, such as National Association Bengali Conference (NABC) Youth Committee of New Jersey; South Asian Public Health Association (SAPHA) in the Maryland/Virginia area; and

South Asian Sisters (sasisters), a Bay Area e-community. I asked for help in identifying and approaching prospective interview participants. From here, I began compiling a list of women's names with their e-mail addresses and telephone numbers, and I made direct contact via email with approximately thirty-five women who were not part of my immediate social and professional circle. Such nonrandom sampling technique allowed me to target a portion of the population that may be underrepresented using random sampling methods.

During my initial e-mail contact with the thirty-five women, I asked the women to provide me with their mailing addresses so that I could send along an informed consent form providing information about me, the purpose of the study, the names and phone numbers of my faculty supervisor, a statement assuring the respondent's confidentiality, and the Human Subjects Protocol approval number (see Appendix C). One-and-a-half weeks after initial contact and after the women had received the documents describing the study, I re-connected with the thirty-five prospective interviewees via e-mail. Those who agreed to participate became the final sample set. Out of the thirty-five women, twenty-five agreed to partake in the study. Since all the women I approached had active e-mail accounts, the majority of correspondence took place electronically, with the exception of one woman who preferred to talk by phone. I sent out another e-mail to the final twenty-five women asking them to complete and return, via e-mail, the electronically attached demographics form before we met in person (see Appendix D). The demographics form gave me cursory details about each woman before our meeting. Then, interviewee was scheduled for an interview via e-mail at a time and place convenient to them. The interviews took place in a variety of locations to include my

home, restaurants and coffee shops, the women's homes, and my mother's home. The day before the interview, I called each woman to introduce myself in person. The brief phone call allowed both of us to confirm the meeting place, and if we were meeting in a public venue, we discussed what we would be wearing for identification purposes. The phone call also permitted us to get to know each other a little bit, easing the tension and awkwardness for the next day. On average, I spent six to seven hours with each respondent, out of which approximately four to five hours were recorded conversation. The interviews took place between May 2004 and December 2004.

My relationship with the women prior to the interviews was mostly non-existent, with the exception of two women. However, once I embarked on this journey, a handful of the women and I discovered that our fathers were part of the same cohort at Dhaka Medical School or had come from the same district (*upuzilla*)/village (*bari* or *desh)* in Bangladesh or that our mothers had received voice training from the same teacher/*ustad ji* or that we had both accompanied our parents to the U.S.-based *Bangladesh Medical Association* (BMA) conferences in the same years. After speaking for less than an hour, one women and I realized that she was the friend of one of my college roommate's younger sister and used to often hang out at my campus apartment. Another woman and I discovered that we had not one but two friends in common. Finally, many of the women and I found commonalities in some aspect of our upbringing such as having two sets of friends that were mutually exclusive, school/weekday friends who were mostly white girls and weekend friends who were Bengali boys and girls. The collapsing degrees of separation between us were sometimes comforting on both ends, sometimes not. There was an apparent fear and high need for confidentiality with one woman who

identifies as a gender-queer South Asian-American Muslim and chose not to come out to her family and Muslim community. Similarly, another woman is dating a man outside of her religious beliefs for more than seven years without her parents' knowledge and has no immediate plans to tell them. In such cases, women chose aliases for themselves to be used in the study, and I have tried to protect their identities to the best of my abilities.

Once the study was completed, I continued to maintain contact with all twenty-five women via e-mail, giving them updates about my life and work and asking them to continually share new developments in their lives. Through e-mail conversations and electronic albums, I was informed about a birth of a child, two more engagements, a wedding, a break-up, a divorce, and a relocation. I maintained extensive contact with two of the women, inviting them to my home for dinner with their partners and other family members. These women have now become part of my immediate social circle. Apart from expecting to have some commonalities in our socialization process as second-generation South Asian-American women, I was genuinely astounded to discover the multiple layers the women and I shared. As a woman who is a child of a Bengali doctor (who immigrated to the U.S. in 1961 via Canada) and professional vocalist (who immigrated in 1971 after marrying my dad), perhaps I should have not been surprised to find that I would be connected to the women in various ways.

Analyze This…Analyze That

I use a voice-centered relational analytic method for analysis or microanalysis of the interview transcripts. Microanalysis involves careful and minute examination and interpretation, and it comprises two components: participants' recounting of events and the observers' interpretation of those events (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Mauthner and

Doucet (1998) push microanalysis further by outlining four levels of reading (of the transcripts). The first reading involves the overall story being told by the participants and the researcher's own response to the informants' minds, experiences, and identities. The second traces how respondents speaks about themselves (the "I" voice). The third reading examines how respondents talk about others in their life, and the fourth reading places the stories being told within larger social structures. Microanalysis as an analytic tool fits nicely into the dichotomous modes of identity, self-identity and social-identity. The second level of reading, the "I" voice, focuses on self-identity, and the third level of reading, which emphasizes how narrators talk about others in their lives, examines social-identity. The microanalysis model is a sound methodological way of listening. I rely on Puar (1993, 1994a, 1994b), Grewal (1994), Visweswaran (1994), and Clough (1998) to guide my readings of the twenty-five transcripts produced between May 2004 and December 2004.

Non-oppression to Negotiation of Power

My methodological choices pose a number of ethical and theoretical dilemmas. The myth of a feminist female researcher interviewing other women as authentic research, closer to the "truth," through an elimination of structural inequalities is simply not true (see Puar 1993, 23-25). Having undertaken an enormous sociological research in an academic framework, the process of conducting an ethnography has proved far more complex than just women talking to me and me talking to women. Repeatedly, the supposed non-hierarchical relationship established exuded differences which were not solely based on gender. Visweswaran (1994) urges that, at a moment when feminism is being realigned along axis of difference and in which objective stance has come into

question as the root of ethnographic praxis, it is important to realize that the relationship between a feminist researcher and her subject is central to feminist work and should be considered at every stage of a project, from developing research agendas to writing reports.

In speaking to two women not quite twenty-years-of-age yet, it was difficult for them to treat me as a "friend," for they were initially addressing me as "Dr. Badruddoja" or "Professor Badruddoja." Switching to my first name "Roksana" did not ease my status as an "expert." By being placed in an expert position, I was able to question the ways in which women were thinking without sounding offensive. Similarly, speaking to both a recent college graduate who just got married and was starting her life with her husband and a single woman who just began a graduate program, I felt the "privileges" of being a seasoned married woman, having a child, living an upper-middle-class lifestyle in a prestigious neighborhood, and being a doctoral candidate at the tail-end of the dissertation process; I felt powerful. Alternatively, I was slightly intimidated by a woman in her mid-twenties who is a corporate lawyer working in her own office with a spectacular view of New York City, earning more than 135K annually. With great unease, I pictured myself in my mid-twenties working long hours as a domestic violence advocate for very little pay. In another scenario, I waited for an interviewee for forty-five minutes and was unable to reach her on her cell phone that day. I left her a voice mail and drove home upset. We reconnected on the phone later on in the week and rescheduled for another time to meet. Once again I was waiting for her but his time I was able to contact her on her cell phone and we met for an interview later on in the day. Another woman's husband called her several times on her cell phone throughout our

interview to ask her when she would be done. The woman's husband's phone calls disrupted the flow of our conversation but I continued our interview session, patiently veiling my annoyance. I was especially frustrated because she agreed to put aside at least four hours of uninterrupted time. I felt uncomfortable asking her to turn her cell phone off because I did not want to negatively impact the wonderful repertoire between us despite the interruptions.

Almost all the women I worked with shared stories of growing up with which I could identify. However, marriage and religion came to be areas of difference. One woman remarked numerous times that she wanted to marry someone who knew what *Gilligan's Island* was. What she meant was that she would never marry a FOB. This was a source of alienation and Othering for me since I married an immigrant man from Bangladesh who had come to the U.S. at the age of eighteen to pursue a college education. In this interview, I downplayed my marriage. In an alternate interview, I discussed my marriage at length because the woman had married a man born and raised in Bangladesh, and she met him under similar circumstances that I met my partner. Some women assumed I knew nothing about Hinduism because I was raised in a Muslim household (indicated by both my maiden and married names, Badruddoja and Rahman). In such situations, I shared my upbringing with women, which included ample exposure to and immersion in Hindu-Bengali culture. Even though I grew up with many Hindu-Bengalis and I do not practice Islam, every time a woman expressed that she would not date a Muslim and/or her parents would excommunicate her if she married a Muslim, I felt a horrific cringe in my stomach. This became another source of Othering for me. In contrast, when Muslim-identified women expressed their feelings about bringing Hindu

men home, I felt a sense of commonality and perhaps solidarity. Clearly, I submerge

power by "constant manipulation of my construction" (Puar 1993, 25). I highlight areas

of commonality I found with women (i.e. talking about my marriage at length with

women who were also married to South Asian immigrant men) and downplay difference

(i.e. bringing less attention to my marriage when I sensed disdain). In these ways, the

balance of power continuously swayed from one side – to me – to the other – to the

women I interviewed. Puar (1993) captures my experiences,

> The interactive interview which characterises much feminist research and
> ethnography is far more complex than simply having someone to share
> experiences with. An actual interview session itself alone can involve numerous
> exchanges of balance of power, subversions, unintended and even intended
> oppressions. (25)

The process of writing and presenting is perhaps one of the only spaces within the

dissertation in which I have unconditional power, excluding the input of my committee

members. Visweswaran (1994) suggests that while ethnographies point to description

and detachment, the style and arrangement the author uses reflects her perspective on the

history and the purpose of the ethnographic text.

My methodological choices, additionally, call attention to questions about

positivistic notions of value-free, neutral, and scientific. "Feminist methods," read as

qualitative and "soft" science, are under much scrutiny because gender studies

historically are micro in perspective, ignoring structural issues. Interactionists cast a

powerful light on the importance of choice in explaining human behavior, but they have

little to say about power and how it might create inequalities in people's ability to choose.

Alternatively, structural theories emphasize individualize choice but fail to acknowledge

how individuals manipulate within these constraints. Kabeer (2000) remarks,

> Ideology and culture do not merely operate as externally-imposed constraints on people's choices; they are woven into the content of desire itself. Consequently, what people need and want, how they define their identities and their interests, partly reflect their own individual histories and subjectivities, but are also significantly and systematically influenced by the norms and values of the societies to which they belong. (328)

Positivistic research methods, then, serve to control data, irregularities of human experiences, and knowledge; while feminist research strategies, such as personal narratives, seek to disrupt scientism and positivism (Lentin 2000). And, by articulating individual experiences' of the women I interviewed, I extrapolate to the broader social position manifested in the individual (see Freeman 2000). Clough (1998) is especially helpful in the context of highlighting women's voices and intersectionality. Clough challenges the observer's struggle to uncover participants' unified identity by disrupting objective reporting/the naturalized male (38). She chooses ethnography as the focus for feminist deconstruction of "objective" social science. Clough treats ethnography as an activity of construction of masculine authority (dead, abstract, and neutral) narrating feminized subjects (independent of the text). Once the reader awakens to the ontological poverty of its writers, ethnographic writing can rapidly undo the invisible male authority (5, 27, 133). Following in Clough and Kabeer's footsteps, the analytical approach in this dissertation is to acknowledge the research field as a feminine site within writing and structure without denying agency; women's interactions surely shape how they do identity work.

In the end, I do not claim to present facts in this dissertation. Rather, I showcase competing realities with women as subjects and I underscore common experiences. I am still a modern subject, collecting data, drawing conclusions, and using conceptual tools, but I am modest about the absolute nature of my findings. This study is a dialogical

project of contemporary social theory and single moments or perspectives in a changing world.

Approaching (Dis)located Women

In review and in conclusion, this dissertation focuses on a rapidly growing but ignored community in the U.S. – second-generation South Asian-American women. The literature underscores that children of immigrant parentage are becoming the fastest growing and most extraordinarily diverse segment of America's population (Zhou 1997), affecting present and future patterns of race, ethnicity, culture, economy, and politics. Until the recent past, however, scholarly attention has focused on first-generation South Asian-American immigrants, ignoring the strategic importance of the "new second-generation." Studies like Gibson (1988) and Agarwal (1991) explores older second-generation Indians in California and Chicago. Others (see Fisher 1980; Lessinger 1995; Mukhi 2000) broadly look at the Indian immigrant community in New York City, and Maira (2002) examines Indian American youth in Manhattan. While this study is also mainly centralized in New Jersey and New York, homes to significantly large South Asian-American populations, no study incorporates multiple and major South Asian migration sites – New Jersey, New York, Illinois, and California – for a comparative study; no research focuses solely on South Asian-American women – a missing and marked category; no project cuts across multiple countries of heritage and religions by concentrating on Bengali-Americans – the dissertation steps away from both Indian- and Hindu-centric paradigms; and no study is attentive to second-generation South Asian-Americans who have already passed the rites of passage of adolescents and early adulthood. Second-generation South Asian-American women can bring light to the

hidden contradictions of citizenship and belonging, work and leisure, multiculturalism, and education, pointing to a larger, material and historical context of the structures. It is ideal to examine the kinds of identities second-generation South Asian-American women are creating, maintaining, rejecting, and appropriating.

The project is significant because it presents the narratives of race, ethnicity, color, gender, and nationality and citizenship from the (auto)biographical recounts of second-generation South Asian-American women. As noted, narratives of gender; race; and nationality and citizenship are based on white, middle class, female experiences; black male experiences; and white, heterosexual, male histories, respectively. There is no working conceptual framework to articulate the lives and perceptions of the twenty-five women who participate in the study. This dissertation is a response to that gap.

CHAPTER 3

**Racial and Ethnic Imaginary:
Projects of (Re-)Negotiation**

In this chapter, I focus on the politics of race and ethnicity through the women's lives.[32] I explore numerous topics related to ways in which in South Asians in America are racialized and the ways in which South Asian-Americans respond to U.S. racial projects, including how the women in this study use racial and ethnic labels. I do this by searching the transcripts for thin references to racial categories or discussions on the ways my respondents adapt to racial affronts from others.

I find that the women sort themselves by contesting notions of race – "Asian" – and appropriating ethnic discourse – "Bengali." Alongside the the term "Bengali," the women in this study forge the label "South Asian" or "South Asian-American" as a critical identity. However, their refusal to identify solely as racial subjects does not mean the women wholly reject the existence of race, nor does it mean that they get to absolve themselves from racial categorization. Like some sociologists, the women use the "ethnicity paradigm" (Omi and Winant 1994, 15) to talk about race. What the women fail to acknowledge is that ethnic labels are part of racialization and racialization is a positioning process that takes place within a racial hierarchy (Bashi 1998, 960). And race is ascribed and not asserted (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Bashi 1998); forging the label "South Asian" is just one example of what Omi and Winant (1994) call a racial project (56). Labels like "South Asian" or "South Asian-American" characterize a racialzing process and are racialized labels. South Asian-Americans, like West Indian-Americans (Bashi 1998), do not have a choice between ethnicity and race. Rather, individuals have

both ethnic and racial identities at the same time. The choice between ethnic and racial

labels is a false one.

Contesting Race

Like Bashi's (1998) study on young West Indians in America, the women whom I

worked with are bewildered over the meaning of race. Positioning me as an "expert,"

some of the women ask me, "What does race mean?" Even though one of my areas of

expertise lies in comparative racial and ethnic studies, I am unable to answer adequately;

I find myself stuttering and pausing several times. The women begin to question then, "If

we don't really know what race is, what is my racial identity?" "What does my race

indicate about me?" And, "Should I use race to construct myself?"

While my research respondents unanimously express that they know which "race"

box to checkmark on employment, admissions, and U.S. Census forms, they voice

puzzlement in the ways in which the U.S. government uses racial categories like "white,"

"Hispanic," and "Asian-Pacific Islander." Indira confides in me that she asks the race

question almost everyday, "How is race defined and what is my race *really*? " Indira

explains her struggles,

> When I think of race, I think of the boxes on the forms, and if I have to say what
> race I am, do I have to say I am "Asian" then? I struggle with it…Racially, I
> don't feel like I know what to say because even if you look at the history of the
> census, Indian people used to be categorized as "Caucasian" at some point…I
> don't get it.

Living abroad helped Mazeda to facilitate her understanding that U.S. racial categories

and hierarchies are unique to America (see Davis 1991; Twine 1997). Mazeda's

experiences working overseas as a Peace Corp volunteer leaves her questioning not only

the validity of race as a meaningful organizing category, but like Indira, how should she racially define herself:

> When I was in the Peace Corp…[I] was [in] a small rural village in northern Côte d'Ivoire…A lot of people had only seen the white French foreigners…or white Americans…So when I got there…this old woman said, "She's red, she's red. What is she?"… Most people didn't know what to call me because I was definitely darker than the other volunteers, but I wasn't *like them*…I have no idea [what I am anymore].

Rekha is forced to problematize and complicate the common black/white racial schema in order to understand herself and others around her within the context of a quickly diversifying demographic landscape. Growing up in a small, isolated white Midwestern suburb, like the old woman Mazeda met in West Africa, Rekha simply saw race as either "black" or "white." Rekha and her younger sister were "black," a severely marginalized category in their Midwestern town. After moving to a diverse West Coast area as a teenager, like Mazeda's presence in Côte d'Ivoire, Rekha no longer fit into the black/white divide. Rekha is neither white nor black in Northern California and she needed to move away from a bipolar bimodal hierarchy (white/black or white/non-white). She adopts ethnic language to describe and categorize herself and others in her new social environment:

> The color of your skin is what I foresaw race to be. I didn't [used to] associate it with culture very much…Race was much more black and white to me. If someone is dark, they're dark…there is no question in my mind…After living in [California] for a while, I actually altered that somewhat because I see more types of people here and groups of people that *behave* in different ways, which I just hadn't really encountered very much [in the Midwest]…Ethnicity is you have some kind of context around [it]…there is something more than just the color of your skin that's defining who you are. There is some cultural aspect to you or your group of people that you are familiar with that makes you…

Rekha's testimony begins to foretell a central theme in this chapter: the women whom I worked with reject race as a conceptual category and a tool for social stratification.

Instead, most women choose to position themselves within ethnic categories like "Bengali" (the ethnicity paradigm). The women find that a "Bengali" identification provides them with the reflexivity they are searching for in constructing their self-identities.

In this study, the women define ethnicity through language, foodstuff, customs and traditions, and ancestral heritage. Rupa makes clear to me that even though her parents were born and raised in the geographical area that is now Bangladesh, she traces her heritage to multiple migrations between India and Bangladesh. In order to encompass both India and Bangladesh in her self-definition, Rupa uses "Bengali" to describe her ethnicity. Rupa says, "In my bio, I identify as 'Bengali-American-Islam.'" Rani connects her ethnic identity to song and dance, food, clothing, and Bollywood. She also labels herself as a Bengali:

> [If] I'm in a group of Indians and I say, "Oh, I'm Bengali," then they say, "Do you sing and dance?"…Bengali's are known to be poetic and very intellectual, so those labels come along with being Bengali…

Padmini, like Naheed Hasnat (1998), articulates her ethnicity as Bengali through the relationship between food and identity. For Padmini, being "American" is absolutely about eating fried chicken (whiteness) and "Amreekan" about eating chicken tikka (brownness):

> I think this remains a place where white is pretty, where accents are funny, and food that smells strong is gross and weird…I try to deny it and I'm like, "No, I'm sure they're all liberated. Like even in Kentucky, they're all eating curry…" But they're not. They like McDonald's…

Auditi adroitly links her ethnicity to belonging to and participating in a community that is mostly comprised of Hindu-Bengali immigrants and their American-born or raised children:

> When I think of myself as a Bengali-American, I am thinking of myself as an insider of a particular community…It was a more safe or comfortable place where you didn't necessarily have to deal with the issues of being an outsider and having to fit in this little white high school community. In a way, when I would go to Bengali events or when I was with my family and everybody's speaking Bengali, those conflicts that were part of being a child of immigrants kind of went away.

Auditi sees herself as a Bengali-American.

Rupa, Rani, Padmini, and Auditi vividly detail ethnic identities that are connected to the sights, sounds, and smells of "chicken tikka." Stories of heritage and culture resonant through the women's voices; the women immerse their identities in political, historical, cultural, and ancestral ties, adopting ethnic labels instead of racial ones. The use of ethnicity as a conceptual category is an active and conscious decision on part of the women versus being forced to mark a false and ambiguous "racial category" on a bureaucratic form.

Through a collection of essays, Shankar and Srikanth (1998) emphasize the process of ethnic construction. Ethnicity is fragmentary, contradictory, and an elusive variable, but, nevertheless, evokes considerable emotional loyalty among individuals and groups. Taken together, the essays point to the emergent nature of ethnic identity. My research participants find that formulated racial boxes prevent them from realizing their links to multiple geographies, peoples, and customs. In this way, the women rupture U.S. nationalism and its partner, a universalizing South Asian category through ethnic identification.

However, Kibria (1998) and Bashi (1998) profess that the process of ethnic construction is not valid. Discarding race as a defining category does not mean that "race" no longer matters in the women's lives then. The women's words forefront Omi and Winants' (1994) ethnicity paradigm, which assumes that "race" is just but one of the

numerous determinants of ethnicity, submerging that the racialization process forces

people into racial identities.   But race is a hierarchical power structure while ethnicity is

not (Bashi 1998, 961). The women's attempts to compete for power (and perhaps even

changing the existing racial hegemony) is done so within the construction of racial

categories that come from outside the group, in which "white" is a power position in the

racial structure of the U.S. (see Winant 1994; Bashi 1998).   Kibria (1998) asserts ethnic

labels characterize a racializing process, and Bashi (1998) argues that racialization

process is related to a group's incorporation into a hierchical, stratifying, socio-economic

system (racialization is an ideological process, an historically specific one (Omi and

Winant 1994)). Bashi (1998) writes, "One is not allowed to be without a race in a

racialized society" (966).

Even though many of my respondents reject race, I highlight that South Asian-

Americans, like West Indian-Americans (Bashi 1998), do not have a choice between

ethnicity and race. This does not indicate that race and ethnicity should simply be

conflated; race is a classification that is assigned or externally imposed, while ethnicity is

internally asserted (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). What I do uncover through my

interviews is that the women's preferences to discuss themselves in ethnic terms – not a

hierarchical power structure – do not mean that they have no race – a hierachical power

structure.

Racing Ethnicity

The choice between ethnic and racial labels is surely a false one. Researchers

continue to neglect the hierarchal nature of racial categories in analysis of categories in

identity and often continue to conflate race and ethnicity (see Nagel 1994; Waters 1996;

Cornell and Hartmann 1998). Bashi (1998) points out that people do not choose between ethnic and racial labels (962), rather, individuals have both ethnic and racial identities at the same time (966).

Kibria agrees that "pan-ethnic" labels like "Asian American" are not simply a matter of a normal Americanizing experience, but instead characterizes a racialzing process and is a racialized label (see Bashi 1998, 962). Their addition to hierarchical system of racial categories in the U.S. moves us from a bipolar bimodal hierarchy to one that has more than two levels.[33] And, the forging of the label "South Asian" and its links to the myth of the model minority is just one example of what Omi and Winant (1994) call a racial project (56). Bakirathi Mani (2003) writes, "[T]o identify as "South Asian" gestures multiply: to…the racialized location of immigration in the US state" (119). As such, Auditi describes that a "South Asian" identity simply does not make sense while traveling in India, "If I am traveling in India, [the term] "South Asian" wouldn't even come up…" Auditi points to Western construction of the "South Asian" as a "new ethnicity" used to organize and build communities in America.

To identify as "South Asian" often involves a post-1965 history of immigration in which South Asians are consistently named the "model minority" (Mani 2003, 118). Ronica's words speak to how the model minority as a category is socially constructed, and despite being a myth, immigrants accept, embrace, and use instrumentally the model minority characterization of themselves. Ronica suggests what Winant (1994) calls racialization (59) as she describes immigrant adaptation in destination countries:

> I definitely think that especially in America there is a very strong idea of what an NRI [Non-Resident Indian] is supposed to look like.[34] If you are South Asian and you are in your late twenties or early thirties, you should have bought a house, have this much education, preferably in the sciences, and definitely be living out

> this ideal that is very much a construct of people coming to this country, wanting to have the best, and thinking that they're a failure unless they make lots of money.

Ronica's testimony follows that South Asian-Americans, like the Irish (see Williams 1990; Ignatiev 1995) were part of a selective assimilation strategy that began in the late 1960s. The creation of a new pan-ethnic group is one example of the racalization process.

While Ronica is critical about the monolithic and unitary conception of South Asians based along U.S. nationalistic dreams, she engages in the political struggles that came along with the fashioning of identity for South Asians in America:

> I feel South Asian is a political identity and I believe in that identity…I think the issues are so inter-related between Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and the Maldives. I think that it is very unifying to talk about a South Asia and I feel like I have a connection [with all parts of] South Asia.

Ronica reflects on the importance of superceding a unidimensional identity like "Bengali" or even "Indian" with a multidimensional one like "South Asian." She embraces the name given to her by the dominant culture, ascribing to it positive connotations (see Winant 1994, 59; Bashi 1998, 965). Rupa's identity as a "South Asian" also emerges as a performativity of resistance. She adamantly voices that what counts as "Asian" is sometimes quite exclusionary[35]:

> [As a performing artist,] I travel a lot for shows. We are most often booked to perform at…Pan-Asian conferences or Asian conferences, and it is [often mostly] East Asian or Pacific Islanders. Here [I am] and people are like, "Oh, we didn't know you were Asian…"

Ganguly (2001) remarks on the importance of self-representation. The decision to adopt "South Asian" reveals the manner in which South Asians had to recast their identities vis-à-vis the dominant culture, choices that are deeply embedded in hegemonic discourses of

race and nation. Mala nicely accentuates that ethnicity is not a riveting "ethnic choice" as

Nagel (1994) and Waters (1996) portray it:

> We talk a lot about what brings us [South Asians] together. Is it simply a link to
> our parents or our grandparents? [T]o me, it's very strongly attached to how other
> people see me. If I didn't identify as South Asian, other people would still
> completely identify me as such or they would identify me as Indian…I think a lot
> of being South Asian means being identified [by others] as such early on…When
> someone sees me on the street and identifies me in their head as Indian, that
> thought comes with a lot of different sort of associations and notions that are
> extremely different than people who are read as African-American or black…

Racialization presupposes the existence of a racial hierarchy into which new categories

are inserted. Hence, by definition, a society's racial hierarchy must change along with

the racialization process. While racialization involves the creation of new groupings,

revolutionizing our thinking about race, it also serves to reify race, ignoring ethnicity and

foricing people into racial identities (Bashi and McDaniel 1997).

Shankar and Srikanth (1998) explore the conflicts and negotiations surrounding

the inclusion of South Asian Americans in the ongoing construction of "Asian America."

They tenaciously account for the tensions and negotiations among diverse class-, gender-,

generation-, and nation-based groups that collectively constitute South Asian-Americans.

Shankar and Srikanth (1998) speak to the problematic process of forming canons that

seek to create and represent ethnic communities though a central theme: ethnicity is

politically constructed in multiple sites, i.e. academia and not-for-profit. Ronica, Rupa,

and Mala's words are evidence to the important power that race and racialization have.

As two sides of the same coin – an imagined "true" South Asian versus the universalizing

tendencies of hegemonic U.S. nationalism and the pressures of assimilation – Ronica,

Rupa, and Mala demonstrate that they are unable to ignore racial projects in America.

While I do not argue that "South Asian" is a racial category, I do profess that "South Asian" as an identity is a racial project that is part of U.S. racialization.

The inclusion of "South Asian" in American racialization is highly dependent upon the colonial and post-colonial formation of (Hindu-)India as a nation-state (Grewal 1993, 228-229; Puar 1994a, 99). Priyanka begins to explain why she often conflates South Asian and Indian, lumping various cultures and ethnicities into one group:

> The reason that I tend to use "Indian" to refer to everyone from that region, even if they're not actually from India, is that growing up, almost every South Asian I knew was of Indian origin. So, the conflict almost never came up…Up until college, I knew no Pakistanis or Sri Lankans. [So], the term South-Asian didn't occur to me as being a collective term for descendants of the subcontinent until much later in [college], and by then I just automatically used the term "Indian" for everyone…I've always felt that "Indian" is used more often [than] South Asian [anyway]…unless people are trying to be very politically correct...

Rani simply states, "I assume when they ask me about being South Asian, they are asking me about being Indian." Anjana deploys a selective assimilationist strategy that deploys Orientalist terms to denigrate identities associated with South Asian and Islam. Despite violent inter-religious community riots in India (i.e. Gujarat 2002), which include both Hindu-Muslim and Hindu-Christian inter-communal riots, Anjana, who identifies as a Hindu, says she will date a Christian but not a Muslim:

> Anything different from Hinduism is bad for my parents. But for me, it's not, except if someone's Muslim…I don't care about being friends with a Muslim person, that doesn't bother me. But for me to date someone, I think that would be huge for my parents…I guess because there's always been a lot of bad blood between Muslims and Indians [meaning Hindus], but not necessarily – at least I don't think a lot – between Hinduism and Christianity. So for me, that would be okay if I dated a Christian guy…

Anjana's strategy disassociates South Asian Christians from South Asian Muslims, associating South Asian Christians with modernity. Naber (2006) suggest that the desire for middle-class U.S. nationalist notions of identity affirm that to be "modern" and

"American" is to be "Orientalist" (107). Then, "South Asian" relies on a homogenous category which is situated in hegemonic U.S. nationalist discourse.

The conflation of "South Asian" and "Hindu Indian" is partially due to the creation of a "South Asian Diaspora." The notion of a homogenous and cohesive collectivity consolidates and flattens differences (see Puar 1994a). Though it is important to form coalitions in the U.S. on the basis of numbers (Mohanty 1988; Prashad 2000), the structural integrity of the terms "South Asian" and "South Asian diaspora" are established through a "middle-class Hindu subject as its normative referent" (Puar 1994a, 101; see Ludden 2002).[36] The cultural category "South Asian" is, therefore, often conflated with "Hindu-Indian" and it is tied to the nation-state and transnational capitalism. It reifies India as the point of origin and as the site of production of authentic culture (Puar 1994a, 102).[37] Grewal (1993) points to the problems of Hindu-Indian nationalism, "Some Indian elites, gaining power through Nationalists struggles in India, make alliances with the white, upper classes as immigrants in the U.S." (232). The formation of South Asians as a group in the U.S. volley amongst nationalist politics of contemporary Hindu-India, colonial discourses, and new affiliations demanded by the immigrant context (Grewal 1993, 231).

Priyanka, Rani and Anjana's stories highlight what Grewal (1994) would call the "problems of the postcolonial" (47-51). The language of identity when depleted of its political implications can be counterproductive to community organizing because it strips the intricacies of different struggles.[38] Rupa comments over the uncomplicated, unproblematized, and random racialized marker "South Asian." She is annoyed that differences among sub-groups are erased:

> [Yes,] we are all brown and we all have Caucasian features, but at the same time, people from all those different regions [South Asia] look so very different…Even within Bengal, Bengali's that are on the further eastern side look close enough to be Burmese, and then further west they look more like North Indian. It is complex and the more I think about it, the more complex it becomes.

"South Asian" as an ethnic formation that is part of a racial project hinders any coalitions with disenfranchised groups in the U.S. Grewal (1993) writes:

> [The] position of dominance in India, together with the acculturation in the U.S., where stereotypes of African Americans, Chicano/as and other minorities abound, often prevents any coalitions with disenfranchised groups in the U.S., with other Asian Americans, and with more recent Southeast Asian immigrant groups, and often leads to an uncritical position on U.S. ideology of "democracy" and "freedom." (228)

Ronica seems to agree with Rupa when she boldly challenges the South Asian = Indian configuration: "I think there is a big Indian supremacy thing in South Asia, like India just dominates the conversation." Similarly, Laila distinguishes herself as a Bengali from Bangladesh (a Bangladeshi), which she argues is distinct from a Bengali from (Calcutta) India (a *Bangali*).

> Growing up, I definitely knew which one of my parents' friends married people who were actually from India - from Calcutta…They spoke ever so slightly differently, they used different words, and they had a different accent…My dad has a friend who [is] Bangladeshi and married a Bengali woman from Calcutta. Recently he has been on TV locally to talk about culture issues and [he] identified himself as being Indian. My aunts and uncles were so offended that he seemed ashamed to admit that he was Bangladeshi. So I am aware of the distinctions for sure…I use to always say I was Bengali and then I realized, "Oh, I guess that's not accurate." I was like, "No, I am Bangladeshi. It's different." I feel like I say Bangladeshi now mostly just to not confuse other people that I am from there [Bangladesh] [and] I am not from India…

Laila is critical, then, about the identity politics behind the term "Bengali." She indicates a racialized hierarchy between Hindus/Bengalis/Indians/South Asians and Muslims/Bangladeshis, with the latter often occupying the status of the Other. There is an enfolding power struggle that accentuates the divide. Historically, Bangals (Hindus

originally from the area now Bangladesh and migrated to Calcutta during the partition in 1971) are considered to be the cultural and intellectual elite of the South Asian sub-continent. The division of Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971 forced many Bangals to migrate to Calcutta and Calcutta became the production hub of high-art and scholarly-thought, marking the Bangladeshis, primarily Muslims, as second-class. Post-9/11 provided an open forum for Hindu-Bengalis to resurface their feelings towards Muslims and Bangladeshis. Puar's suspicion towards the term South Asian-American then is not unfounded. She is right to imply that the term, whilst it holds merit as a mobilizing force, connotes sameness with in fact there is multiplicity; it imposes monolithicness when the dynamics of hegemony also operate among minority communities; and it implies solidarity where, often, there is division. The term "South Asian" (which equals Indian) "unregisters borders" (Poore 1998, 24).

Collectively, the women's oral histories illustrates that while they use ethnic language to challenge racial structures, their refusal to identify as racial subjects do not mean they reject the existence of race, nor does it mean that they get to absolve themselves from racial categorization. By using Omi and Winant's (1994) ethnicity paradigm to talk about race, the women in this study fail to acknowledge that ethnic labels are part of racialization. Bashi (1998) makes clear that racialization is positioning process that takes place within a racial hierarchy (960). While I do not argue that "South Asian" is a racial category, it is indeed an identity formation that is a racial project part of U.S. racialization. Here, a South Asian identity reinforces a particular kind of assimilation constituted for the women involved in my field work.

The Multicultural Beast

I now map out additional identity labels that the women have offered to me in our discussions about race and ethnicity. While "South Asian" is a meaningful identity to my respondents (see also Mani 2003, 118), I find that the women try to "self-imagine" themselve beyond the collapsed category "South Asian," precisely because the label is prescribed to them through nation-state boundaries, and South Asian-American identity processes are not simple or linear projects as the U.S. would make it seem. Rupa says, for example,

> I do feel like my identity is fractured, and I am constantly trying to make it a whole somehow or figure out what it is. At the same time, I don't feel I can just put borders between them. It is not like my arm is American and my head [South Asian]. It is not as linear as that; it is much more blurry.

In the following section, I show the women's efforts to consider the application of intersectionality and the range of inclusions and exclusions such intersections have to offer. My research participants forge the term "desi" to address some of the fissures of the term "South Asian" and to better describe their identity politics as second-generation South Asian-Americans. Here, the women problematize some common labels that often come up in discussions about migration history - "second-generation," "ABCD" (American-Born Confused Desi), and "FOB" (Fresh Off the Boat) - as critical to their identity work.

The categories second-generation, ABCD, FOB, and desi are neither racial nor ethnic labels. Rather, "second-generation" is a social category that describes the off-spring of immigrants to America; "ABCD" and "FOB" are labels that are often used by South Asians in American to distinguish between immigrant South Asians and non-immigrant South Asians; and, "desi" (derived from the Hindi word "desh," meaning

motherland) is a diasporic term used by South Asians in America to refer to other South Asian-Americans in solidarity and brother/sisterhood. The historical development of such categories includes the incorporation of "South Asian" as an identity in America, and I have argued that "South Asian" is an ethnic formation that is part of a U.S. racial project. Hence, the mapping out of "second-generation," "ABCD," "FOB," and "desi" is an important exercise for understanding the identities of South Asian-Americans.

Second-generation!?! I thought I was First-!

Second-generation South Asian-Americans are often positioned as ABCDs and in opposition to FOBs within the South Asian-American diasporic context. I expected the label "second-generation" to be a significant identity marker for my research participants. On the contrary, my research participants are adamant that the term is not used for meaningful identity work. Mala voices, "It doesn't actually often come up in my conversations to call someone 'second-generation'." While, I took my ownership of a "second-generation" identity for granted when I embarked on the ethnography, the women quickly reminded me that my inclusion of the term "second-generation" comes from my privilege of being an academic. "Second-generation" is not a salient identity label in the everyday lives of my research participants. Rupa says, "I get confused as to what is first-generation and what is second-generation. I thought that because I am the first-generation born here that I am the first-generation." Rani follows, "The term 'second-generation' is really not accurate because we are really first-generation Americans, right? We are the first-generation to be born in America from our parents." Throughout the data collection process, I repeatedly provided examples on the various ways "first-generation," "one-and-a-half generation," and "second-generation" are used

in the immigration literature and that I would be using the term "second-generation" to describe the women in my data analysis. Because most women whom I interviewed seemed confused about generational terminology and which generation they belong to in the context of immigration and assimilation, I asked additional questions that spoke to generational categories. Through my interviews, I uncovered that the term "second-generation" was most often learned in college through liberal arts classes (i.e. courses offered in South Asian Studies), advocacy and community involvement (i.e. working with South Asian women who are victims of domestic violence), or cultural organizations and conferences (i.e. *North American Bengali Conference* or NABC). Tina says,

> I [think I learned] "second-generation" from the Bengali community [and organizations]. They use the word "youth" a lot during the cultural events, like "The *youth* are going to do this and the *second-generation* are going to do this.

Indeed, "second-generation" is not used as an identity label. It is a social category and like many social categories (i.e. high school graduate or unemployed), have no identity meaning. Even academics do not use it as an identity label, but the term is often constructed and used by im/migration scholars like Alejandro Portes, Ruben Rumbaut, and Min Zhou to describe the American-born and -raised off-spring of immigrants in the im/migration literature (i.e. Portes 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

ABCD and FOB (American-Born Confused Desi and Fresh Off the Boat)

Some of the women offer "ABCD" and "FOB" to me to describe in part their identity to me. ABCD and FOB are not racial or ethnic labels, but their connection to the ethnic formation "South Asian" incorporates them into a racial project in particular ways, primarily one which allows people of South Asian descent to separate themselves from

South Asian immigrants through differing racial-ethnic-national experiences. Tina says, "It is just a way of categorizing people…It doesn't really matter what 'C' stands for; it's more raised here versus immigrant." Mala also says, "I think among my desi friends, we sort of just joke around and say ABCD or FOB, but what we're actually saying is pointing out a difference in U.S.-born or South Asian-born." ABCD refers to being a South Asian who was born (and raised) in America while a FOB means being a South Asian born in South Asia.

While Tina and Mala categorize South Asians as ABCD - American-born - or FOB - South Asian-born - most of the women in this study, like Sera and Noopur, complicate the ABCD/FOB dichotomy, highlighting the grey space between the two. Sera, an American-born Bangladeshi depicts herself as more of a FOB than her immigrant parents because she loves to listen to Hindi music and watch Hindi movies:

> I'm really FOBy in a lot of ways. I listen to a lot of Hindi music, I watch Hindi movies, [and] I'm on all these South Asian dance teams…So when I talk to them [my parents], it's not like, "Oh, my God, my parents are such FOBs." My parents have been Americanized and I guess it's just the fact that my parents are so liberal, maybe if they were stricter, I'd be like, "Wow"...

Using a similar discourse – cultural behavioral traits – Noopur, an American-born Indian, finds it difficult to describe some of her friends who immigrated to the U.S. as children as FOBs:

> The term FOB…it is granted as being born in India and being in America…and not being able to adapt. So it is a birth thing, but it is really your being to adapt issue. Because if I were to use the term FOB for just that, there's probably five people I could list right now, some of my close friends that moved to America when they were like eight or nine years old. You couldn't tell the difference between them and someone who was born here. They truly are FOB in that definition, but I don't think that they're having issues trying to identify with American culture by having moved here…[So] it's about social skills…

The intersections of contradictory discourses – first-generation versus second-generation and ABCD versus FOB – enable the women in my research to explore additional identity-making processes in ways that address only mobilization and representation (of presence and voice). In this effort, as South Asian women who are born and/or raised in America, the women, collectively, forge the label "desi."

I am Desi

Like "second-generation," "ABCD," and "FOB," the term "desi" is neither a racial nor an ethnic label, but its connection to a South Asian identity provides it with a role in racial-ethnic-national formations among South Asians in America, especially the second-generation. Among my research participants, the identity "desi" emerges in the context of ideals that they associate with being a South Asian from America. Rupa expresses:

> There is some desi pride that goes down and that feels good. I feel more at home with other people who feel equally adrift and equally marooned. It is like there is no homeland or the land wants us, but we don't fit the people anymore. We are like this floating island.

Noopur addresses the potency of "desi" in her life:

> To me, [desi] is something that we just throw out there in everyday conversation with my more intimate group of friends or people that I'm comfortable with…I could never call some of my best non-Indian friends desi. It doesn't work that way...[So] yeah, desi is huge.

Rupa and Noopur's articulations of "selfhood" are key sites where oppositional logic of self/Other, us/them, South Asian/American is reproduced (see Naber 2006, 92). And selfhood articulated in terms of choice between South Asian and American position Rupa and Noopur's identities as American. Rupa reflects on the label "desi" and its

relationship to being American. She underscores that "desi" as an identity is a South-Asian-American construct:

> [As a] Bengali, I see the term "desi" [in] Hindi or Urdu, and it is "deshi" in Bengali. So I see it as American English in the way that we use it now…I use this word amongst American-South Asians…

And Noopur says "desi" is an intimate label to describe the experiences that come along with being a South Asian-American, an experience distinct from South Asians elsewhere:

> "Desi" is a slang way of being proud of who you are in a more comfortable setting [with] people [who] understand it and get it. Desi is [sharing] similar-type backgrounds; they deal with the same frustrations, they've got to go through the same things that you do.

Like the label "Chicana lesbian" (see Brady 2002, 100), the forging of such a classification – desi – helps to establish a distinct organizational category working as a form of disidentification – from both Americans and South Asians from South Asia – and a powerful device for anthologies like *Bolo! Bolo!: A Collection of Writings by Second-Generation South Asians Living in American* (2000) and *Asian American X* (2004). Labels like "South Asian" are bureaucratic words that do not hold within them the revolutionary aspirations and histories of a people. The word "desi" raise associations of struggles, and makes my respondents feel like they belong in a collectivity.

Rupa and Noopur's containment strategies – expressing two racial-ethnic-national categories South Asian and American in dichotomous terms – emerge as a response to a series of identity-defining movements, including a shift towards more inclusion (and exclusion) in both the South Asian diaspora and U.S. assimilation processes and destabilizing claims to a transparent and uncontested billboard for identity. While Rupa and Noopur are mutually invested in discursive mechanisms that allow them to engage with immigration and assimilation (see Naber 2006, 90), they also show that South

Asianness and Americanness absolutely depend on each other to exist. Hence, while my research participants think through the labeling process and attempt to emphasize multiculturalism side-by-side a critique of the State, they simultaneously mold identity labels that emphasize American nationalism.

In summation, in this chapter, I focused in on the ways in which South Asians in America are racialized and the ways in which South Asian-Americans respond to U.S. racial projects, including how the women in this study use racial and ethnic labels. By searching the transcripts, I uncovered that the women sort themselves by contesting notions of race – "Asian" – and appropriating ethnic discourse – "Bengali." The women find that identification as a Bengali provides them with the reflexivity they are searching for in constructing their self-identities. Alongside the the term "Bengali," the women in my fieldwork forge the label "South Asian" or "South Asian-American" as a critical identity. The women also offer to me additional lables in our discussions about race and ethnicity - "second-generation," "ABCD," and "FOB," and "desi."

However, the process of ethnic construction is not valid. Discarding race as a defining category does not mean that "race" no longer matters in the women's lives. But, forging the label "South Asian" is what Omi and Winant (1994) call a racial project (56). Labels like "South Asian" or "South Asian-American" characterize a racialzing process and are racialized labels. And while the terms "second-generation," "ABCD," and "FOB," and "desi" are not racial or ethnic labels, their connection to a South Asian identity provides them with a role in racial-ethnic-national formations among South Asians in America. The women in this study use Omi and Winant's notion of "ethnicity paradigm" to talk about race, which assumes that "race" is just but one of the numerous

determinants of ethnicity, submerging that the racialization process forces people into racial identities. What the women fail to acknowledge is that ethnic labels are part of racialization and racialization is positioning process that takes place within a racial hierarchy. What I uncover through my interviews is that the women's preferences to discuss themselves in ethnic terms – not a hierarchical power structure – do not mean that they absolve themselves from race – a hierachical power structure.

CHAPTER 4

Patrolling the Cultural Fences:
Community Place-making

Culture has been defined in a number of ways in the social sciences. For the purposes of this study, "culture" is the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group. Lederach (1995) writes, "Culture is the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them" (9). Most simply, culture is the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings. In this chapter, I have a discussion about the meanings of "culture" and "cultural identity" through the voices of my research participants.

"Culture" is an integral variable for my research participants in articulating their "selfhood" as South Asian or desi; Indian, Bangladeshi, or Nepali; and/or Bengali. Unanimously, the women voice that there is indeed a distinct "South Asian culture" or "desi culture" and "American culture," and "cultural difference" is thought through binary oppositions and polarities. Articulation of selfhood is a key site where the oppositional logic of self/other, us/them, and South Asian/American are reproduced among my research participants. My respondents place South Asian culture and American culture on a continuum, constructing American culture as "empty" or unmarked (and immoral). In positioning South Asian culture and American culture in opposition, the women in my fieldwork draw on four variables: familial ties and

obligations; (multiple) lineage and symbolic ethnicity; work ethic and educational aspirations; and, capitalism and materialism.

However, while I find that the women I interviewed express the theme of culture within binaries, positioning South Asianness in strict opposition to Americanness, they also simultaneously engage in assimilatory acts. The women protect the boundaries of U.S. nationalism and white hegemonic discourse, which is predicated on dilienating South Asian from American through the discourse of Orientalism and Otherness. The notion of binaries is central, but the oppositional positioning occurs in varying permutations at different times. On one hand, the South Asian community is constructed along the insider/outsider model. On the other hand, race, ethnic, culture, class, gender, and sexual formations are based on a process of white homogenization and naturalized racial, gender, sexual, and class ideologies (see Brady 2002, 6). In this discussion, I suggest that binaries are "always more complex than the straightjacket of identity politics might suggest" (Shohat 1998, 6, as cited by Naber 2006, 108). My research participants' distinction between being "South Asian" and "American" often break down, suggesting that the South Asian community is not altogether a different conception of spatiality.

Culture:No Culture AS TO South Asian:American

My research participants draw on four variables to discuss the notion of culture - familial ties and obligations, (multiple) lineage and symbolic ethnicity, work ethic and educational aspirations, and capitalism and materialism - and to position South Asian (moral) culture and American culture (immoral) in opposition.

The women I worked with voice that having a strong sense of duty to family, strengthening the family unit through individual action, and being closely connected to

family members, including extended family, is moral behavior. Nadia feels that being a child of immigrants means that she has strong (family) values, which in turn indicates that she is not a "true American":

> I don't think America has a culture. [In my] culture, there is this big emphasis on family. Extended family is family; my mom's sister is my second mother, [and] not just my mom's sister. Even if I am far away, I still love my parents dearly and I call them every night just so they won't freak out… You can see that in India and you can see it in China but you usually don't see that in America…American people… don't even call [each other] on the cell. They usually don't have that closeness.

Mazeda tells me how she has had to defend her sense of family obligation, like monthly phone calls to her parents, to her "white, Californian boyfriend." She says:

> He could do what he wanted and I did what I wanted but I always expressed the guilt…He didn't understand the family dynamics I grew up [in]. Just the difference in our sense of obligation, he didn't have that. He is very close to his family, [but] he didn't have that same sense and I had to explain a lot of things to him and I just got tired of it.

Nadia and Mazeda disrupt the representative narrative of the "Western" or "American" family. They interrogate the cultural dialogue commonly expressed in the discussion of "Americanization" by problematizing utilitarian arguments made with respect to immigration and assimilation and the view that dominant Ango-American culture represents the one "true" culture in America. Mazeda questions how core American identity deeply influences how she thinks about herself along with and how the majority (in reference to her white American boyfriend) perceives her as falling outside the assumption of sameness. Both Nadia and Mazeda additionally point to an important notion in identity theory. The women recognize that the individual is not the only locus of identity, but also includes a collective identity.

Noopur extends the theme of South Asian collectivity. She feels that making simple decisions like hanging out with friends involves thinking about her parents' feelings. Noopur exclaims, "[Is it] okay to be able to go out and spend time with your friends because that's what you want to do or it's a bad thing because your parents don't want you to?" Noopur implicitly articulates that being American means having little responsibilities towards your family and doing what your heart desires. She solidifies the immigrant=family values=collectivity and American=no family=individualism logic. Padmini describes a much larger life event - her (arranged) marriage - as an example of making life choices due to her sense of family obligation and duty versus choosing a spouse on her own in order to fulfill her personal sexual, romantic, intimate, and partnership needs and desires:

> I am married to a Bengali-Hindu, and it is specifically because he is Bengali and Hindu…I suppose if I perceived myself more as part of the mainstream, I would have the idea [that] it should just be someone whom I like, whom I feel comfortable with, and then the parents will come afterwards…

Selfhood, then, is articulated in terms of a choice between "being an individual/being an American" or "being connected to family/being South Asian" (see Naber 2006, 92). As Zerubavel (1991) suggests, the self is just but one particular focus of identity. He writes, "[W]e experience ourselves not only as 'I' but also collectively as 'we,' that is, as liberals, baseball fans, Muslims, women, humans" (14). The standard psychological definition of identity as "I" and "me" is problematic for South Asian women (Dasgupta and Warrier 1997). Familial ideology is indeed considered to be a South Asian and immigrant ethos and therefore "un-American," and the struggle for desi women is one of collectivism versus individualism.

But Padmini provides a counter experience to the American=individuality and South Asian= family ethos. She shares with me a time when she did not have health insurance and her parents did little to help her:

> [W]hen I [returned] to the States from grad school in London, I had two part-time jobs but no health insurance from either of those jobs…My mother happens to be a social worker and she told me about this [new Medicaid grant]. It was Murphy's law that as soon as I got on Medicaid insurance, I had a lot of problems with my health and I really needed to see a real doctor. My parents were just oblivious and they bought a plasma TV [instead of helping me].

While talking to me, Padmini consciously questions her belief that the Indian culture means being there for your family, "I don't believe it anymore because of the experiences that I have had with my own parents." Though, Padmini quickly addresses the discrepancy: "I am not saying that Asians are devoid of values, but maybe once they come to America their values are not much better than your average Americans…"

Padmini and my respondents turn their gaze to focus on their "desi" cultural ways and their familial strategies of being within the field of race relations (and gender and secuality). The women whom I worked with unknowingly draw on Durkheimian notions of collectivity and individuality and Bellah et al.'s (1985/1996) notions of expressive individualism and divided individualism to talk about community, tradition, and sense of duty. And my research participants' words do not problematize the ways in which whiteness is typically understood (see Frankenburg 1994). The assumption of a monolithic whole is intertwined with ingrained cultural understandings and the white ethnic immigrant myth (see Vargas 1998). Such a narrative captures percieved core American values that reflect my respondent's sense of self. Just as my research participants are categorized in particular ways by the normative, the women in turn also serve to reify what it means to be an American.

Coupled with loose family ties, being an American means having multiple

lineages with weak connections to countries of origins or "motherlands," yet another

dimension the women use in distinguishing between South Asian culture and American

culture. Rani believes:

> I don't feel that the people who are a quarter this, a quarter that, an eighth this, feel like they have lost out on anything…[People] ask me about me and then they say I don't have any kind of heritage. I could not be happy just saying I am American…I would lose something…I would feel emptier…

Padmini says:

> I do feel proud that I am South Asian… I remember having a conversation [with a Korean friend in high school and] her saying, "Sometimes I wake up in the morning and I am just so glad I am not white…" I am not trying to generalize about [whites/Americans], like the trash you see on talk shows or when they talk like this (using a nasal accent)…[But] it is a relief that [I] come from a background where [my] civilization has it figured out…

Both Rani and Padmini begin to comment on the invisibility of whiteness, or the capacity

of whiteness to contribute to a representation of sameness (a fortress of white race

privilege) (Frankenburg 1994). Naming whitness in this way places it as unmarked and

unnamed. And the invisibility of whiteness makes race and ethnicity issues reserved for

the "Other." Padmini uses her husband's name to clearly demonstrate that being

American (white) means being less ethnic:

> The way that we all retain these very ethnic names…like my husband, his real name is Shaam, but he goes by Sam, and I am like that is so dumb. Like your name is one syllable and someone would really have to have a serious disorder if they couldn't even pronounce Shaam. But, that's just his philosophy having grown up more in a whiter part of New Jersey, where you just really wanted to relinquish any ethnic ties…[39]

Padmini comments on what Waters (1990) would call "symbolic ethnicity." Symbolic

ethnicity is an ethnicity that contributes to individual identity and perhaps to family

communion, but does not create or sustain strong ethnic group ties (see Waters 1990;

Nagel 1994). Most white Americans, including those of northwestern European

background, know and identify with their ethnic ancestry, but white ethnicity is neither

deep nor stable (Water 1990).

Collectively, the women I interviewed convey that whiteness contributes to a

representation of sameness. The women's ethnic identities and experiences, on the other

hand, give them the capacity to contribute to a self-representation that goes beyond the

invisibility of whiteness or homogeniety. Padmini says being raised in an immigrant

South Asian family give her "perspective."

> I just think I see this world from a broader perspective than someone who is monocultural…I think you can just approach things differently because you are on both sides of the coin at the same time. That is a huge thing to gain. You don't have to talk from somebody else's perspective in a patronizing way. You can really relate to it.

Ronica explains,

> I gain a multiplicity of identities and I get to explore all these different people inside of myself…I get to be peripherally a part of many different cultures just based on the fact that I am a mixed heritage kind of person.

Padmini and Ronica are certainly appreciative of being raised desi. The women believe

that being a South Asian-American gives them an edge over being a "plain white

American." My respondents feel that they are able to criticize a monistic view that

Anglo-Saxon culture is the core American culture (the "homogeneity assumption," see

Vargas 1998). As second-generation South Asian-Americans, the women live their lives

in a multicultural environment with experiences in more than one place (through their

travels). The women in this study feel that, unlike normative Americans, they are able to

interrogate Anglo-Saxon culture as superior to all others and empathize with people from

different backgrounds.

In addition to voicing their beliefs that American culture has little or no family values; is individualistic and decisions are based on personal needs and desires; and is far removed from immigrant roots and means having a choice in ethnic identification, my research participants voice that their families taught them the importance of hard work – preconceived as an ingrained desi cultural value. In asking the women I interviewed to think about words, phrases, and images that come to their minds when they think about themselves as a child of desi immigrants, the women equate America to "the land of the free," but simultaneously describe multiple barriers of racism. In negotiating racist structures and achieving "the American dream," with an overwhelming consensus, the women in my fieldwork unfold their parents' U.S.-migration histories as a model-minority story. Tina proudly articulates the hard work = success ethos within a South Asian-American matrix:

> When he was working [in India], he was working at an engineering firm. Doing that work, he would have done well, I am sure, but he wanted to see what else was out there and that is why he came over…His "making it" story is really just hard work…He would always be at work and made significant progress in terms of his career and building a savings…

Mazeda reiterates the links among struggle, opportunity, hard work, education, and success for desi Americans:

> My father was able to leave Bangladesh because he did well in school…My mom only finished high school but she works as many hours and as hard as my father does. So it is very important for them, for us to do well in school…School is the most important thing for everyone to succeed in…[My] parents are always working hard, pushing [us] to work hard…[They are] always telling [me] where they came from and how hard they have to work and that we need to work hard as well in order to do well…

My respondents and their families use education as a legitimizing tool to morally place themselves above the common American, and the desire to pursue education via a strong work ethic is attributed to an innate value ingrained by South Asian culture.

Abu-Lughod (2003) suggests that immigrants feel they will be redeemed by education and truly believe their faith in education is the only path to progress, morality, and acceptance. And Zhou (1997) finds that ethnic communities can help channel frustrations with cultural conflict away from rebellion, turning cultural tensions into pressures for achievement. Collectively, the women themselves derive comfort and confidence from their strong work ethic and educational attainments. Sujata reminisces about summer school:

> In the beginning of every summer, our parents would take us to the teacher store…We would buy math workbooks and every day my dad and mom would assign us a certain number of pages…We had family friends who were part of the "summer school." We spent every summer together and our days were very structured.

Juhi's mother also charted Juhi's summers with academic-based activities, "My mother had lesson plans set out from books set for the next class year - an hour for history, an hour [of this], and we had work charts…" Within this context, the women report that their parents expect them to achieve an ivy-league education or at least very close to it, an undergraduate degree and at least one graduate or professional degree, and the career mantra is "doctor-lawyer-engineer." Rupa says,

> When I was fourteen, I told them I wasn't going to be a doctor and they completely freaked out. All through college, [my parents] were wondering what I was going to do because I didn't want to be a doctor, engineer, or a lawyer...

And Juhi says, "I work in the media so they [the Bangladeshi community] don't even understand the concept. They're like, 'Are you a doctor, engineer, or lawyer?'"

The basic conservative claim that Tina and Mazeda make is that the South Asian family structure and discipline accounts for their families' success, and not racism, for South Asians are also "minorities." But political and economic systems are more powerful than culture (Bashi 2001). What the women disregard is the historical process of the construction of South Asians in the U.S. Tina, Mazeda, Sujata, and Juhi's parents arrived to the U.S. as professional workers through a particular U.S. immigration regime. Prashad (2000) would argue that the women's family successes are not a result of natural selection, but of state selection. It is too simplistic to view South Asian-American racial formations through the lens of cultural difference or "having a different culture." The model-minority image is a myth built on an American history: South Asians are disproportionately successful in America not because they are inherently more intelligent or work harder, but mostly because of immigration law. Those immigrants that did well expect their American children to be top achievers at every level (Prashad 2000). Bashi (2001) astutely points out, "What is often misread as cultural differences among racial subgroups may indeed be evidence of differences in adaptations to racial structures, which in turn may be caused by positioning of socio-economic structures" (216). South Asians encourage a vocabulary of culture and morality to predominate the description of social stratification. Racism does in fact affect the South Asian-American community, but members circumvent racism by placing themselves outside of U.S. racial hierarchy through hard work and educational and career achievements, using "South Asian culture" as the motive.

In further positioning South Asian culture and American culture in opposition, drawing Americans as immoral, the women in this study equate American culture with

capitalism and materialism. Rupa presents her older brother as a case-in-point to

articulate the American culture = materialism equation:

> He chose to be as white as he could be. I love him very much, but he looks like
> he walked out of a page of an *L.L. Bean* catalog. He is very materialistic. He is
> an orthopedic spine surgeon and he has the *BMW X5*.   He has all of the right
> things for the American family dream; he was always striving for that.

Nadia says:

> Americanized to me is like apple pie and baseball. It is growing up with TV, speaking
> without an accent, going to high school, and wearing *Abercrombie*. [It's] being around
> white people and emulating them a little bit.

Rupa and Nadia indicate being American means ascribing to middle-class white

aesthetics which include the white picket fence, brand-name clothing, and designer cars.

That is, being American means not being poor.

Implicitly, Rupa and Nadia implicate South Asians in the process of

"Americanization." Ronica succinctly describes the links among materialism, capitalism,

and being South Asian-American:

> I have to [include myself as an American], because I just can't be, "Oh, I benefit
> from [class privilege] when I feel like it and can't benefit from it when I don't." I
> [also] think that part of it is the term American actually isn't really inclusive to
> poor people in this country. Somehow people being poor in this country mean
> that they are acting less American.

Ronica recognizes that class privilege begins to break down the oppositional positioning

between South Asian and American, not only bolstering the myth of the model minority,

but also erasing South Asian-Americans who live on the outskirts of the myth along with

poor black, Mexican, and white Americans. The romantic memories of "home" and

"homeland culture" rupture among middle- and upper-middle-class South Asians in

America. Meaning, class strategies enable the women to strategically assimilate to

appropriate norms of whiteness (see Naber 2006, 93). The particular (cultural)

worldview that emerges from the twenty-five interviews is a result of socioeconomic positioning that occurred as part of the migration process of the women's families. As the women critically receive cultural meanings, they associate South Asian cultural identity with community, cohesiveness, control, ingrained work ethic, being naturally smart, and a desire for education; and American cultural identity with individualism and autonomy. Yet, the fantasy of a romantic notion of "cultural authenticity" collapses (see Naber 2006, 98).

Despite Rupa's model-minority upbringing, having a dad who was Chief-of-Medicine, and growing up in a home with a large green-grassed yard, as an adult, Rupa struggled in college with rape, alcohol and drug abuse, and depression. After seven long years, she finally received an undergraduate degree in South Asian Languages and Civilizations. Rupa says, "At the end of it all, they were just glad I got a degree… I could have gotten my degree in basket weaving and they would have been psyched." Ronica dropped out of college for several years because she was unclear about what she wanted to do in life:

> I had no idea what I was doing at the age of eighteen. I feel like I was so sheltered growing up and my family was so strict that I really didn't have a sense of myself and I spent so much time rebelling against my family that I really never developed the sense of, "What did I want?" So I really needed time to be able to figure that out…

Ronica's decisions to leave school left her feeling alienated from the South Asian-American community:

> I think I miss out on being able to define myself based on many different ideals of what a population looks like. Like here in America the South Asian ideal is over-educated, science-based young person…[I feel] alienated from the NRI population…

The South Asian and American binary ignores women who do not attend "top" schools, do not pursue traditional educational (and career) routes, or worse yet, do not go to college. Culture is a spatial-temporal site bound in class formations.

In the context of the study, plainly, culture reproduces class narratives. It is important to ask then, who is producing culture and who is consuming it? What is at stake within consumption and production processes? What kinds of alliances make particular cultural consumption and production possible?

South Asian-Americans as a category have a great deal at stake in maintaining class-reductive analysis and using culture as a proxy for it. By sustaining the model-minority status (and placing themselves outside the black-Mexican-white racial hierarchy), South Asian-Americans have the discourse of "tradition," "culture," and "not forgetting our homeland" available to them. Consider the production of a lavish Bengali meal. Class-based privilege allows certain Bengalis (primarily women) to travel to Edison, NJ or Chicago, IL or Artesia, CA to purchase multiple vegetables, meats, and sweet dishes from Gujarati vendors who hardly speak any English.[40] They return home to neighborhoods in Holmdel, NJ or Burr Ridge, IL to re-create a "traditional" Bengali meal while wearing a Madrasi sari either brought back from their travels to South Asia or purchased in the U.S. from areas like Devon Avenue in Chicago. The putting together of a lavish meal, among other modes of production, like the ability of a Bangladeshi medical community in Barrington, IL to sponsor (immigration) and financially support a Bangladeshi *hoojur/mullah* (a Muslim priest) and his family in order to provide their American-raised children with Islamic and Arabic education, allow certain South Asian-

Americans to maintain the belief that that they are a "traditional South Asian family" despite living in America.

The ideal South Asian-American immigrant construct easily erases the history of the Punjabi migration in the 1800s and bestows invisibility to working-class populations. In this way, by focusing on class, South Asian-Americans vie for favored status by the majority by turning against one another, subsequently re-articulating their own experience, not as unwelcome migrants to the United States, but as a community with significant relationship to the United States. Class formations are very much dependent upon migration flows, and the making of a lower class is the work of dominant social strata (see Lash and Urry 1994, 171-192). Consider the following excerpt from Vijay Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk* (2000):

> But we are good immigrants. We have advanced degrees…These cabbies, noted one such professional, are 'lowering the tone.' They are 'spoiling things for us,' even 'ruining our image' in the United States…These uncouth chaps, straight out of Punjab, can't even speak proper English – can't even drive. I don't know how they got here. Must be through Mexico…I don't know why they let them in…' The new working-class migration is turning *us* into Mexicans! (82)

Ronica keenly observes the perceived bi-modality of the South Asian-American populations Prashad writes about:

> America doesn't want South Asians to come here unless they make over a hundred thousand dollars a year or have some super high power job…Do they want *chaiwallas* (street vendors who sell tea) to come? No…You see the vendors on Essex or Delancy or by Union Square and there is no way you get treated like a model minority.

Ronica's word indicate that while the traditional function of guarded borders is to defend sovereignty, the mobility potential that globalization facilitates concurrently spawns conceptualizations of borders that need to protect a perceived stable and secure social fabric against suspect populations (Shamir 2005, 199-200). Like Jain (2005), Lash and

Urry (1994) speculate that the shift from the traditional market to extended channels of transactions indicate a transformed stratification of the core and periphery, one that differs from the classical Marxian paradigm of bourgeoisie and proletariat (28). South Asian-Americans are yet another category of commodification supporting the naturalized boundaries of the United States and questioning the cohesiveness of the diaspora (I do not reject the notion of resistance however). That is, strategic assimilation is not solely about alleviating the white voyeur. It is additionally a process in which whiteness, produced through cultural modalities, is re-cast through class (the production of Arabic-reading children and holiday and religious meals are based on achieving the "American dream"). In other words, diasporic culture is recreated through production and consumption, and the modern nation gets (re-)created through events of the everyday (see Bhabha 1994, 209). The class-as-culture narrative helps to shift the discourse of South Asianness and Americanness, centralizing the intersections of culture and modernity within the context of South Asian-American femininities.

Third World Women: Culture=Color=Oppression

My research participants make clear to me that "their culture" - South Asian or desi culture - is "rich" with "strong values." South Asians are "moral" and believe in "family." And they express disdain over American cultural ethos, reading American culture as empty of tradition, void of ethnic ties, and immoral (the individual is more important than the collective). However, the women continue to implicate themselves in the process of Americanization. In this next and final section of the chapter, by searching the transcripts, I uncover that within the framework of femininities and sexuality, the women in my fieldwork, through class-based narratives, use Orientalist historiography

(Said 1979) to map the oppositional positioning of South Asian culture and American culture as tradition/pre-modern (read as "backward") and liberal/modern, and they claim Americanness.

India (a class-based proxy for South Asia and vice versa) first appeared in the popular imagination of the U.S. through P.T. Barnum, Christian missionaries, and traveling Indian lecturers or spiritual gurus like Vivekananda. In these domains, as Prashad (2000) explains, "India was presented in the context of a generalized Orient" characterized by "images of opulent and effeminate sultans surrounded by oversexed women, animals, jewelry, and the scent of the unknown" (27). India did not emerge in this discourse as just romantic and beautiful, but it also came across as foreign and barbaric. In the context of femininities and sexuality, my respondents begin to use such conceptions to map South Asianness with tradition, "unmodern," conservative, strict, backward (and at times barbaric), and static.

The women suggest that the prototypical South Asian-American family is based on Dasgupta and Warrier's (1997) notion of an "abstract model of culture" or an imagined "true" South Asian culture. Noopur says,

> I feel that a lot of Indian American families will move to America and then act as if they're still in India. And they don't address the fact that their children are growing up in a very, very different environment from what they're used to, and that they try to just kind of recreate a little India in their home…

Juhi underscores the immigrant's romantic notions of home, which is built on class privilege in the U.S., and hence a strategic process of assimilation:

> My mother once said when you step into this house it's like you're stepping into Bangladesh…I think that they have the sense that they are going to come here and have opportunities for themselves and pass it on to their kids but still maintain their culture and the way that they grew up...

Immigrant nostalgia and imagined South Asian womanhood help the women in my

fieldwork to decode America as open/less traditional/less patriarchal/more equality/more

agency. Noopur outlines America as such by describing a simple event like walking

down a street:

> I feel that independence is just what America teaches – it's freedom, and powerful, and in general as a country, you get a sense of independence just walking on the street…[I]t doesn't matter if a woman's walking down the street by herself. It's not looked upon as, "Oh, she shouldn't be doing that…" Even midday, sometimes, you can't even leave the house [in Calcutta] unless you're escorted by your five male cousins.

And Juhi says, "America is a liberal country, [while] South Asian culture is conservative

and stifling."

Juhi's words provide a wonderful segue into examining my research participants'

feelings of embarrassement, as children and young adults, of being of South Asian

descent and having close ties to immigrant roots. Padmini's describes her

embarassement when her parents came to visit her at summer camp:

> When I was thirteen, I went to camp and my parents came to visit me…I guess I was sort of embarrassed…my parents shout when they talk. They don't talk in a regular voice and it's not necessarily that they are arguing, but that is just the way they talk…It did make me feel that these people are slightly uncivilized.

Rupa was equally mortified when her parent's spoke to her in Bengali at the mall:

> I was ten or twelve years old…The clerk would stare at them speaking Bengali and then look at me…I would try to move a few feet away so it looked like I wasn't with them. [But] I was [also] ashamed of their accents when they were speaking in English…The accent meant that they were stupid somehow, or imperfect…[I] always [felt] less American, always the "Other" somehow, and usually foreign.

Ronica experiences shame and humiliation in high school, "We are all at a school

assembly and my parents don't know how to do the *Pledge of Allegiance* or sing "My

Country Tis of Thee" and I am totally like, 'Oh my God mom.'"

My research participants repeatedly describe parents who choose to isolate daughters from American socialization patterns, like going to the movies with friends, as "traditional," "strict," and/or "conservative." Rupa expresses,

> I couldn't do anything…Even if I went to the movies with my best friend there was this, "Didn't you see her last Friday night?" We would go to a movie and my dad would check the time to see exactly when the movie got out; he would come and pick me up and take me home…I felt like I was in prison.

As South Asians and a fairly newly arrived immigrant group, my respondents feel that they missed out on formative "American" socialization experiences. Auditi declares,

> I do think I missed out when I was in high school…[Slumber parties and stuff], even though they seem so silly, are important for developing socialization skills in America…When I got to college, I was a self-conscious person [because I] really had to struggle socially much more than the average American because I missed out in high school.

Juhi says,

> My friends were running around in the sprinklers till they were fifteen and it was weird to me that they were doing that because I was doing trigonometry in my house in the summer time. So, I feel like I missed out on a normal childhood.

And Indira states, "That whole idea of a guy coming to pick you up on a Friday night and you go out to a movie - that quintessential Americana - that's not my reality and wasn't my existence." Auditi, Juhi, and Indira's experiences represent gendered and sexualized discourses of a selective (family-based) assimilation strategy. In policing daughters, the women report that their families deploy categories "South Asian" and "American" in opposition. Within the context of South Asian-American femininities, the cultural nationalist logic emerges as "good South Asian girl" and "bad Americanized girl."

The theme of female sexuality circumscribes the ways my research participants imagine and contest culture (see Naber 2006). The women in the study share with me

gender differences in the realm of dating and marriage.[41] Mazeda exclaims that her

parents allow her younger brother to date:

We [my sisters and I] couldn't date [and my parents] didn't like us hanging out with boys
even if they were just friends, things that my other friends did while I was growing
up…My brother has girlfriends and he is open about it…And it's ok.

Juhi connects the restrictions on dating for daughters with the need to (culturally) protect

the female body:

> My parents didn't want me to even be in situations where those things [i.e. getting
> pregnant] could happen so they just sort of put this huge cage around me…[But]
> what was so frustrating was my younger brother was going out. I was like, "He's
> going out with a girl who is like me so by that logic he is putting that girl in the
> very situation that you don't want me to be in." But since the onus lies on the
> girl, my parents were like, "Well he's a guy and he's not going to be taken
> advantage of."

Anjana talks about how she was thrown into the marriage market before her much older

brother, "They're not really pushing for him just yet…because they're waiting for him to

– he's in the middle of some job stuff – they just want him to be very established…"

Similarly, Rita married before her brother, who is a year-and-a-half older than her and

has also been in the job market longer than Rita. Though, Rita says that at least she did

not have the pressure of securing a high-paying job, like her brother, before marriage.

Rita speaks to the fact that Bengali women and men earn marriage value based on

different parameters. Rita says,

> I think with Bengalis it is always education for either side, but for women and
> men there is probably a difference; for women you could put down a PhD in art,
> and it will be respected, but for a guy a PhD in art would not be that highly
> respected…In my parent's mind, it was important to make sure that I was taken
> care of…It's important [that a woman knows] the cooking…If you are second-
> generation [woman, it's important that] you speak fluent Bengali…I have actually
> heard my dad say that it is the mother that usually instills the cultural values.

For a man, "being settled" (i.e. having a good job and showing potential to own a house) is important, and, for women, being educated and proficient in culture and domestic chores is salient. My research participants indicate that the ideal of reproducing cultural identity is gendered and sexualized and disproportionately placed on daughters. Rupa, Auditi, Juhi, Indira, Mazeda, Anjana, and Rita agree that virginity and heterosexual (endogamous) marriage are key demands of idealized South Asian-American womanhood (see Chapter 6). A daughter's rejection of an idealized notion of South Asian womanhood signifies cultural loss, negating her potential as capital (see Naber 2006, 88).

In review, through the women's oral histories, I establish a major site of cultural difference: collective conscious versus individual conscious (á la Durkheim). "South Asian culture" is perceived as family-oriented (collective consciousness) while "American culture" is self-oriented (individual consciousness). The women I interviewed firmly believe South Asian culture is morally superior to American culture. A cultural nationalist logic is deployed by my research participants (and their families) to represent the categories "South Asian" and "American" in oppositional terms. Within the theme of femininities and female sexuality, the binary translates to "good South Asian girl" and "bad Americanized girl." Such (cultural) binaries are often a result of the universalizing tendencies of hegemonic U.S. nationalism, the pressures of assimilation, and gendered racialization. Zerubavel (1997) points out that the constructions of our everyday existence from cultural, religion, history, geography, and social interactions are characterized by lines of (cognitive) demarcation. In this way, he draws our attention to the fact that there are differences among different cultures, social groups, and historical

periods (and also among individuals). Zerubavel refers to such groups as "thought communities." My research participants refer to South Asian culture positively and associate it with family values, and describe American culture with derogatory terms, often sexualized. Yet, as binary terms persist throughout the site of culture, I find that the binaries implicate the women in my fieldwork within a desire for Americanization that is predicated on "South Asianness" as the monstrous Other. By searching the transcripts, I discover that class privilege bolsters the myth of the model minority, erases South Asian-Americans who live on the outskirts of the myth, and begins to break down the oppositional positioning between South Asian and American. The class-as-culture narrative shifts the discourse of South Asianness and Americanness, centralizing the intersections of culture and modernity within the context of South Asian-American femininities. Through the women's stories, I show that Mohanty's (1988) "monolithic 'Third World Woman'" is a central actor within the South Asian/American cultural divide. Like the white gaze, the women in this study read culture as "culture=color=oppression" (Puar 1994b, 24), relating South Asianness to patriarchy and South Asian women to oppression and bound by familial ideologies.

The contradictory and ambivalent stories in this dissertation showcase the women in this study as "floating islands" and reveal the making of a selective identity which includes both individualism and the extended self: the women actively seek to be part of a desi community network, while at the same time they circumvent the Bengali/community/parental gaze. Naber (2006) suggests, "A binary cultural logic of 'us' and 'them'…[is] a discursive reaction to the complex dichotomies of hegemonic U.S. nationalism that at once pressure racialized immigrant to assimilate into a whitened

middle-class U.S. national identity while positioning them outside the boundaries of 'Americanness'" (89-90). In other words, through the discussion of culture, I show that my research participants are vested in expressing two dichotomous cultural (and racial-ethnic-national) categories because it allows them to engage with the process of immigration and assimilation, and within this discursive mechanism, "South Asianness" and "Americanness" co-exist depending on each other both symbiotically and as parasites. The South Asian cultural space is a well-crafted class-based sresponse to a specific cultural desire - the transformational myth of culture as a language of universality and using culture as a strategy of survival (Bhabha 1994, 178) - shaping the women's movements in various sites of interaction; producing and interpreting space; controlling the relationship between space and social power; and, regulating the subject-citizenship discourse (see Brady 2002, 83-110).

CHAPTER 5

Territories of the Self:
Language, Holidays, Religion, Food, and Clothing

In this chapter, I present five discursive sites – language, holidays, religion, cooking and eating (food), and clothing – that my research participants collectively identify as spaces of cathexis in which they produce and consume culture daily. I call the five sites "territories of the self." I choose the five dimensions of language, holidays, religion, food, and clothing because my research participants point to these sites in which they participate in daily to "make" culture. For example, Urmila says, "We speak Bengali in the house, I learned Bengali dances when I was little…I identify as my culture, the food that we eat, the language that we speak, it's all Bengali." Anita exclaims, "My cuisine, my language that I spoke at home, the Indian dress that I would wear, the different functions that I would go to outside of doing stuff with my high school friends."

The discussion is significant because my research participants suggest that through the five discursive sites of cultural production, they (re-) negotiate their identity performances continually and consistently. Through the five sites of cathexis or territories of the self – language, holidays, religion, food, and clothing – the women validate categories that define human visibility (i.e. speaking Bengali at the mall). The women in my fieldwork recount stories about producing several counter-identifications that rupture U.S. nationalism through the five sites of daily practice. In contrast, territories of the self are also spaces of cathexis for invisibility (i.e. speaking English without an accent or American accent). My research participants protect themselves

from the white gaze by adopting banal norms of public behavior through "appropriate" dress and gait. The women also use their education, class, and immigration status to avoid the white gaze. In other words, like the Punjabi-Mexican-American families of California (see Leonard 1997), my respondents demonstrate the flexibility of cultural identity, both in its grounding in a specific political economy and its responsiveness to situational factors that allow individuals and groups to make cultural choices. I address the acceptance of, manipulation of, and resistance to hegemonic power through five territories of the self – language, holidays, religion, food, and clothing – by an often invisible and marginalized group, second-generation South Asian-American women.

What to Speak?

Like most literature on U.S.-immigrants and their children, language is a site of assimilation for my research participants. The twenty-five women I interviewed state that English is the preferred mode of communication in both writing and orally. English is used more often than any other language in their daily lives (English, Bengali, Hindi, French, and Spanish are the five most often mentioned languages by the women when describing their linguistic skills), and my research participants perform cognitive functions in English, thinking in English first before verbalizing Bangla/Bengali or any other language. Jhumpa says, "I work in English. I speak to my brother in English. I speak to my friends in English. I speak to [my boyfriend] in English. English is pretty dominant in my life…" Anita voices, "Regularly, I speak English…English I was exposed to in school at a really young age and [it is] my first language…"

Yet, unlike Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) study on a variety of second-generation youth groups, language retention remains a highly emotive issue for most of the women I

interviewed. The women I interviewed are extremely comfortable speaking Bengali (even women who mention that they have a "bad American accent" when speaking Bengali) and many are proficient reading and writing in Bengali. Proficiency in the Bengali language allows the women to speak in Bengali with their immediate and extended family members and their parents' friends or "the elders." And it also allows the women to participate in cultural activities like singing *Rabindroshongeet* (Bengali-language national and folk songs written by Rabindranath Tagore, author and poet and winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature). The Bengali language is a symbol of a distinctive identity and a showcase of solidarity.

Jhumpa shares with me memories of learning to read and write Bangla as a child so that she could keep in touch with her family in India, "I would write letters to *meshos* and *mashis* (aunts and uncles) in India. It was very clear that it was very important to [my mom] that I knew how to speak, read, and write Bangla." Tonima's dad taught her to read and write Bengali when she was eight so that she could sing Tagore songs:

> When I was about eight, my singing teacher was like I should read them in Bengali because my parents would write the Bengali lyrics in English for me – like that was a disgrace. They were Tagore songs and they were meant to be read in Bengali.

Supriya recollects speaking Bengali in the home was a "big point,"

> Obviously, you know English and you speak English, and then there is a point to try and retain the language and we always just spoke Bengali in our home. Even if we're at dinner and my brother and I speak to each other in English, we will speak to our parents in Bengali…As a kid it [speaking Bengali] was a really big point.

Urmila says, "I always take the opportunity to talk [in Bengali] with anybody from like taxi drivers to vendors…" Finally, Ronica uses her ability to speak fluent Bengali to

make connections above and over achieving cultural experiences and strengthening

family ties. Ronica uses Bangla for community-building and advocacy work in America:

"I started doing translation for the Bengali Vendors Association. I can use this privilege

and linguistically navigate between these two cultures to give some benefit to somebody

else." From the women's words, language retention signals the desire to maintain

culture, strengthen family ties, and build community.

Next, the ability to speak Bengali is a sign of strategic resistance on the part of the

women. My research participants use language retention to create a symbolic space in

which to exclude the voyeur. In public places like a shopping mall, the women in my

study often speak to their siblings in Bangla, people they normally speak in English with,

to prevent the salesperson from understanding their discussion. Anita recalls speaking to

her younger sister in Bengali in public so that others cannot understand the content of

their conversation:

> We do [speak Bengali], especially when we are out somewhere and we don't want
> anyone else to know what we are talking about. But that doesn't always work,
> because every once in a while we will run into someone who knows Bengali.
> That's embarrassing.

Tonima says, "If I go out shopping with a Bengali friend and you want to say something

about clothing or someone else or whatever, we just talk in Bangla." Women also speak

to their Bengali friends in Bangla to be cute, funny, or to share a moment with them that

is only theirs as Bengali-Americans. Tonima spoke in Bengali with some of her college

friends as a joke, but it eventually allowed her to keep up with the language while being

away from home,

> My friend and I started this [speaking in Bengali] in [college]…Our accent got bad when we went [off to college] because we didn't speak it. We were like, "Hey, let's speak Bangla to each other." It was just a joke, but we actually started doing it.

Noopur uses basic Bengali (and Hindi) words with some of her South Asian friends because they share a familiar understanding about certain words and phrases. This enables Noopur to cultivate a particular kind of camaraderie that she is unable to produce with her non-South Asians friends: "I could start using phrases in Bengali (and Hindi), and people would get it and we could laugh about it. It was just our own little kind of connection." Noopur begins to inform the treatment of "code-switching" (Gumperz 1982) as a signaling device.[42] Code-switching reveals that social, interactional, discursive, and other information can be signaled through the alternation of speech varieties in their broadest sense (Gumperz 1982). In other words, code-switching introduces socio-cultural information in context.

Finally, assimilation theorists often juxtapose the English language in opposition to the "Other" language; one must choose a single language - English - and forgo the Other. The women make evident that language retention and the appearance of assimilation are not at odds as they randomly interchange English and Bengali words (and sometimes Hindi), referring to this as speaking "Benglish." Such "Mixed Code" (Agnihotri 1967, 89) is used with parents and fictive kin (friends of their parents whom they call "auntie and uncle"). Anita remembers:

> On a daily basis when I am around my family, we mix Hindi, Bengali, and English all of the time. We don't even realize we are doing it. Ever since we were little my sister and I would always mix the three languages together. We had our own family language.

Similarly, Nandita says, "Many times, I can't think of the right word, I'll just throw an

English word in there and my parents do that too, so it's not odd in any way…You might

hear half and half. Though, Mala believes that the production of "difference" is within

the confines of the production of "not so different." Mala, who is not fluent in Bengali,

comments on her own use of Mixed Code, "At home there are a lot of Bengali words that

we just use…so I intersperse them in my English, but it's so Americanized…that it might

even have an American accent to it." Alba (1992), in his study of ethnic indicators in the

Italian-American communities in New York, finds that ethnic identity is significantly

related to language (and to foods and festivals). He notes that attachment to language

does not necessarily mean that people are fluent in their "ethnic languages," but that they

at the very least use a few words or phrases as forms of "ethnic signaling" that can remind

others of a shared ethnic background (84). And Vogt (1954) assumes that code switching

is natural and common. He suggests that all languages experience language contact, and

that contact is an important element of language change. Alvarez-Cáccamo (1990)

argues code choice patterns reflect social structure, specifically class-structural positions

and changing interethnic relationships; signal group membership like ethnicity and

gender; correlate with group roles of leadership and subordination; constitute a socio-

functional style, a culturally specific mode of speaking; manage the speaker's ambiguous

or dual group identification; and, in general, invoke social identities in discourse.

In policing South Asian American identities (and femininities), family strategies

deploy a cultural nationalist logic that presents the categories "South Asian" and

"American" in oppositional terms. For example, the women report Tagore songs must be

read in Bengali and Bengali must be spoken in the homestead, and English outside the

home only. Collectively, while my research participants identify English as their primary

language and use English on a daily basis for oral and written communication, the

women complicate their ownership of English as their mother-tongue by using the

Bengali language as a vehicle to participate in cultural activities, to speak to their parents

and other family members, to bond with siblings and friends, to exclude people, and to

produce Mixed Code. However, the opposition is positioned within intersecting

coordinates of race, class, and nation, implicating my research participants and their

parents within a desire of Americanization. While the women whom I worked with

define their ethnic affiliation as non-white, they also experience whiteness. In discourse,

this complex identity is indexed by shifting uses of nonstandard Bengali and English.

Issues of race, ethnicity, and class and domination are prominent here in the use of

language and identity among my respondents (see Vogt 1954; see Gumperz 1982; see

Alvarez-Cáccamo 1990). The women in this study use language to account for and give

meaning to everyday life (Jones 2001). In similar fashion to Jones (2001), by focusing

on language, I attend to the diverse meanings given to identities. I show how the women

use language to tease out the variations in their identities as they move from one situation

to another (see Jones 2001, 109-110). Attending to my respondents' use of language

provides a view of identity as dynamic. Even within the boundaries of hegemony, the

women I interviewed step over the edge of current assimilation and identity models.

What to Celebrate?

Thanksgiving and Christmas are redundantly popular holidays celebrated among

my research participants, but much like language, the ways in which women celebrate the

holidays are a product of flexible and fluid notions of identity along with an appreciation

of one's own culture and a strategic comprehension of what it means to be American or

the meaning of "whiteness." As a group, the women voice that Thanksgiving and

Christmas are salient celebrations because they are U.S. government-sanctioned holidays

which include the longest pre-set time-off or vacation-time in the women's professional

settings (i.e. job or school). Visiting family during *Eid* (a Muslim holiday), *Durga Puja*

(one of the largest Hindu celebrations), or other "South Asian" holidays require formally

petitioning for additional time-off. Supriya says,

> We do celebrate the Hindu celebrations [but] given that we [are] in this western culture,
> the western holidays take more precedence… Those are official holidays and you get to
> travel. If you want to go home for Durga Puja, I have to take a day off."

In addition to receiving vacation time from work and/or study, the women state that

Thanksgiving and Christmas are their favorite holidays because there is an overwhelming

feeling of "joy and warmth" over the entire nation. Supriya says, "I like Thanksgiving a

lot. We just have a huge Thanksgiving dinner of 40 people. We just eat and chat…"

Priyanka says, "My most favorite holiday as Christmas because it is festive for a whole

month and that particular week everyone is off and people are getting together." As

Americans, the women express that they are emotionally vested in Thanksgiving and

Christmas.

Yet, my research participants resist being consumed by the white pole through the

ways in which they choose to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas.[43] A woman's

family may have the traditional turkey and pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving accompanied

by a menu of commonplace Bengali foods, like in Supriya's home, "[We] make three

pumpkin pies…We have turkey, stuffing, and mashed potatoes and gravy…The other

people bring more Indian stuff for the people that want to eat that." For Supriya,

celebrating Thanksgiving is about being with her Bengali community: "[We spend

Thanksgiving with] the Bengali weekenders. Our Thanksgiving is not with the non-

Bengalis…" Rani says, "I know in Calcutta for puja everybody gets new clothes. We

don't do all that here. We do that for Christmas." Priyanka states that her favorite

holiday is Christmas. Like Supriya, Priyanka celebrates major American holidays with

the Bengali community and an atypical dinner,

> We always go over to one of my mom's friend who hosts a Christmas party every
> year; it is just tradition. Practically the entire community goes to her house. We
> all dress up in new clothes. My mom usually wears a sari and I wear whatever
> new clothes I got for Christmas, which is usually regular American clothing…It's
> not the typical American Christmas dinner with turkey. It can be anything; it can
> be Thai, Bengali, or Chinese food, but it is not the typical meal…

One of my research participants, Padmini, generally detests the idea of spending holidays

with family. Lying down on her bed due to severe chronic back pain, Padmini solemnly

says, "I think a lot of time holidays are about spending time with people who are family

period and it is not so much that you want to be with them." Still, through our

conversation, Padmini recounts a fond memory of celebrating Christmas with her in-

laws:

> For Christmas - that's like a big deal somehow with my in-laws [who are staunch
> Hindus] - we go to [my husband's] mashi's house…Nobody wears a sari or
> anything. Pretty much people wear American clothes, but then we eat Indian
> food. They open a lot of presents…They spend the whole night talking and they
> get hammered. Then they stay over. The next morning they eat breakfast and
> then go home. It is *sweet*.

Annual commemorations of Thanksgiving and Christmas in such alternative ways – i.e.

wearing a sari or having Bengali dishes on the holiday dinner table – creates a

commemorative narrative about events that are detached from their larger historical

context (ahistorical). The dissociation of Thanksgiving and Christmas from their perceived religious and historical relevance allow my research participants (and their families) flexibility in delineating the narrative boundaries to accentuate a desired moral lesson and leave out those developments that might detract from it (see Y. Zerubavel, 1995).

I learn then that Thanksgiving and Christmas are important holidays in the women's lives because they feel connected to the holidays through the theme of family, community, and social solidarity, which is embedded in both the contradictory discourses of U.S. nationalism and South Asian nationalism. Together, my research participants respond to the celebrations of "American" or "Western" holidays with insistent and imperious re-negotiations of traditional images. The persisting themes in my research participants' lives remain problematizing the East/West divide and American Orientalism by underscoring multiple and contradictory alliances, and articulating a complex process in which the categories "South Asian" and "American" are mutually constitutive and exist both as opposites and in unison. Meaning, in celebrating the holidays, my respondents engage in a process of "cultural re-authenticity" (see Naber 2006, 88).

Whom to Pray to?

An examination of religion and belief systems has helped me to compile information detailing practices of beliefs among my research participants. Most women in the study adamantly voice that they do not have sufficient knowledge about Hindu scriptures or Islamic ideologies - the two most mentioned religious affiliations in this study - to confidently categorize themselves as "religious" or actively participating

Hindus or Muslims. Rather, the women consider themselves to be "spiritual." I have

found that while there is a proliferation of popularized versions of spirituality, these are

often not the products of the religious tenants the women have been born into. Instead,

the beliefs of the women I interviewed are often derivatives of challenging practices

dictated by religious doctrines.

Sujata talks about the personal and private nature of religion and she describes her

religious affiliation by de-emphasizing strict, devout practices:

> Religion is a very personal thing to me. I don't know a lot about the Hindu
> religion and I am not comfortable saying that I am a religious person, but I follow
> a certain a belief…We didn't have certain [mantras] that we memorized…You
> prayed in your own personal way.

My research participants adopt the portions of religious tenants that make sense to them

and are easily explainable, helping them to build their own sense of spirituality in

personally meaningful ways. The women reject segments that they are unable to make

sense of or have not received adequate explanations for. Nadia, born into a Muslim

household, comments on the triviality of Muslim tenants, like the prohibition of eating

pork. She values instead being a good person who is tolerant of others and is

knowledgeable about different faiths:

> I wouldn't say that I am religious, but I am spiritual. I have read the Bhagwat
> Gita, the Bible, and texts on Buddhism…I consider myself someone who is into
> all the religions. I almost believe in a big spirit that goes through everything, and
> that way I believe in God, not necessarily through the Jesus-Muhammad where
> everybody else is going to hell except for me…I wouldn't even know how to raise
> my child if I were to raise them Muslim…I don't care if I eat pork…It is not a big
> deal for me.

Laila retains some of the central principles of Islam without being a "practicing" Muslim:

I believe most of the religion, but I don't really practice. I [do] think about it almost every day because I do feel like it is part of my identity to be Muslim - I don't eat pork and it affects the reasons that I'm a bit more of a conservative dresser. So there are things that I do follow that play into my life every day…

Ronica follows in Laila's footsteps:

I do consider myself Hindu and I do meditate and pray, though not very often. I don't consider myself very devout, but it is a part of my life and I am into being a part of my life. It is also something that I feel conflicted about because of the roles of Hindus in India and the way that they treat Muslims and other religious minorities. I like the mythology behind it…I feel like I have built my life around doing things that are good and right in the world, but I am not willing to have them codified by a doctrine.

Two additional research participants, Padmini and Rani, do not "practice" Hinduism either, yet, both women are strongly attached to a small mobile temple and a picture of the goddess Durga, respectively, as ways to build their spirituality. Padmini does not consider herself to be a devout Hindu:

I don't think that I am religious in that I don't pray everyday, and in fact, I don't pray at all that much…I don't say any mantras. I just sort of have a conversation with God. My husband…he just does everything. I asked him one day, "The mantra that you are reading, do you know what it means?" [He said,] "I used to know what it meant. I forgot." He considers that he is a very pious and righteous person. It became clear to me [then] that I am not into the rituals…

As I was recording and listening to Padmini's words, I could not help but notice the miniature golden temple, an open box of *agar bathi* or incense sticks, and matches. The temple was visible from where I was sitting in her bedroom during the day of our interview. The smoke and jasmine aroma of the incense was still lingering from what I assumed were remnants of Padmini's morning prayers or her "conversation with God." Rani says, "Religion does play a part in my life but more a spiritual type…Whenever I move into a new place, I put out my little Durga picture." Though, she intensely frowns,

forcing her eyebrows to come closer together, while she recounts a story of her original

picture of Durga:

> It broke. It was a big one too. It was nice. It was a beautiful face and I came
> back one day and it was shattered on the floor. I was like, "Oh my God, is this a
> bad omen?" It was after I had started dating him.

Rani's Durga broke after she started dating her Christian (Malayalam) fiancée, a taboo in

her Brahmin upbringing.

Almost unambivalently, I find that the women are keen on constructing religious

categories in a cultural context that welcomes both the traditions themselves while also

alien to the traditions – i.e. praying to Durga without reading mantras like Padmini or

marrying a Christian while maintaining a Brahmin identity like Rani. The women work

hard to de-align themselves from a religious bracket, choosing instead a language of

spirituality - read as progressive and liberal or open to all belief systems - to explain their

religious practices and beliefs. The women show that how they choose to remember,

"fit," and sustain the continuity of religious doctrine is shaped by the way they think

about their life trajectory. Hankiss (1981) suggests that everyone builds his or her own

theory about the history and course of his or her life by a coherent, explanatory principle

and to incorporate them within a historical unit. Hence, the women equate religion with

spirituality in order to explain and insert contradictory behaviors into a coherent life

schema.

Next, like the use of the Bengali language, the women use the space of religion as

a platform to meet and maintain social, cultural, and community-building needs.

Participating in social and cultural aspects of religion, like attending Durga Pujas or Eid

parties, are consequential. Tina, Rita, and Sera express the social and cultural aspects of

"practicing" religion. Tina states,

> In terms of upbringing, it was limited to Durga Puja, which happened once a year
> in our community - ninety percent of how my friends were raised. It was just a
> social kind of event. Having said that, I think I have always been more spiritual
> than religious.

Rita explains that her how parents use Durga Puja as a medium to set-up potential

marriages among the second-generation:

> We will go to Durja Puja and we'll see Bengali family friends. My mom will ask
> if they know anyone, so that's kind of how it happens with Bengalis...There are
> always certain people in the [community] that are known as matchmakers.

Sera describes her religious practices in terms of dressing-up in "nice clothes" (nice

clothes means new fancy shalwar kameezes) and getting together with the community:

> We go house-hopping… it [is] nice…I [usually come] home [from college], and
> my mom [has] clothes made from India, so I just borrow one of those…She
> makes typical party dishes like *piash* [rice pudding]…and it's open door,
> everyone just comes and goes…

Fundamental to the women's religious beliefs is familial-type relationships or

collectivities. Religion provides the women with social integration and social solidarity.

Collectively, my research participants do not use their religious affiliations to practice

religion. Rather, religion is a portal in which to build and keep ties to the Bengali

community. Puar (1994b) call this "symbolic ethnicity" (34).

The women in my fieldwork choose which segments of religious doctrine they

will hold on to and which ones they will amputate. The women show that religion is a

realm in which ontologies of the self are invented and re-invented either simultaneously

or at different points in time to serve diverse personal and community agendas (see Y.

Zerubavel 1995).   For example, by identifying as a "spiritual" Muslim instead of a

"practicing" Muslim, Nadia can keep fast during Ramadan and eat pork in college dining halls without challenging her sense of self and morality. Similarly, Padmini can pray to Durga without reading mantras and Rani can marry a Christian while maintaining a Brahmin identity. Gans' (1979) notion of symbolic ethnicity provides further insight into some of the identity processes taking place in the women's experiences. Gans (1979) writes,

> [Symbolic ethnicity] is characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior"
> (9).

Gans would argue then that the religious practices described here have been reinvented in the American context and linked to American ideals. Thus, what is called ethnicization is in fact a process of Americanization. Then, through spiritual discourse and selective decapitation of religious rites and rituals, the women whom I interviewed disown their religions (pressure of assimilation and racialization within the context of immigration) while simultaneously solidifying their social ties to the Bengali community (supporting an imagined "real" South Asian culture). The binary myth between South Asian and American simply break down to a decisive cultural force consistently and continually (see Y. Zerubavel 1995). The women's expressions of discontinuity (see Zerubavel 1991, 7) begin to hint at what I uncover below in my respondents' food preparation - a selective assimilationist strategy that reproduces the sexual politics of colonial discourse in terms of modern (American woman)/backward (South Asian/Orientalist woman) fantasy (see Naber 2006, 107).

<u>What to Cook and Eat?</u>

The practice of cooking varies widely for my research participants. Some women do all of the cooking, some share the cooking equally with their partners, and some do not cook at all. Sujata had a large cheese and fruit platter designed on her coffee table to share with me throughout the interview. And eat we did! I was indeed grateful. Tina's husband prepared *iftar* to share with me and a very pregnant Tina. After Tina's husband broke his day-long fast, he insisted that I have a cup of tea and chocolate and hazelnut-filled pirouettes. A steamy, sweet, and creamy concoction I was grateful to warm my body with on a chilly November evening. It was a deliciously soothing end to a very long but enjoyable day with Tina. Anjana had no food to offer me in her tiny, mostly bare-walled bedroom. As a doctoral candidate in New York, she shared a small apartment and kitchen with a roommate. Her roommate's bedroom was in fact part of the kitchen. Anjana was uncomfortable making herself dinner, let alone preparing and sharing a home-cooked meal with me. Three and a half hours into our interview, we decided that we were both in dire need of sugar, caffeine, and carbohydrates; we headed towards the corner Dunkin Donuts to attend to our sleep deprivation and dropping sugar levels. Despite displaying a variety of cooking practices, the women in this study show a consistent trend: while for women, especially, food is a powerful medium and cooking, historically, is an essential part of women's reproductive labor, identity, and power (Counihan 2004, 79), cuisine is one realm where negotiations of different constructions of whiteness are less important for my research participants, including dichotomies of male/female, production/reproduction, public/private, and dominance/subordination. My

research respondents' experiences both speak to and challenge the historical role of food production, reproduction, and gender.

Padmini, Rita, and Juhi articulate the perceived relationship between cooking and being a good wife in racialized terms. Padmini coldly says:

> Bengali food is so labor intensive. It's from hell. It just seems like American people cook in twenty minutes. Life is easier. It seems to me, being Indian imbues a domestic life with a lot more pressure on women.

Padmini detests preparing meals altogether:

> I suppose in some weird way my in-laws just hope that one day I am going to pick up that bottle of mustard oil and start cooking. [But] as I got married, I realized that I am not traditional. I am not village India that lives in Bengal…

Rita laughs as she talks about a matrimonial advertisement her parents wrote for her (marriages among educated South Asians are sometimes arranged through matrimonial advertisements in South Asian-American newspapers like *Indian Abroad*):

> [For] hobbies, my dad [wrote,] "reading, writing, and loves to cook." I do love to cook, but not the way they are putting it down. I was so insulted by that… I know with my parents the cooking wasn't really a big deal to them, but a lot of Indian or Bengali [parents] that [write ads] for women, it's [cooking] important. That's why my parents probably put it in that profile.

Juhi communicates in an agitated voice, "My mom is trying to get me to [cook] lately. I think in her attempt to make me the perfect wife."

Auditi comments on the historical relationship between women and food and preparation, and how her first date ruptures the boundary between men and food and cooking. Auditi shares a romantic memory with me about her first date with her now husband, "He cooked me dinner, which for me was a big thing…It was really a nice dinner. It wasn't anything totally fancy, but it was really nicely laid out, wine and everything…" Auditi not only illustrate her appreciation for the adeptness required in the

formation of a meal, but she also points to the gender boundaries infused in food and

cooking, "A man cooking dinner…That was big thing that set him apart." The women

reject the essentionalized notion of food = women = family (see Counihan 2004).

Auditi's husband continues to do the bulk of the cooking in their family:

> I come home and do some chores, like cleaning or whatever, I do a little bit of
> reading, and I watch the news. I make dinner or more likely [he] comes home and
> makes dinner. He's the cook in the family. I don't really do much of the cooking.

Supriya follows in Auditi's footsteps. Supriya's busy work schedule and her

cosmopolitan, single, New York City lifestyle, prevents her from frequently visiting the

kitchen:

> I don't really cook that much because when I do go home, it is eight or so. I am
> hungry then and I don't have the patience to make something and wait another
> half hour to eat it…I honestly can't remember when I turned on my stove because
> I am okay with salad.

Supriya skillfully leaves the "real" cooking to her boyfriend, "[My boyfriend] is a more

adventurous cook than I am. He will make fancy pork chops and salmon with a coating

that he made." Rani too steps away from using food as an essential part of her labor,

identity, and power:

> "I can't cook." That was always my staple answer, but [my fiancée] cooks. So
> when we got together, he was cooking a lot for me. He took a cooking class. He
> made me Thai chicken, he made me shrimp, [and] he made me lobster. It was
> amazing.

Rani learned the art of maneuvering through a kitchen from her fiancée. Rani says, "He

kind of introduced me into cooking and I realized it is kind of cool. He made me want to

cook for him because he was cooking for me all the time." Auditi learned to craft

delectable dishes from her husband.

> I actually learned to cook more from [my husband]. He was always cooking and I
> was more likely to be in the kitchen with him and see him cooking…I learned the

appreciation for cooking or to be comfortable with cooking and with the actual physical putting together of a meal.

My research participants not only resist the food = women = family equation, but they also go over and beyond gender boundaries in the kitchen. The women leave the daily cooking to the men in their lives, and they also learned to cook from their partners, cooking only on special occasions, like a spouse's birthday.

The women who do cook prefer to prepare "one-pot" items that do not require abundant preparation. All the women whom I interviewed either have full-time jobs or are full-time students or work full-time and attend school part-time. Due to time constraints coupled with the one-pot rule, my research participants rarely indulge in cooking "desi" or *deshi* (in Bengali, "desi" is pronounced "deshi") dishes. Rekha simply says,

> I like to cook things that are self-contained. I don't like too many pots and pans. The reason I don't cook Indian food is not because I don't want to. It is just very detail oriented. You have to grind the spice and I don't really have time frankly.

Sujata candidly expresses,

> I am all about one-bowl meals. Things have to be eaten in one bowl and cooked in one pot. I make stir fries, pastas, soups, and all kinds of sandwiches…Every now and then I'll make Indian food just really randomly out of nowhere.

Acquiring a worldly and cosmopolitan city lifestyle is yet another reason women choose not to often entertain desi food in their kitchens and on their dining tables. Auditi illustrates her diverse and worldly palette:

> I do love Indian food or South Asian food in general [but] I don't necessarily cook or eat Indian food at home. [My husband] loves South Asian food also. Sometimes we will go out for Indian, but most of the time it is more open. I guess that's where the New York thing comes in. I really like being very open - Thai, Ethiopian, and trying an amalgam of things. I try to be really diverse [and] not specifically desi at all. I try to have more of a worldly experience.

Juhi has access to numerous ethnic restaurants within walking distance from her

apartment:

> A couple of blocks over there is this great Afghani place [and] they have amazing kabobs and that's like one of my favorite, a hole-in-the-wall place…There are some Indian restaurants that I really like here, some Japanese…Basically, I have a favorite in every ethnic category because that's easy to do that here.

My research participants' eating habits generally underscore food consumption as

a site of perceived assimilation. The women's daily diets consist of food items that are

considered "standard American foods" like pastas, salads, soups, and sandwiches.

Supriya characterizes a salad fetish:

> It is funny because when I do go to India, they are like, "What do you eat?" "I eat salad." An Indian's perception of salad is like three slices of tomato and three slices of cucumber. I have lots of lettuce [and] lots of all the vegetables that I like. That's usually what I have for dinner.

Noopur's "typical" diet is bagels, sandwiches, and pastas:

> If I eat breakfast, [it's] bagels and yogurt…Lunch, I typically prefer a sandwich and soup, like a turkey sandwich…Dinner, I like probably more so pastas [or] maybe like a turkey burger, stuff like that. I guess typical kind of stuff.

Unanimously, out-of-the-ordinary breakfast items include IHOP-like dishes such as

pancakes, waffles, and ornate omelets. Lunch and dinner treats encompass "restaurant

food" of any kind with complex desserts and wines. Noopur's special foodstuff includes

omelets for breakfast with Thai food from a nearby restaurant for dinner:

> Like some sort of really good omelet with like potatoes or something [for breakfast]. And then for dinner, I'd probably have to go with Thai and say there's this basil chicken dish with rice and probably a glass of wine would be great.

And because the women in this study rarely create meals in their home, hot, home-

cooked foods of any kind are also welcome and highly appreciated. Supriya fantasize

about homemade spaghetti and *kheer* (rice pudding):

> I eat in restaurants so much that it isn't a treat. Home cooking of any type is a treat for me…Homemade apple pie or homemade kheer… Homemade spaghetti is also a treat… Someone providing me hot food is a treat…

Juhi dreams about *biryani* (baked rice with lamb or mutton): "When I go home, my mom will cook biryani, *polau* [baked rice flavored with saffron], [and] she will make all those kind of foods."

All my research participants have fast-paced busy lifestyles regardless of how often they cook. For none of the women is cooking a priority. Many eat at restaurants or get take-out, some leave food and food preparation to their partners, and others prepare and eat very simple food items like sandwiches and salads. Women who choose to cook prepare easy-to-make and easy-to-clean one-pot items. None of the women in my study consider food and cooking to be an essential part of their identity as women. They not only reject a middle-class feminized positionality, but they also jettison the notion of an imagined South Asian woman.

The quality of women's diets along with the content of meals, eating habits, and meanings of consumption change as they move out of their parents' homes. Leaving the "nest" require my research participants to think about consumption in different ways. Lack of easy and frequent access to the women's mothers' cooking, hectic work schedules, personal disposable incomes, and cosmopolitan lifestyles result in the loss of desire to cook and eat deshi food. That is, home-cooked Bengali foods are waning because women do not have the time or the urgency to make them like their mothers. Cooking "self-contained" items and frequenting restaurants, sometimes choosing "traditional" cuisine and at other times reaching far more widely, is part of "being on my own" scenario. When "cravings" hit, desi restaurants, particularly in New York City,

Chicago, and San Francisco, are easy to access. The food-centered experiences

additionally reveal that the increasing entry of women in the workforce have produced

challenges to cooking in traditional ways. Thus, we see more men cooking in this study

and influencing they ways in which women cook. In ending, as foodways change, so

does the culture.

What to Wear?

Appearance and sexual imagery is often a hallmark of assimilation (see Puar

1994a). Just as women may dress in "Western" clothes to shop at Stop N' Shop, a

grocery store chain in New Jersey, to avoid exclusion, my research respondents may also

choose to wear a shalwar kameez while purchasing desi groceries at *Bharat Bazaar* in

Sunnyvale, CA for inclusion. In this study, I find that my research participants "mix and

match" clothing (i.e. wearing jeans with a *kurta* or long tunic), juxtaposing inclusionary

and exclusionary processes simultaneously. Ritzer (1992) notes that fashion can be a part

of objective culture allowing individuals to come into conformity with norms of a group.

At the same time, fashion can express individuality, because an individual may choose to

express some difference from norms. Much like celebrating holidays, the ways in which

the women dress are a product of flexible and fluid notions of identity.

The women whom I interviewed on a day-to-day basis wear "American" clothing

whether it is "standard American" clothing like Priyanka's, "I wear anything from tube

tops to turtle-neck sweater. My sense of style is classic clean-cut looking clothing which

is very feminine. I love wearing heels and jewelry," and, Nadia's,

> I wear a lot of black and I love heels…I love blazers and I love jeans. I really like
> classy sexy, but not trashy….My favorite outfit is a white tank top with stilettos
> and jeans with hoop earrings. I like dangly, big chandelier earrings…and little

black cocktail dresses. A little like Audrey Hepburn, but I like to be a little risqué with accessories and color. It is a classic look with an edge to it.

Or, "alternative American" clothing like Ronica who is unable to see her sister's children because of her off-the-cuff clothing style:

I'm not allowed to see her kids is, even though I'll cover my tattoos and take out a septum piercing, which is from India in the first place…We had this conversation once where I had blue hair and she basically said that she didn't want her kids to talk to the homeless people on the street in Boston and that I looked like them.

South Asian clothing such as saris or shalwar kameezes are reserved for special religious-cultural events (i.e. Durga Puja or Eid) and regular small-scale weekend social gatherings like dinner at a parent's friend's home (mashi and mesho or auntie and uncle's home). Rani, comfortable in khakis and a black shirt for our interview on her faded cream-colored couch, pulls together what she would wear at various events:

If there was a party at one of our American [meaning white] friends' houses, I would wear a dress or skirt. If it is at an Indian [meaning Hindu-Bengali] person's house, I might wear a shalwar kameez. If [we] are going to the *mondir* [temple]**…**I might wear a sari or a shalwar...

Anita, attired in khakis and a semi-form-fitting top for our time together on a weekend in her apartment, shares the importance of wearing "appropriate" clothing in various settings (American versus desi), "If I was going out [at night], I would probably wear black pants and a kind of a hoochie top...If I was going to an Indian wedding, obviously, Indian clothes."[44] The spatial partitions here clearly divide more than just space. Wearing different types of clothes helps the women to substantiate the mental distinction between "desi" and "American," business and casual, formal and informal, ordinary and festive (see Zerubavel 1991, 7). Clothing is a wonderful example of how mental distinctions are concretized.

In this study, as a function of how often women wear certain items of clothing, including the frequency in which the women have access to particular social spaces, they partition their closets into separate spheres to help them further compartmentalize their daily activities into separate clusters. Meaning, differentiation of space reinforces mental differentiations (Zerubavel 1991, 7). Women house "ethnic" or desi clothing in the remote parts of their closet, keeping them separate from their daily "American" wear, or they leave most of their desi clothes at their parents' homes. Ronica imparts,

> Underwear and socks in one drawer…I fold most things like pants and put them in one place, and skirts probably in a similar place, and tops in another place. My Indian clothes will have a separate place.

Auditi takes a moment to mentally visualize her closet. She says,

> I do have a whole other side of my closet where I have my Indian clothes - my shalwars, my *lehengas* [a long skirt with a short blouse and a long piece of loose material draped over the chest], and then also dresses. And then my off-season pants and skirts. Things I don't wear very often.

But, due to the value placed on ethnicity in today's fashion industry, some pieces of clothing that reside in the dark, hidden side of the closet easily migrate to the popular, visible side.

The relationship between fashion and ethnicity has enabled my research participants to feel comfortable and "chic" adding a South Asian-specific item to their "American" outfits almost on a daily basis like a Sikh or gold bracelet. Like some of Maira's women respondents who sport a nose ring and dupatta with slinky club wear, Tina parts her lips, slightly smiling, as she expresses with pride, "I like to consider [my style] "ethnic chic." I like kurtas with jeans or black pants and heels…I wear Indian

jewelry with almost anything." Auditi, a woman who immediately struck me as humble, poised, and sophisticated, remarks,

> [My sense of style is] kind of a mish-mash of New York/New England with a hint of desi thrown in. I tend to dress really more or less conservative mainstream. I don't wear a lot of color and gold jewelry. [But], I like to throw in something that has a fabric or something that has a desi influence.

Tina and Auditi offer how ethnicity figures in their styles of dressing. In part, it is a priority to assert their cultural identities (encompassing race and ethnicity) in response to visibility and exclusion, but they equally show identification with American culture (invisibility and inclusion). The "modernization" of shalwar kameezes and the popularization of indigenous clothing in the U.S. is an extension of ethnic fashion. Noopur shares with me a memory of wearing a "fusiony" shalwar kameez at an office party:

> Typically, [I wear desi outfits at] weddings [and] Durga Pujas…[But] I actually wore an Indian outfit to our [office] holiday party last year…Well, it was an outfit that I had designed, so it was pretty like fusiony. [It] wasn't your typical like bright pink, gaudy outfit, but it was like black and gray and sleeveless and it was almost just a two-piece outfit you see these days in [any department store].

The popularity of "ethnic" fashion not only allows my research participants to bring certain items, such as a *dupatta* or scarf, to more used portions of their closets, wardrobes, and drawers, but it also permits them to be entirely attired in South Asian clothing outside of South Asian-specific events.

Noopur's discussion around "fusiony" clothing at her office holiday part, lead me to contemplate what does it mean when I wear a *couture punjabi* (short tunic) purchased from Bombay with a pair of *juicy couture* jeans (especially to present a paper on second-generation South Asian-American identities at a conference on Cultural Studies and

Education at Columbia University (2005))? My pull towards South Asian clothing –

partially a function of ontological security and in part due to my economic ability to

participate in "boutique multiculturalism" – lured me to the racks at a local mall in

Freehold, NJ to purchase desi-inspired garments in the summer of 2004 (and two years

later, in 2006, living in CA, I continue to see desi kurtas to be a fashion staple in most

Californian women's closets). The "hybrid" fashion consumption tales attempt to

reconfigure patriarchy, but they also solidify capitalism.[45] Hence, and as a social

scientist, I cannot help but theoretically problematize my purchases of South-Asian

inspired long kurtas and short cotton punjabis from *Express* and *Arden B.*

  In an attempt to produce "desi" culture in America, I purchase kurtas and

kameezes from the mall. In identifying as a South Asian – a core identity marker for me

– I believe my participation in the production of desi culture to be authentic. And my

disdain at non-South Asians, especially whites, purchasing such items, along with Gwen

Stefani and Madonna's appropriation of the bindi, also indicate that I believe my brown

body to be an authentic site of cultural (re)-production. However, my production of

"authentic" culture indeed takes places within hegemonic choices; I am able to produce

culture because there is an availability of consumption of culture within whiteness.

Retailers like *Express* produce culture for me to consume which in turn helps me to (re-)

produce. The process in its entirety takes place in white capitalist hegemonic spaces.

The "local embeddedness of retailing is accompanied by a more global embeddedness in

production linkages that have been facilitated by a longer-standing social relations"

(Raghuram 2003, 68). The hegemonic frame includes the global popularity of hybrid-

ethnic fashions and shalwar kameezes, which allows me to express "my (desi) culture" without being marked as the Other.

The acts of purchasing and exhibiting culture in sites that do not require me to manipulate the white gaze speak to class formations, dictating my confident reconfiguring of ethnicity. Globalization is predominantly theorized in terms of social openness and social fluidity, a small social stratus of "cosmocrats" lives the reality of hypermobility (Shamir 2005. 188). Many South Asian women who belong to the taxi-driver communities in New York City, for example, find it arduous to participate in such consumption and production processes. Most women are bound to clothing that were brought with them from the "homeland" years ago – now dated in any fashion context – or they are required to sew garments (Raghuram 2003, 73) when they feel the desire to produce culture. Such U.S.-based model-minority class and citizenship privileges manifest into racialized gender constructions (in generational contexts): the ugly, working-class South Asian women and the chic, exotic, South Asian woman or *Masala-it is* (Dasgupta 1993). According to Puar (1994b), "The stereotype of the dirty, ugly South Asian woman thus becomes exoticized through middle-class consumption" (37).

The point here is that the differential ability to move in space – and even more so to have access to opportunity for movement – is a major stratifying force in the global social hierarchy (see Shamir 2005, 200). Ronica says,

> The privilege to be able to come and go from India is a really big deal...That's very much a product of living in the global south and having these economic realities…There is a big difference between somebody and me who doesn't have an American passport in terms of what my privilege is in the world…Later migrations don't have that same privilege.

My facility, along with the women of this study, to purchase South Asian-inspired

clothing items from upscale department stores like *Marshall Field's* in Chicago or

Nordstroms and to periodically travel to South Asia – historically the privilege of white

male bodies – to purchase designer items from exclusive boutiques addresses class.

Here, my movement in and out of spaces via citizenship and class-based resources imply

that I am a diasporic traveling body and my subjectivity is a postmodern one where

capitalism, space, and identity collide. My economic agency is far more complex than

appears in the economics literature, and forms of consumption not only reflect my status,

but also means of gaining and negotiating status across social hierarchies (Bourdieu

1984) (see also Shamir 2005, 199). Though, as I have acknowledged, the structures and

accompanying privileges that grant me such a title also undermine it as I make choices

within the hegemony of the dominant space. Surely, then, as I challenge the voyeur on

several fronts, especially in the production of culture, I am also re-casting whiteness

through capitalism and class privilege. Here, I underscore a central theme in the study:

the categories "South Asian" and "American" are mutually constitutive and exist both as

opposites and in unison.

In closing the discussion on clothing, fashion is dynamic and has an historical

dimension to it, ranging from acceptance of a fashion trend to following some deviation

from the trend to change in fashion to abandonment of the original norm, and a new norm

becoming established (Ritzer 1992). The clothing practices of the second-generation or

"diasporic youth" – the juxtaposition of kurtas with jeans for example – not only

produces a situated reading of "diaspora" as a localized cultural form (Mani 2003, 117),

but it also shows that crossing lines that mark off perceived insular chunks of space serve

to articulate passage through mental partitions (Zerubavel 1991, 7). The "diaspora" is indeed a critical point of inquiry in globalizations studies. Noopur's "fusiony" fashion sense, Tina's "ethnic chic" clothing style, and Auditi's need to put a little "desi kick" into her appearance hint that the conceptualization of diaspora includes privileging hybridity, and the notion of hybridity offers a sense of home along with a call of authenticity specifically for the second-generation (see Puar 1994b, 103).

But, such approaches toward articulating a South Asian diaspora effaces the the significance of certain pieces of clothing and even histories behind why particular ingredients are used in cooking (see Narayan 1997, 159-188), obliterating the fact that the two "origins" of the hybrid are by no means equal. Naber (2006) argues that hybridity "fails to account for the ways that essentialist categories, while constructed and fictive, operate to support hierarchies of privilege and domination and power and control" (108). Raghuram (2003) comments on the commodification process involved in producing authenticity,

> Along with the status value, there is also a symbolic value to the clothes they wear, which arises out of the meaning-making processes formed within reference systems bounded by class differences but also racialized and gendered differences. (76)

That is, "diasporic dress" rests not only on hegemonic notions of capital, but it also generates out of a history of clothing practices that denote both colonial and nationalist attempts to represent the nation (Mani 2003, 121).

Yet, like Puar, I argue that hybridity serves as a powerful and positive tool for the second-generation. The women whom I worked with counter gendered and racialized notions of the body. My research participants disrupt the tradition-modernity binary, problematizing "the paradigmatic constructions of the referent geopolitical entities"

(Raghuram 2003, 69-70). The discussion on fashion shows that through "mixing and matching," women subvert the stereotypical South Asian woman, altering the meanings of the clothes they buy and wear (see Raghuram 2003). The women I interviewed challenge stereotypical representation of the clothes they wear by re-articulating an entirely different presence of a South Asian woman. The women collectively counter celebrations of essentialist thinking of ethnicity by focusing on the "hybrid" (see Bhabha 1990; Gilroy 1995) and rupture the oppositional discourse behind tradition and modernity.

Clothing choices among second-generation South Asian-American women then are a distinctly political act that both disturb the assumed coherence between categories of race, nation, and culture and reaffirm essentialized identities (Mani 2003). The clothing practices presented here are peculiarly cosmopolitan and refer to middle- to upper-middle class women who possess cultural capital and participate in bourgeois consumption patterns. The terms of participation within clothing practices are, furthermore, situated in the contingent contextuality of the spaces and places in which the women are participating. Raghuram (2003) writes, "…wearing clothing requires a sensitivity not simply to ethnicity, or to class and gender, but also to spatially situated racialized codes" (79). The women recognize the importance of clothes to a self-definition of South Asian, American, and South Asian-American (see Jones 2001, 99). Simmel (1950) notes that fashion provides,

The best arena for people who lack autonomy and who need support, yet whose self-awareness nevertheless requires that they be recognized as distinct and as particular kinds of beings (as cited by Ashley and Orenstein, 314).

Through clothes, my respondents can choose to be desi, American, or desi-American if they want to be. The women have the option to exclude South Asians or Americans or both and mark themselves as same or different.

The spaces of cathexis brought to the center of attention in this study – language, holidays, religion, cooking and eating (food), and clothing – are sites of counter-hegemony and hegemony accompanied by both struggle and privilege. The women I interviewed reject the hegemonic conception of a unitary self. Through the five sites of cathexis, my research participants show their affiliation to browness or South Asianness, but they also experience whiteness or Americanness in numerous ways. Escoffier writes (1991), "One major limitation of identity politics and its representation in multiculturalism is that we are all born within a web of overlapping identities and group affiliations," but we are forced to disconnect those ties to focus on only one (64). Minh-Ha (1989) says "despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak" (94). The pendulum-like tension between struggle and privilege and visibility and invisibility makes Puar's (1994a) "bargaining with racism" an invaluable analytical tool in the study. In this chapter, I showcased the women's efforts towards invisibility and visibility through the five spaces of cultural cathexis. In similar fashion to Jones (2001), the exploration helped me to uncover the paradoxes of class, gender, and racial formations in the United States. A central theme that emerged from the data is how my respondents "perform" their identities as South Asian-American women. The cultural practices expressed through the five territories of the self underscore the agency individuals have in asserting, enhancing, maintaining, and reconstructing their identities.

CHAPTER 6

Cultural Autonomy:
Boundaries of Marriage

In this chapter, I focus on the role marriage plays in my research participants'

lives. I explore how the women in this study respond to their families' expectations of

marriage along with the women's own expectations of marriage. By searching the

transcripts, I uncover that heterosexual ethno-religious endogamous marriage is a key

demand of South Asian(-American) womanhood. I discover that marriage constitutes the

yardstick for policing female subjectivities (in cultural nationalist terms). The women in

my fieldwork frame their tales of marriage with three foremost dimensions. First, the

women report that their families imagine an "ideal husband," and the women's families

expect the women, as daughters, to marry men who fall into their families' notions of

acceptability. Here, the women voice that they are seen by their families and community

members as carriers of culture. Second, my participants articulate that in order to attract

the ideal mate and fulfill their families' expectations of marriage, the women must

actively pursue potential marriage partners while they are in their twenties. The

assumption here is that with age, it becomes less feasible for the women to fulfill their

parents' idealized notions of a South Asian-American daughter's marriage. Third, and

finally, even though my respondents feel coercive pressures of marriage, the women

themselves reproduce idealized notions of selfhood in the diaspora. Collectively, the

women I interviewed indicate that they are unwilling to marry outside of "their culture"

because they long for a partnership in which they do not have to explain their cultural

background. Here, I also uncover that, collectively, my respondents do not ignore the

histories and nuances within the practice of arranged marriage and arranged marriages in the second-generation community are not uncommon. Though, my research participants map modernity with America and falling in love and pre-modern or the traditional with South Asia and arranged marriage. Hence, the women in this study attempt to re-engineer the arranged marriage, de-centering some of the stigmas (strict, inflexible, patriarchal) that come along with the notion of an arranged marriage. Taken together, the women in this study interpret the regulatory ideals of marriage as the central act that would render them embraceable within their families and community as ideal South Asian women and daughters in America.

Feminized Cultural Carriers: The Ideal Husband

The fear of dating that consumes many South Asian families is primarily a fear of women dating (Mani 1993). There is little attempt to control men's sexuality while women are frequently policed with the stick of tradition and called on to preserve the ways of the old country (see Mani 1993, 34-35). My respondents report that their families closely guard their sexualities, and both parents are complicit in this. The women recount that both of their parents are vested in their prospects of marriage. Unanimously, the women report that among South Asian cultural authorities (i.e. mother, father, older siblings, and aunts and uncles) in America, the ideal marriage - within the discourse of immigrant nostalgia, imagined "true" South Asianness, myth of the model minority, and gendered labor - is fashioned in terms of marrying within one's religious group, economic class, national group, and racialized/ethnic group. I find that these categories are hierarchical, as religious affiliation (Muslim or Hindu, including caste for Hindu families) supercedes economic class (model minority myth) and economic class

supercedes national origin (Bengali) and national origin supercedes racial and ethnic

identity (South Asian).[46]

Auditi describe that her family expected her to select a husband from an

endogamous "kin" group - fashioned through religion, nationality, and racialized/ethnic

group - who is of "their kind." She states,

> [My parents'] biggest concern is a Bengali-Brahman - somebody's whose family speaks the same language and not just the literal language, but also all of it; the cultural language, the framework, and all of that…The interest is having this real similar cultural, basically being able to replicate what they had had…Somebody with whom I would carry on the religious and cultural traditions, and we would raise children who would also speak fluent Bengali and we would all go to puja together…[My mom] really expected [me] to follow the Bengali woman ways…It's a fairy tale.

Rani's Bengali-Brahmin mother expresses her disdain towards Rani's Christian-

Malayalam fiancée, also framing her comments within the categorical hierarchy:

> My mother says, "Oil and water do not mix…Look at what they are getting and what we are getting?" She will say it flat out…It should be somebody who is fair, good-looking, a doctor, Bengali-Brahman, and speaks the language…It should definitely somebody who is going to be able to take care of me financially…Our parents are so scared. They want us to marry the same thing so that we can carry on our culture throughout the generations.

Some of the women report that an acceptable alternative, within notions of endogomy, is

a non-Bengali South Asian man from the appropriate religious affiliations. For example,

Rani says, "Now she has opened up to at least that they don't need to be Bengali but they

need to be Brahman. She tells me, 'This is your birthright!'" Rupa shares, "[My parents]

don't care if he is from [Bangladesh] or Pakistan or India, but he must be Muslim. That

was what I grew up with. I always struggled against that, but I thought if he wasn't, he

will convert."

My research participants' words indicate that the categorical boundaries should be protected within a daughter's marriage (whose daughter will produce ideal children with the ideal man?). One of Zerubavel's (1991) insights is that people carve reality into discrete mental slices, "islands of meaning," which they categorize, classify, and label. We structure our lives into territories, partitions, and classes, i.e. black and white, homosexual and heterosexual, and South Asian and American. Unanimously, my respondents reveal that Hindu men for Muslim women and Muslim men for Hindu women are outside the prescribed boundaries of marriageability. The experiential of discrete entities presumes a perception of boundaries surrounding us, and such "fine lines" lead us to perceive a fundamental discontinuity between insiders and outsiders, "those included in a social cluster and those who are left outside its confines" (14). Only in relations to such lines can the women in this study learn who is available to them as a sexual partner and whom they must avoid.

The significance of the current discussion is that my research participants suggest that South Asian women are often the carriers of culture. "Brown" women's bodies are a symbol of tradition (Yegenoglu 1998), and, thus, they are often "used to represent national identity or ethnic loyalty" (Maira 2002, 14). The women in this study emerge as the bearer of tradition. They are expected to reproduce "South Asia" in the home (and responsible for preventing acculturation of the children). The discourse of an imagined "true" South Asian culture reproduces a cultural nationalist logic that is predicated on the idea that an imagined South Asian community loses itself to Americanization if a daughter chooses to betray the regulatory demands of an idealized South Asian(-American) womanhood (see Naber 2006, 92).

Masculinist Cultural Production: "How Old is Your Daughter?"

As part of the regulatory demands of an idealized South Asian womanhood, the women I interviewed tell me that there is pressure from their families to be married (and have children) by a certain age. Juhi's mother is strict about when a woman should be married:

> My mom point blank told me I had to be married when I was twenty-five. And she's like, "I am not playing around." I didn't even know how to react to that because she was so dead set about that. She was like, "You have to start your family. This is ridiculous now. I was twenty-two when I got married."

Noopur further recounts the role of a South Asian woman's age in marriage:

> For some reason, with them, it's like this set pattern of life: you go to school until you're 22, you work until you're 25, you get married and start having kids before you're 30. It's like bam, bam, bam.

Both Juhi and Noopur's testimonies about their families show me that that the women have a small window where they are the most "marketable" for marriage, having access to men from within one's own religious group, economic class, national group, and racialized/ethnic group.

Mid-twenties is the ideal time for a South Asian woman to be married because by then a woman has presumably graduated from college and even gained some work experience. I find that a college education and some work experience means that the women are ready take their appropriate place in the community as responsible adults, allowing them access to partners from within the categorical and hierarchical boundaries (i.e. religious affiliation supercedes economic class and economic class supercedes national origin and national origin supercedes racial and ethnic identity). But I also find that education and employment indicate a woman's independence, which must be curbed. For instance, Rita says, "I'm going to go out to work and I'm going to become

independent, which is such a bad word for our parents for some reason. So then they were, 'When are you going to get married?'" The age bar is often motivated by virginal primacy or the families' fears about sexuality and symbolic pollution or contamination.

Though, some extended educational training, like pursuing a Masters degree, buys the women time from the demands of South Asian womanhood. Rita explains that the next point of entry into marriage is after receiving graduate training, presumably women are in their late twenties.   She says,

> I think the worst [my parents] got was when I was twenty-three [after I graduated college]. [But] when I started law school, it wasn't that bad because I was so extremely busy and whenever they would say anything, I would say I can't think about that. The second year, they are looking at graduation – Again, they were like, "When are you going to get married?"

Juhi speaks of similar pressures,

> Ideally, I think [my mother] would like me to be married now, but I told her that because of my masters there is just no way it is going to happen in the next two years. Then her next thing is, "When you're done, then it's just going to happen."

Here, my research participants recount that once women are in their thirties, higher education is no longer an appropriate reason to abstain from marriage. For example, Anjana, a doctoral candidate, speaks about the value of her marriage in her parents' lives:

> [My parents] keep saying, "Do you really want to do this school thing? What's so bad about just getting married now?" So they really want me to just get married and have kids right away and the school thing should be on the back burner.

Noopur shares with me her parent's expectations of her older sister's marriage, "With my sister, [my parents are] starting to get a little nervous…The fact that she's approaching 30 and could strike 30 and that she's not going to have those kids at 30, it kind of throws them for a loop…" The women in this study offer to me that being thirty and over means being old, less beautiful, and less capable of bearing children.

My respondents voice that once a woman reaches thirty, families become less steadfast about whom their daughters should marry - except for taboo populations - as long as the women are married. Mazeda articulates that the older South Asian women are the accepted circle of partners widens: "[My parents] want me to get married, and have kids. So part of me is thinking that pretty much anyone I bring home by the time I am thirty years old (unless they're black)." In overriding the ethno-religious ideal with the heterosexual imperative, Mazeda's parents reinforce control over Mazeda's marriage practices that underlie the conjugal heterosexual and family ideals in both South Asian and American societies (see Naber 2006, 102).

Changing Contours of Boundaries

Mazeda provides a critical and complex quote that indicates the changing contours of religious, economic, national group, racial, and ethnic boundaries for South Asian-Americans. By further searching through the transcripts for thin references to descriptions of intimate partnerships, I find that the forging of an imagined South Asian identity in America through ethno-religious endogamy is ruptured. I, first, come across marrying "the same thing" does not simply mean marrying within one's religious group, economic class, national group, and racialized/ethnic group. While the regulatory demands of South Asian womanhood are framed as an alternative to assimilation, the cultural discourses that control a daughter's marriageability enable a family strategy of assimilation that privileges heterosexual marriage within boundaries of race and class as capital. Second, in the context of marriage, the discourses on South Asianness and Americanness shift in accordance with the kinds of power relations that set the stage for

expressing and/or transgressing idealized notions of South Asian(-American) femininity as I discover the availability of adequate exogamous partners.

Collectively, the women report that they refuse to form intimate partnerships with South Asian men who are FOBs or "bananas." Nadia provides a telling testimony, "I would never date a FOB, and I would never marry one. There is a reason for it: they are backwards!" Nandita feels that she needs to be with someone who grew up with

Gilligan's Island:

> One of the things that I think of a lot, and it's a joke among my friends, is I need my husband to know who Gilligan is. That's kind of how I foresee the difference of someone who's brought up and grown up here and has the same background and the same thought processes as I do. When they see that red shirt, they should go, "Oh, my gosh, that's Gilligan!"

Juhi says, "I think ideally I would like someone who was Bangladeshi but grew up here (and who obviously comes from a professional and economically stable family)…" The potential "foriegnness" of an immigrant South Asian man reflects the instahity of an imagined "true" South Asian culture. Nadia, Nandita, and Juhi speak to their placement in U.S. class and racial structures and the idea of a suitable marriage partner disrupts the women's homogenous South Asian world.

Padmini and Laila discover the acceptability of exogamous partners – "white" men. Padmini, a Hindu woman, says,

> I was dating this Jewish guy for a while. [My parents] were very enthusiastic about that, but it didn't pan out. I guess it is the stereotypical thing that you hear that white is much more acceptable at least than a black person. This is totally not to offend you, but a friend of ours, she is marrying a Bangladeshi-Muslim and my mother recently said that even a white person would be better than that…

Likewise, Laila, a Muslim, voices,

> I think [both black and Hindu] would matter more than a Christian or a Jew. My best friend is Hindu. She is like another daughter [to my parents] and they have

talked about me and who I should be with. My dad has basically said to her that he wouldn't really be happy to see me with a Hindu guy.

As part of the South Asian(-American) matrix of feminitity and sexuality, marriage and having children are on the forefront of Ronica's family discussions, especially as Ronica approaches thirty. Ronica's parents have expressed on several occasions that at this point they would even approve of a white man, though not a Muslim. Ronica says,

> It is interesting now because I think they are starting to get desperate. They are like, "You can even marry a white man." I am like, "Mmmm, that's nice." They want me to get married. They would like for him to be white or South Asian and not Muslim…It's so dumb…It's old. I feel no connection to that.

Surely the South Asian-American community is constructed on the heteropatriarchal family (and religiousity). Fissures in an imagined "authentic" or "true" South Asian culture emerge when Ronica's parents suggest that she bring home even a white American man. In the context of Ronica's queer identity, the heterosexual imperative becomes a more significant symbol of the South Asian/American boundary than the "virginity" ideal. Anzaldúa (2001) writes, "For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality" (17). Ronica's queerness underwrites her marginalization as traitor-American by cultural authorities like her mother and father. In overriding the virginity ideal with the heterosexual imperative, Ronica's parents reinforce the control over women's sexual and marriage practices that underlie the heterosexual conjugal ideal in South Asian and American societies. Yet, in learning of a Muslim man's unacceptability, Ronica comes to terms with the heterogeneity of South Asian cultural identity. When Ronica's parents replace the taboos around whiteness with Muslim, they reveals the "gaps and fissures" within the idea of a

unified South Asian nationalist identity and the ways in which an imagined "true" South Asian culture shifts depending on sociohistorical circumstances.

Nadia, Nandita, Juhi, Padmini, Laila, and Ronica's parents burst the bubble of "authentic South Asianness" that they left behind in the homeland and have tried to recreate in the United States. The women and their families secure a particular racial and class positionality, and they must come to terms with the heterogeneity of South Asian culture and identity. The complexities of accepted marriage patterns among the women and their families reveal the difficulties of applying any single model of assimilation.

Expressing the Need for Likeness

Even though the women in this study begin to recognize the heterogeneity of South Asian culture and cultural identity, my respondents continue to reproduce idealized notions of selfhood in the diaspora. The women distinguish between having "family and community" or being "lonely and isolated." Collectively, my respondents' testimonies indicate a practice towards expressing cultural autonomy – a vital theme in this dissertation. Many of the women I interviewed report that they are unwilling to marry outside of "their culture" not only because they long for a sense of commonality, but also because it is important to their parents. The women in this study interpret the regulatory ideals of marriage as the central act that would render them embraceable within within their families and community (the discourse of distinct and homogenous "South Asian" and "American" worlds).

Tonima expresses that she would not consider marrying outside of the Muslim-South Asian community because it would be difficult for her Bangladeshi-Muslim parents to come to terms with it:

> [My parents] would freak out [if I brought home a black or Hindu] and then I think they would accept it at some time or another just because they are my parents. But I know I would have to have gone through hell. I don't want to go through that. I don't feel like it is worth it. I don't think I could go out with someone who is non-desi.

Juhi prefers South Asian men because she enjoys the sense of cultural commonality she is able to share:

> There are certain jokes that another South Asian person will understand that a white person just won't get. I think where I am at in my life and the way that I want to be, I don't want to have to deal with, "Oh what does that mean?" I have had to do that before and I just don't want to deal with it.

Rupa expresses reasons similar to Juhi:

> [In college,] if I would cook something and eat with my hands, [my boyfriend] would say, "If you did that at my mother's table we would have to call you a savage." Shit like that…I don't want to have to explain everything about myself and about my culture and what I mean by this. It is exhausting…I don't think I would want that in my life…

Tonima, Juhi, and Rupa state that they do not want to have to explain their desi background to their partners.

The women in my study who partner with exogamous partners, outside of the endogamous circle but not entirely taboo, find ways to maintain their links to South Asian community spaces. Auditi and Noopur share with me that they find white men more attractive than South Asian men but since both women are highly vested in their Bengali-Hindu culture, they seek out white men who would be open to learning about and participating in some of the women's traditions and customs. For example, Noopur says,

> Being that my preference is probably non-Indian…I need someone that is adaptable to my culture. My culture is a huge part of me. I am not saying that I need someone who will convert to Hinduism. What I mean is more someone that is willing to learn and at least adapt partially.

And Auditi says:

> My relationship with my family and my relatives and culture are important to me, and to be able to go to a puja or my cousin's wedding and get dressed up, and eat the food, and do that unquestioningly, and having a partner that is willing to do that or at least be interested in it…[My husband] is more Indian than we are. He is not, but he fits in so well and I realize on some level I knew that's what I was going to be most comfortable with. I was lucky but it wasn't that it just accidentally happened.

Noopur describes to me a recent short-term love interest. What caught her attention was that he knew she was Bengali:

> I met him through friends through work and we had hit it off. The first thing he had said to me – and this goes back to one of the biggest things that I look for in men – was something about the fact that I happen to be Bengali. He's straight-up Midwestern, Caucasian guy and so it impressed me.

Auditi and Noopur problematize the idea that "brown" women engaged in interracial relationships are rebels and symbols of final assimilation (into white society) (see Puar 1994a). The women challenge assimilationist beliefs about interracial relationships which presume differences between the two cultures to be so great that the minority of culture must submit to the dominant or the privileging of whiteness (Puar 1994a, 47). Auditi and Noopur simply do not play Dasgupta's (1993) "Masala-itis" role.

I have come across two women who have formed intimate alliances with men who would be considered taboo by their families. Looking beyond Puar's notions of oppositionally active whiteness and strategic assimilation, I find Indira and Jhumpa to entertain romantic relationships outside the brown-white matrix. Puar's assessment that the terms "South Asian" and "South Asian-American" are constructed on communalist

tendencies among South Asians in America and their distinction from blackness while fruitful, fails to recognize representations of ones' self across multiple dimensions in a pertinent way: ignoring (marriage) alliances outside the South Asian/white continuum. Just as Prashad (2002) highlights the interactions of Asian Others and Black, offering a construction a history which de-centers the role of the white American, Indira forms resilient ties to black community formations by marrying a man who is half-black (and half-white) from a single-parent and working-class household. And like Indira, Jhumpa articulates her associations outside white and South Asian communities by dating a Mexican-American man also from a working-class family.

While Indira and Jhumpa show the Puar's notions of oppositionally active whiteness and strategic assimilation serves as a smokescreen to exclude blacks, Mexicans and other groups of color (who are on the "wrong" side of the culture/class line), both women also reflect on their allegiance to a cultural world order in the South Asian-American context. For instance, Indira says that it was fairly easy to date her now husband because he does not "look black":

> He is mixed. His mother is black and his father was white. He doesn't look like anything distinct. A lot of people think he is Indian because he is about my color. He is kind of light…I don't think the concept [of him being black] sinked in [with my parents] because he is my color, and he doesn't look black.

Jhumpa struggled for months, thinking about whether or not she should pursue a long-term relationship with a Mexican man. Once she decided to pursue the relationship, she found that she was unable to tell her mother about her Mexican-American boyfriend for over two years:

> I am twenty-five years old and I should be able to tell my parents who I am dating. What if we do take it to another level and we want to make this

> permanent or we want to get married? What am I going to do? Just come home one day and be like, "Mom, I am engaged!" Then my mom started randomly asking, "Are you and him dating?" because I would be talking about him so much. I would be like, "No, no," which would be a perfect opportunity for me to say "Yes," but I just couldn't do it for whatever reasons.

What Indira and Jhumpa and some of the other women show is the complexities of possible and simultaneous identifications within multiple contradictory sites (i.e. brown/white /black/Mexican/ Hindu/Muslim/Christian). If we can begin imagining the women beyond a fixed identity within a sociospatial fabric of existence, then we can see that my informants' experiences, as a whole, signify that they are not rebelliously seeking partners.

"Love-Cum-Arranged" Marriage

In this study, I find that the Masala-it is rebel-imagery clichés about second-generation women (see Dasgupta 1993, Puar 1994a) fall apart in the context of marriage. The women are not only searching for partners who will be able to follow through on Bengali traditions and participate in the women's family and community gatherings, but I also uncover that, collectively, my respondents do not ignore the histories and nuances within the practice of arranged marriage. Through my interviews, I explore the diversity of actual marriage practices, which are dictated by class; religion; migratory experiences and regional settlements of the women in this study, and the women report that arranged marriages in the second-generation community are not uncommon. Though, values surrounding marriage prove to be a particularly contentious arena in this study. My research participants map modernity with America and falling in love and pre-modern or the traditional with South Asia and arranged marriage. The women perceive Asianness as more patriarchal and arranged marriage as oppressive, taboo conduct, and I find that

my respondents continue to aspire to avoid identification with the Orientalist Other.

Hence, the women in this study attempt to re-engineer the arranged marriage, de-

centering some of the stigmas (strict, inflexible, patriarchal) that come along with the

notion of arranged marriage. In this endeavor, I follow the stories of the two women in

my fieldwork who participated in arranged marriages: Rita and Padmini

Rita allowed her parents to help her choose a partner because she wanted a partner

who would be able to "click" with her parents and in turn, she wanted a partner whom her

parents would approve of:

> I did not want to do it because I had a really bad impression of that whole
> process…[But] my dad completely rationalized everything. He was, "If you
> haven't met anyone, then why not let us introduce you to people? Wouldn't you
> let your friends introduce you to people?" [And] I have always had a very strong
> sense of duty to my parents. I have never wanted to disappoint them, and I know
> that my parents would not be able to click as well [with a non-desi]…

It was also important to Padmini to be married to someone who was familiar with

Bengali-Hindu culture. Padmini's parents also helped her to find a partner:

> It was something very prominent in my mind [to marry] someone who can
> understand the language [my parents] speak…I was looking for somebody who
> knew their food and who knew their mannerisms…

Like the Kutchi Hindu Gujarati women in Ramji's (2003) ethnography in Northwest

London, the reasons for wanting to be part of a tightly-knit community and intricate

marriage network are not necessarily intrinsic to the culture and tradition of these women,

but part of their identity formation developed in the South Asian-American context.

However, I find that the women continue to focus on cultural practices in

conjunction with an essentialized concept of culture, allowing them to perceive Asianness

as more patriarchal and arranged marriage as taboo conduct. My research participants

aspire to avoid identification with the Orientalist Other, fashioning Orientalist distinction

between "arranged marriage" and "love marriage." Nadia provides a telling testimony, describing arranged marriage as an oppressive act imposed on women:

> A lot of the girls that I grew up with are all getting arranged. The parents just pick someone and the girls say yes. They see some black [meaning dark complexion] ass guy from Bangladesh who came [here] [meaning a FOB] and they just get married. You see the wedding pictures where the girl is real pretty and the guy has thick ass glasses and he is nasty. I am just like, "Why?..."

Tina believes that the arranged marriage process focuses only on women's roles as wives and mothers:

> The way I perceive it [arranged marriage] is the way my cousins have been raised in India…There is a focus on marriage and getting married right away after you complete your education. There is a focus on the traditional role of a wife or mother and not really given the chance to explore your career.

Both Nadia and Tina perceive arranged marriage to include a woman's lack of agency. Both women's Orientalist representation of South Asian women as subservient victims and exotic goddesses ready to be consumed by the male gaze illustrates the significance of Orientalism to middle-class U.S. notions of identity and modernity. Nadia and Tina reproduce an Orientalist logic that renders South Asian women as "requiring Western discovery, intervention, or liberation" (Naber 2006, 106). Rita's cousins felt that she was a "sell out" by approaching men through an arranged marriage setting:

> [I really had to defend myself] when I agreed to do the whole arranged marriage thing. I really felt like I had to justify it to my cousins. They were like, "I don't believe you are going to give in to this." They really couldn't believe it and it almost felt like I was selling out because we've always been kind of united against our parents, and that kind of set me apart…I think that once I agreed to start meeting people through my parents they almost were disappointed.

The women in this study see arranged coupling experiences as "backward."

Rani considers herself "more American than Indian" when it comes to marriage because she decided to marry a Malayalam-Christian while her family are orthodox

Hindu-Brahmins. Rani articulates that she chose a partner based on her desire rather than

preserving family honor:

> I believe in falling in love, being proposed to, and getting married – [the] traditional Western ideal. I don't value some of the Bengali marriage customs, like arranged marriages, following a caste system, and even when it's time for the wedding [based on horoscope matching]…I don't value the culture of guilt, duty, and fear of shaming the family that is put open children in Indian culture.

Anita also feels the only and right way to marry is to wait for the right man rather than

exchanging "biodatas":

> I definitely want to get married, but I don't want to get married for the sake of getting married. I want to get married because at the end of the day you know it's someone you want to grow old with.

The taboos around arranged marriage are linked to the idea that South Asian women lack

agency and are domesticated beings (Puar 1994a, 24). Auditi refused to have a marriage

arranged for her:

> I was raised with a very strong message: I belonged to [my parents] and it was for them to make decisions for me and then it would be my husband making decisions for me…There was always the expectation that I was going to have an arranged marriage and when I tried to challenge my parents on that, which I did, I was a bad daughter for having done that…I think I was just really ready to step up to my parents and say I am not going to fit into any of those definitions that you've laid out for me as a woman, what my responsibility is, or what my role is, or anything else.

Auditi use Mohanty's construction of the monolithic Third World Woman – through

color equals culture – to write off the complexities of arranged marriage.

The notion of agency and choice in romantic partnership – falling in love and

choosing whom to marry and when to marry – is of great consequence, especially for desi

women. It sheds light on the relationship between South Asian women and feminism

(often read as Western), a relationship that renders an activist wearing a hijab or

connecting the words "Islam" and "feminism" impossible (see Puar 1994a, 84-85).[47]

South Asian women as an exploited and oppressed category serve to build the "free and

independent American woman" (see Grewal 1994, 59) (a construct often used in

diasporic literature found on bestseller lists, i.e. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged*

Marriage, 1995; Tanuja Desai Hidier's *born confused,* 2002; Jhumpa Lahiri's *the*

namesake, 2003; Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days*, 2004). Within this comparison,

South Asia is a uniformly oppressive place for women. Noopur's perception of gender

equality in the U.S., described in Chapter Four, is rooted in European colonial discourses.

But it is in fact more dangerous for a woman to walk alone in New York City compared

to a man, and women in America are ogled at in higher numbers than men across the

nation. The Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City in the early 2000s is an excellent

case-in-point. Such a binary formulation ignores women's exploitation in the U.S. and

denies women's agency in South Asia.

The East/West: tradition/modern discourse persists because it is needed to paint a

"free" and "democratic America. Grewal (1994) writes, "The discourse of 'freedom' is

essential to the consolidation and ongoing construction of Western state structures…"

(59). Padmini hides that her marriage was arranged, offering a counter memory of her

marital experience:

> None of my friends know the story of how I got married. I didn't even tell them
> when I was first engaged. I didn't want them to know after three dates with
> someone that my parents chose for me, I was getting married. I think [my
> friends] would have expected more from me. I don't think my friends knew me
> as someone who would take that, but low and behold I did. Rather than an
> explanation, I gave people a totally alternative story, because I didn't think that
> they could understand the explanation.

The forgoing contested myths suggest that we tend to remember (or not remember)

events that proceed according to a certain schematic set of prior expectations, resulting in

historical narratives becoming "verbal fictions" (see White 1978). While Padmini's arranged marriage is a secret, Rita uses "falling in love" terminology to describe her partnership, bridging the gap between social traditions and her attitudes about dating and marriage by both breaking and supporting Orientalist discourse. Rita attempts to re-configure her arranged courtship and marriage through the "standard" American meeting, dating, and marriage narrative á la e-harmony.com:

> I could tell he was really nervous, which is kind of charming in a weird way. We talked for two and a half hours [on the phone]…We talked about not very generic things. It was almost like we had known each other. It was really weird. I asked my parents to tell me more about this guy because I had kind of felt something.

And she submerges the image of universal arranged marriage in two ways. First, Rita highlights her agency in the arranged marriage process:

> I told my mom that my rules are probably different than most people who agree to this process. I told her I did not want to exchange pictures because I don't want it to be based on looks. Second of all, I don't want them to only pick someone for me to meet based on their bio-data. If I am going to give someone a chance, it is going to be everyone. This is not a job interview and I am not going to date someone off of their résumé.

Second, Rita challenges the Orientalist cultural conquest:

> It's not like where within a couple of days you decide if you want to marry him and then there is an engagement. It's not like that. Still, in an American's eyes, it's arranged. But what's strange about it is if it were two Americans meeting through their parents, it wouldn't be arranged. It would be a setup; it would be like a blind date!

Padmini and Rita's contradiction speaks to their ambiguous privileges of class and nation, resulting in them being a multiply shifting and positioned subject.[48] The emergence of contradictory and complex experiences foregrounds the multiplicities of Padmini and Rita's identities.

In this chapter, I focused on the role marriage played in my research participants' lives. I explored how the women in this study respond to their families' expectations of marriage along with the women's own expectations of marriage. I highlighted that marriage constitutes the yardstick for policing female subjectivities by exhibiting three dimensions: the women reported that their families imagine an "ideal husband," and the women's families expect the women, as daughters, to marry men who fall into their families' notions of acceptability; my participants articulated that in order to attract the ideal mate and fulfill their families' expectations of marriage, the women must actively pursue potential marriage partners while they are in their twenties; and the women showed that they themselves reproduce idealized notions of selfhood in the diaspora. I find that the women in this study interpret the regulatory ideals of marriage as the central act that would render them embraceable within their families and community as ideal South Asian women and daughters in America. The Masala-itis imagery about second-generation women simply falls apart. Here, arranged marriage among the second-generation is not uncommon. Though, the discourse that frames arranged marriage is re-engineered by the women such that the arranged marriage process is not seen by others as oppressive, taboo conduct imposed on South Asian women. Collectively, I uncovered that heterosexual ethno-religious endogamous marriage is a key demand of South Asian(-American) womanhood.

CHAPTER 7

Queer Spaces, Places, and Gender:
The Tropologies of Rupa and Ronica

Much queer theory is based on the white male experience and privilege, excluding people of color and severely limiting its relevance to third world activism (Ingram et al. 1997; N. Islam 1998; Kawale 2003), leaving many people who identify with Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Inter-sex Queer (GLBTIQ) communities unable to make sense of this discourse. Doubly marginalized women like the late Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa (1942-2004) have been thinking and writing about their experiences at intersectional locations, but the way their experiences are framed in philosophy and social theory remains uncomfortably simplistic, and queer theory in the United States continues to be thin on thinking through its intersections with gender and race. Too often, the limitations due to undertheorized South Asian lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual histories, compounded with a queer canon overwrought with the East/West: tradition/modern equation, renders queer South Asian-Americans as a monolithic homogenous category with little or no agency. Within the last decade and a half, chronicles from GLBTIQ communities within the South Asian diaspora in America, like *A Lotus of Another Color* (1993) and essays in *A Patchwork Shawl* (1998), have appeared, critically challenging western feminism and mainstream GLBTIQ theory and adopting an intersectional approach (á la Mohanty). Still the richness and contradictions that characterize these communities continue to be stifled with Indian-centric and Hindu-centric paradigms.

In this short but telling chapter, I adopt the spirit of *Queers in Space* (1997) and *Queering Bollywood* (a website demonstration of a collection of queer readings in Indian cinema, see http://media.opencultures.net/queer/) to visit paradoxes, difficulties, unity, and diversity by further unraveling the lives of the two second-generation South Asian-American women in this ethnography who self-identify as gender-queer - Rupa and Ronica. In doing so, I address the underdocumentation of the lives of queer South Asian-Americans, especially women, and their responses to normative forms of power.

Rupa and Ronica are no different than the other twenty-three women, self-identified as "primarily heterosexual," on a plethora of dimensions. In the previous chapters, I demonstrate that a queer identity does not necessarily produce alternative meanings and choices for South Asian-American women. For example, both Rupa and Ronica encompass multiple ethnic designations and emphasize multiculturalism side-by-side a critique of the State. Like many of the other women in the study, Rupa and Ronica are also confused by generational terminology, they speak Benglish, they find comfort in surrounding themselves with people of similar cultural backgrounds, they feel both the pressures and privileges of being encompassed by the model minority myth, and they struggled to go out with friends and date boys while in high school. Finally, Rupa and Ronica show that they too, through language, holidays, religion, food, and clothing, validate the categories that define human invisibility and visibility. Both women protect themselves by adapting banal norms of public behavior (i.e. citizen privileges) while simultaneously using the spaces of cathexis to produce counter identifications (i.e. refusing to date white men).

The point of departure lies in access to space. Space has become recognized as a signifier of a group's status in society (see Brady 2002, 7-8). For minorities, including people marginalized through sexuality, uneven development in space have compounded their sense of isolation (Ingram et al. 1997, 6). In nodding to Adrienne Rich's (1986) "politics of location," Rupa and Ronica's herstories address the underlying homophobia resulting in a complex limitation of movement and self-expression of queer people. Both women are out there floating even more disconnected from communities, limiting their access to resources and networks, than their heterosexual counterparts. The debates around race and gender are especially consequential here because they allow us to think about the development of sex and gender studies in academia, particularly gay and lesbian studies and queer studies – a discourse much needed in order to illuminate Rupa and Ronica's feelings of disconnectedness.

The term queer was once, at best, slang for homosexual, and at worst, a term of homophobic abuse. In recent years queer has come to be an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications that describe a nascent theoretical model which developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies. Queer theory's debunking of stable sexes, genders, and sexualities specifically develops out of reworking the post-structuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions. And the recent resignifying of the word queer in academic discourses, more so in gay and lesbian studies, suggests that traditional models - models of stability which claim heterosexuality as the origin of sex, gender, and desire - have been ruptured (see de Lauretis 1991; Jagose 1996). The most commonly voiced anxiety among sex and gender theorists is whether queer disregard for dominant systems of gender fails to consider the

material conditions of the West in the late twentieth century: is queer an identity category

that has no interest in consolidating or even stabilizing itself (Jagose 1996)?

South Asian-American GLBTIQ community members find it enormously difficult

to construct fluid identities within the available GLBTIQ discourse. The failure of

Western feminism to properly and critically theorize third world women opens a space in

which a monolithic subject (or object) of knowledge is constructed (see Mohanty 1988).

Naheed Islam (1998), in her seminal study about South Asian women who love other

women, finds that her respondents reject the term lesbian. South Asian-American women

who sought lesbian organizations and communities – a majority of white lesbians defined

theses spaces – felt they were marginalized and exoticized because of their differences.

The women were marked by essentialized notions of their race and culture. Islam's

respondents unanimously and consistently describe that women in saris and shalwar

kameezes would never be seen as lesbians in America. The women additionally discuss

growing up with breasts, hips, and long hair, an aesthetic value system utterly different

from white androgyny. Most women felt that their bodies were reinterpreted by white

lesbians as manifestations of being femme. Brah (1996) finds that there is a tendency to

see Asian women as passive, dependent, quite, sensitive, and gentle. And Khan (1993)

uncovers that South Asian-American women believe that white people see them through

imperialist eyes, which requires South Asians to either integrate or abandon their

Asianness.

These studies address the oppression of racism in mainstream GLBTIQ history.

Collectively, the women from the studies state that white women believe that sexism is a

more fundamental problem that racism. Ingram et al. (1997) explain,

> Women, people of colour, and transgendered people are wrestling with the complex array of differences and similarities that complicate the building of alliances, and few canons exist to help define the specific subjectivities of women, people of colour and transgendered people. (7)

South Asian movements have been excluded from GLBTIQ history, literature, and media in the United States. The GLBTIQ culture marginalizes South Asian-American experiences and lumps all non-white women under umbrella terms like lesbians of color or queers of color, denying differences and rendering them static and generic. It is precisely in such a portal that Mohanty (1988) offers a better theoretical model of intersectionality.

In the pages to come, I explore Rupa and Ronica's painful struggles to individually (as opposed to collectively) fashion a space for themselves. Rupa and Ronica consciously forgo community-building in white mainstream spaces. They show here that they remain resilient in maintaining ties with South Asian communities, especially their parents and the collectivities in which they grew up in. Though, Rupa and Ronica underscore that South Asian spaces are not altogether a different conception of spatiality; like hegemonic spaces, South Asian spaces mimic similar processes of homogenization of race, class, and gender. As a result, Rupa and Ronica work and play in alternative brown (South Asians and non-South Asians of color) spaces through their career and friendship choices. The two women recreate a sense of their South Asian culture and the familial by negotiating brown social networks outside of the heterosexual matrix. Here, Rupa and Ronica show resistance. In the act of re-creating "family," Rupa and Ronica challenge South Asian and American (Anglo-European) ideologies that read blood as the key foundation to kinship (see Naber 2006, 102). Rupa and Ronica demonstrate that all families are contextually defined. The two women also find an

alternative to the South Asian/queer split in the coming together of what they understand to be their "queer" and "South Asian" identities (see Naber 2006, 98-104). Being both South Asian and queer are core identity markers for Rupa and Ronica, and they manipulate social ties to create safe spaces for themselves that speak to being queer without forging their cultural background. Through their experiences, Rupa and Ronica demonstrate that the notions of South Asian-American and queer identities are far more than simple and linear. The two women arduously navigate the spaces between subjective, lived experiences and discursive, applied definitions.

<u>Rupa</u>

Not Muslim...But Muslim

I unravel Rupa's journey through her romantic experiences. As part of the hetero-normative and paternalistic matrix, Rupa went through a series of fleeting relationships with men, mostly white, while in college, and by sophomore year she found herself in an exclusive relationship with a second-generation Korean-American man. Within weeks of their courtship, Rupa was caught in a web of physical violence, "We started dating and within two weeks he had raped me...I thought because it happened that I had to be with him, and I didn't call it rape at the time." She quickly found solace from the repetitive physical and mental abuse by forming close ties with another man who was a part of her larger social circle in college:

> At that same time, I started to become really close to [another guy]. He was also in that same network of friends; we just hit it off. We cooked together, smoked weed together, and opened up the dictionary and read funny words to each other...Everything with [my boyfriend] was getting worse and worse...Then somewhere in the beginning of that winter quarter, [my friend] and I made out...and I really like [my friend]. That was the thing that gave me the impetus to break up with [my boyfriend].

Moving into a relationship with this man gave Rupa the inner-strength to eventually leave

her abuser

By the end of sophomore year, Rupa entered into a committed and monogamous

romantic partnership with the new man in her life, but the mental trauma from her

previous relationship followed her into her new one. Rupa suffered from severe bouts of

depression, incapacitating her in several ways. She was unable to engage in daily rituals

like getting out of bed in the morning and attending lectures. Rupa dropped out of a

Midwestern Ivy-league school her junior year, and while she was still committed to and

exclusive with her fairly new boyfriend, she moved to the West Coast to live with her

best friend:

> We started going out winter quarter, and I dropped out of school…because I was
> severely depressed…[My parents] shocked me; they were surprisingly good about it
> and they asked me to come home…I then told [my parents] that I was going to go out
> to [my friend's] for the summer…and they let me.

Rupa desperately required some time away from school, her boyfriend, and her parents in

order to work through some of the physical and mental trauma on her own. She turned to

cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol to dissipate her pain, "After all that stuff with [my ex-

boyfriend], I started smoking every day, drinking, and doing drugs…" Rupa's parents

(residing on the East Coast) confronted her about the drug and alcohol abuse over the

phone. They strongly advised Rupa to think about her health along with what community

members, especially religious leaders, would say about her and the family if they found

out about her substance abuse. More importantly, Rupa's parents were concerned about

what god would think of her. They sternly warned that her recent actions are un-Islamic

and that she was risking going to hell:

> I think what happened is that somebody from the community, meaning the
> Muslim community, told them that I was smoking weed, drinking, and fucking
> up. They asked me on the phone, "Are you smoking marijuana?" I told them,
> "No." My dad asked why I was lying. It was all downhill from there. [My parents
> said,] "It is un-Islamic, what are people going to say? We have worked so hard
> for you and now you are going to do this! *We know what is best for you*. Don't
> you know you are going to go to hell for this?" I was nineteen. I was at the point
> where I said, "I am not Muslim!"

The intervention ended with Rupa renouncing Islam.

Soon after, Rupa made the difficult decision to attend her brother's high school

graduation. Upon arriving at home, both family and community members reminded her

that dropping out of school; living with a friend and remaining idle; and drinking,

smoking, and doing drugs will only serve to destroy the path of success her physician

parents have worked so hard to secure for her:

> With the only credit card that I had, I got a plane ticket to go home for my
> brother's [high school] graduation. That is how much I loved my brother. But it
> was horrible…They wanted me to stay at home. I think if I stayed at home and
> promised never to do these things again, they would have been happier
> somehow…[They wanted me to be] the absolute ideal [daughter]: five-times-a-
> day-praying, regular Koran-reading, a daughter who goes to her classes and
> makes good grades, goes to Muslim Student Association meetings, and ask her
> parents' guidance in finding the right life partner for her… It was mostly framed
> in religious kind of things, and at that point I did not did not feel safe to say,
> "Look, I am not going to hell because the hell that you are talking about doesn't
> exist."

Once again, religious discourse – Islam – was used to frame the second attempt of

intervention. During the graduation celebrations, Rupa felt that she should partially-sever

her ties with her parents and the Muslim community in her small hometown on the East

Coast. Rupa returned to her best friend's place (on the West Coast) feeling horribly

inadequate as a Bengali-Muslim daughter (in America). Her boyfriend helped her to re-

affirm her value as a human being:

> In the end of it all, [my boyfriend] was on the phone with me everyday. I was a wreck, like ready to have a nervous breakdown. At one point on the phone, he said, 'If you tell me that you need me, I'll come.' I told him that I needed him and he came to rescue me…So I followed him back [to school in the Midwest]…We were together for two more years.

Rupa moved back to the Midwest to live with her boyfriend while he completed his senior year in college.

Despite having limited contact with her family, Rupa felt that it was time her parents knew about her significant other. She again traveled home but this time to inform them of her intimate partnership. Not surprisingly, she used anti-religious discourse to frame her relationship with her white-American boyfriend:

> Over the summer, when I moved with [him], I told them. I also told them that I wasn't Muslim at that time…I didn't know how else to explain it without telling them, "Okay, this is the person that I love." What ended up happening was that I was disowned…"You are not our daughter and we are not going to financially support you."…That was the only time I ever smoked a cigarette in front of my parents.

Rupa left her childhood home feeling empty and lost for a second time. Weeks later, Rupa's community priest or Imam contacted her. The Imam urged her to come back home yet once again so that he could mediate a solution between her and her parents. Rupa, hesitant, took him up on his offer, only to be forced to leave for campus that night:

> That Imam, I really hate him…He called me, "*Betti* [my daughter], I know it is not your fault. I know it is hard growing up here. Please come home. You and your parents should at least be talking face-to-face. I will mediate." I agreed and my parents sent me a plane ticket. Everything turned upside down. I got home and all of my posters were taken down from the walls and all of the stuff that was me was just gone. I met with the Imam for two or three hours and he was such an ass. He said, "This is your fault. What are you doing? This is totally unacceptable. Nobody is going to support you if you take this route." I went home that day.

Rupa suffered from an emotionally wounding déjà vu.

Undoubtedly, a centrifugal theme in Rupa's herstory has been her family and religious community's decisions to label her life choices as un-Islamic. To protect her own sense of morality, Rupa distanced herself from a Muslim identity in college. Yet, Rupa could never quite obliterate her links to Islam and she thinks about the implications of being a Muslim (woman) in America, often correcting misconceptions about Muslims and defending the religion:

> I remember having this discussion about the word "Jihad" [with one of my white boyfriends in college] and I said, "Jihad doesn't mean holy war. The actual word means striving or struggle." He said, "No…it is like this really religious and war mongering society." I said, "No, and I don't identify with that religion, but that is not all it is." It was interesting because I didn't identify as Muslim, but I knew that was part of me somehow because I really felt it was an attack on my people and me…

Rupa now in her thirties confidently identifies as a Muslim woman:

> I have an extremely small community of Muslims that I identify with, my spiritual community. They are mostly like me. Yes, I think Islam in essence is this beautiful religion, and I think that it has been totally warped by patriarchy. I believe that Islam is about peace, justice, love, and divine love.

Rupa describes her spiritual awakening and religious epiphany during a trip to Bangladesh (one of her ancestral homelands) several years ago:

> It is rice patty fields, barley fields, and just miles and miles of wetland…I felt so completely at home. It was bizarre…I felt utterly centered. I felt like the earth was rising up to meet my feet. I would walk inside the house, which was red clay, and it felt like [it] was embracing me…It came from the actual land, the actual air, the sky, and the water…It was like a spiritual awakening. That was the moment I think I went from like, "I am not Muslim, I think I am an atheist, to the Goddess exists and she is at least partly [in me]."

Hence, when she thinks about her racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious heritage, she feels *rocktortan* or the calling of blood ties. Rupa conjures up the following imagery:

> Fragmented, Bengali, migration, partition, communal violence, refugees, and I think about food, spirit, gin, and myths. I think about ancestry and all of the women on my mom's side of the family. I think *rocktortan* and the pull of land…

The pull of the land feeling cajoles Rupa to defend and uphold Bangladesh, Bangladeshis, and

the Bengali-Muslim way of life.

> In high school, whenever we studied Islam or South Asia in social studies I was always defending it. They always portrayed Bangladesh as this poor, ravaged, starving, awful, terrible place. I would do what I could and talk about it's [beauty]. My social studies teacher in ninth grade was an idiot and he was the football coach or something as well. He said that Bangladesh was named after the Bengal tiger and I said no. Whenever we studied religion, the only images I saw of Muslims in our textbooks were men in turbans with machine guns so I was defending that as well…I had a lot of pride in where I came from, even though all I wanted to do was fit in.

Rupa's personal identification as a Muslim is linked to her Bangladeshi heritage, underscoring

that religious choices often stem for racial and ethnic projects (see Bashi 1998).

Another watershed in Rupa's life is when her *nani* or maternal grandmother

suffered from a debilitating stroke in Bangladesh. It proved to be the beginning of the

repair process between Rupa and her parents:

> My grandmother had a stroke in Bangladesh…That killed me. I told my dad on the phone, "Look, if amma is going back, and I don't know if she wants this or not, but if she wants me to come, I would go with her." I talked to my mom a few days later, and she told me that she wanted me to go with her. I think that was the turning point for them. They thought that whatever terrible decisions she is making, she still loves us and that did it.

After Rupa's trip to Bangladesh to visit her grandmother, Rupa rejuvenated her ties with

her mother and father and returned to school part-time,

> I was going [to school] part time now. After the whole thing with my nani, my parents told me that they loved me and they didn't approve of anything that I was doing, but they would send me back to school if I wanted.

Rupa was relieved that her parents were beginning to accept some of the decisions she had

made about her life and refrained from demoralizing her through religion.

Challenging Whiteness, Patriarchy, and Heteronormativity

Upon returning to school, Rupa's boyfriend graduated and unexpectedly moved to the

West Coast for a job opportunity. The distance took a toll on their relationship. Rupa and her

boyfriend drifted apart and he eventually cheated on her:

> [My boyfriend] moved back to the [the West Coast] and he cheated on me with a
> teenager [there]…We should never have tried the long distance thing. We had really
> grown apart at that point, but I had left my family for him so I couldn't even imagine
> anything else.

The break-up with her boyfriend was yet another fault line in her life:

> In the end it was really good. I think it was sometime when I was with him [that I
> realized that I was queer]. I don't know when I put that word or label to it. I
> know that I kissed my best friend's little sister in high school, and my girlfriends
> and I in college were really affectionate. It was really interesting and exciting
> when [my boyfriend] caught me looking at girls and he was okay with it…If he
> weren't around to rescue me with our relationship, I think I would have started
> dating women much sooner. Even when we were dating, I felt like it didn't
> matter what sex or gender a person is, and I wasn't really transgender aware at
> that time. But it didn't matter if it was a guy or girl; it mattered who the person
> was. I always carried that with me…

Rupa recognized that she is queer.

Parting ways with her boyfriend also helped her to develop some rules about

whom she will not date. Like many of the women in the study, one of Rupa's critical

rules involves a bar on white men:

> Currently, I am attracted to men, like bio men, but I am just going to say it is *no* to
> white boys…The whole thing of the white man [is that] there is such privilege
> there and it has just gone unrecognized or unacknowledged that there is that
> privilege difference… I would be defending things like eating with my hands [to
> one of my white boyfriends]. If I would cook something at home and eat with my
> hands, he would say, "If you did that at my mother's table we would have to call
> you a savage." Shit like that…The whole thing of white men is, I don't want to
> have to explain everything about myself and about my culture and what I mean by
> this. It is exhausting…I don't think I would want that in my life…

Rupa struggles with her "no white boys" rule because she is once again in an intimate

relationship with a white man. She circumvents her struggles by cogently emphasizing

that he was not born with white male privilege:

> It just gets complicated [when I say] I am not going to date any white boys. *He* is
> white and he identifies as a *boy*, but there is a difference because he wasn't born
> with the same privilege…I guess we have been saying since we started seeing
> each other, which has been over a year now, that girls make the best boys; he is
> *definitely* a boy. There is *nothing* like a girl about him for real.

Rupa's boyfriend is a woman-to-man transgender.

South Asian Women's Subjectivity and Managing Multiple Identities (Sexuality, Family, and Culture)

Rupa encounters a number of watersheds which grant her back and forth

movement, like a pendulum, between her individual conscious and collective conscious.

The reflexive relationship between the "I" and "Me" (á la Mead) warrants a fear of losing

her parents. This has always been a central concern for Rupa and it continues to be so,

especially when she makes choices different from them:

> "From the time I was nineteen, I have lived my life as I needed to, [but,] I think,
> whenever [I] made those decisions, my first reaction was always fear about what
> was going to happen, and fear of losing my family in the past, and I still do."

Rupa, therefore, has not shared her gender-queer status with most of her family members,

even though it is one of her stalwart identity markers. She says, "I am out to my younger

brother; he is the only person in the family that knows that." Rupa was disowned once

for abusing drugs and alcohol and for dating a white man. She does not even want to

begin to think about how her parents will react and what they will do to her if they find

out that she is queer. Through silence, both Rupa and her parents are mutually implicated

in keeping the idealized notions of South Asianness and Americanness active in

opposition. These silences allow them to keep the binary intact and efface the fact that through the heterosexual imperative, the points of opposition are one and the same (see Naber 2006, 97-98).

Rupa's experiences up to this point plainly suggests that since the age of nineteen, Rupa has made decisions that she thought were best for her at the time. She led her life as she needed to, often dismissing and being dismissed by the familial and community collectives she was raised in. Sophomore year in college proved to be a pivotal time in Rupa's life; an amalgam of potent events that took place - an abusive intimate relationship, incapacitating depression, disowned by her family, renouncing her religion, and an overly-dependent intimate relationship - helped her to probe her sexuality. Rupa was successful in uncovering her sexual identity, but she found that her sexual calling was at odds with her racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious background. Kawale expresses,

> Being under considerable surveillance from South Asian communities, the managing of multiple identities such as ethnicity *and* sexuality is an essential part of South Asian women's subjectivity, whether they are heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual" (193-194).

This conceptualization of identity helps to appreciate Rupa's inability to combine her religious identity as a Muslim, which partially stems from her ethnic identity, with her sexuality.

But, surprisingly, Rupa triumphantly talks about her transgendered boyfriend in conversations with her parents. She simply disguises him as her female roommate and best friend, "[My parents] don't know that Sam is *he*, but they hear 'Samantha.' They have never met him. They don't know what it is. They hear best friends. I talk about Samantha all the time."[49] Since our time together, Rupa and her boyfriend have had numerous conversations about taking their relationship to yet another level of

commitment. Because their relationship falls far outside the heterosexual matrix, Rupa is

unsure what that partnership would look like, what it would mean, and how she might

integrate him into her family life. Rupa voices,

> I know that it would not be worth it for me to have [my boyfriend] and lose my whole family for it… I think that is why I haven't said anything…[My boyfriend] and I would throw out these insane ideas about how we would work around this. There is the crazy idea of [my boyfriend] transitioning and converting to Islam, and they will never know. Of course, they are going to find out and it is going to be the same shit, right? I mean physical transition. It was a joke before, but it is not a joke anymore and it's not even funny anymore. [Maybe] I'll find a gay boy to marry who is [South Asian] and Muslim and be in the same boat.

Rupa ponders if it is even worth carrying on a relationship with someone her parents

would never approve of. These are wonderful instances of how Rupa begins to think

about managing her queer identity while also preserving her relationship with her parents

and culture. The following excerpt is another lucid example speaking to Rupa's

performance of her sexuality, family, and culture over a single spatial-temporal location.

Rupa is an actor, artist, and poet working for an all-women, Asian-American and Pacific-

Islander collective involved in multi-media and multi-disciplinary theater and

performance art. Rupa describes one of her recent shows, a show in which her father

came to see her perform on stage for the first time:

> For this particular show, I don't think we have said "pussy" more times in a single set. I was freaking out. I had myself taken out of one of the pieces called "Fiercely Fem" so it wouldn't be me directly saying these things. Even so, I was seriously stressed that they were going to start to wonder…The night before I had barely slept…That whole day I was physically ill with fear. Before every show we circle up and dedicate the performance to someone in our lives. I said that my family is going to be here tonight; the show is for them…It was hilarious that they ended up being totally late and came right before I was on for four pieces in a row…

Rupa was relieved that her parents were able to attend the show but had missed the sets

that may call into question her sexuality.

In ending Rupa's story, Rupa, without a doubt, innovatively lives her life as she needs to while maintaining resilient ties with her family. She also productively re-builds an alternative familial and cultural community through her all-women-of-color performing arts collective. Though, Rupa fervidly expresses that she is lost, not only in terms of being an American, Indian, Bangladeshi, Bengali, and Muslim, but, also as a gender-queer-identified person; she is floating in a hetero-normative world:

> I hate to sound so negative about all of this stuff. I think about identity and I am just at a loss. I know that I am going to go back home [to my parents] in a couple of weeks and I am not going to fit in. I also know that, especially since these days [post-9/11], I don't feel like I fit in here [the U.S.]. And so I don't what it means when and if I am able to have kids and what that means in terms of who I raise those children with.

Nevertheless, Rupa actively constructs spaces and places that foster diversity without policing, surveillance, and erasure, where the familial is reconstructed outside the heterosexual matrix (see Butler 1997). She demonstrates that she has uncovered ways in which to realize her religion and ethnicity performatively and sexuality together through redefinition rather than forging one for the other. Like the British-South Asian lesbian women in Kawale's (2003) study, Rupa generates new ways of doing gender, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to identify as a gender-queer-South Asian-American-Muslim. Rupa's history certainly offers possibilities of re-homing.

I next present a portion of Ronica's herstory as another narrative of brown queer-agency in space-making.

Ronica

Rupturing White/Feminist/Queer Canon

Ronica and I begin to develop her narrative through some key words, phrases, and labels she often uses to identify herself with and what being these labels mean to her. First, and foremost, Ronica identifies as a South Asian, a Bengali from Calcutta:

> I feel South Asian is a political identity and I believe in that identity. I would say I was South Asian and then Bengali. I would probably say I was from India and Calcutta. I end up bonding with my South Asians who are queer in a way that I can't really bond with anybody else. I don't know how to explain it, "Does your dad say this? Do the people in your family go like this [raising her pinky finger] when they have to go pee?"

Second, Ronica simply refuses to categorize herself as male or female. She self-identifies as gender-queer:

> There is this really strong gender binary of what is feminine and what is masculine. [But] gender is a continuum just as much as sexuality is to me. It has been more recent for me to think about myself as being this gender queer-person and, although, I identify as a female, I don't really feel like, "Oh, I am this 100% woman…" Yeah, [I still mark "female" on a form], but I think that that's probably pretty wrong these days, especially seeing my friends' [gender] transitions…

Ronica's words indicate that being a gender-queer South Asian-American is an elaborate identity that combines gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and cultural constructions into a cohesive category. But, the specific forms of intersections among these categories often leave Ronica feeling alienated from the larger queer community in America.

As a queer Bengali-American, Ronica was initially afraid of judgment from broader queer movements about participating in Hindu-Bengali cultural practices. She provides an example of selectively wearing South Asian clothing: "I could probably wear a shalwar or a sari to hang out with my friend, [but] I would wear them in places where I wouldn't feel totally uncomfortable." Ronica enjoys wearing South Asian clothing to

increase her visibility and affirm her South Asianness but only with certain people in particular venues. Ronica's queer South Asian friends provide her with a space in which she is able to exert control over being seen through dress and assert positively a non-normative sexuality and ethnicity in combination. But she is unlikely to wear saris or shalwars to white venues, where she dresses in more appropriate clothing (invisibility/assimilation).

Ronica is indeed concerned with queer South Asians in America not having a safe place to articulate their cultures: "I'm afraid of queer [South Asians] never having a place to integrate [South Asian] culture." Part of the predicament is that her coming out process was framed within the confines of a Eurocentric sexual agenda:

> I definitely felt like when I first came out as being queer, I was excluded from the queer community because I didn't really know Asian people, South Asian people, or people of color that were queer…The dominant discourse in the queer community is based around white people and that's really alienating…I [eventually began hanging] out with South Asians, but we didn't talk about or didn't do activism around it [sexuality] and I didn't include it in my discourse around a lot of things…Now, I feel like I am very vocal about it. I demand that people I am friends with talk about race and ethnicity as being an important part of your sexual identification.[50]

Kawale (2003) writes about the struggles for cultural authenticity within the South Asian lesbian community in Britain. While Ronica vehemently rejects a lesbian identity, Kawale's study is nevertheless applicable:

> White women in lesbian spaces are more likely to be considered as lesbians that are South Asian women. For example…one of my interviewees [with a group of friends]…[were] asked [by] the white (male) bouncer…whether they were aware it was gay night…and whether they were indeed lesbians. [My interviewee] interpreted this and other similar experiences with white women as a racism driven by the assumption that 'South Asian women can't be lesbians', especially if they have long hair. (185)

Ronica and Kawale problematize the powerful role of the white gaze in queer activism and theory.

Both Ronica and Kawale's discussion around the insignificance of race and ethnicity in the realms of gender and sexuality illuminate that the American – and perhaps even Western – conception of queer needs to be reconceptualized along transnational terms for diasporic queers like Ronica. Ingram et al. (1997) follow: "The majority if people who 'run' visibly queer ghettos and municipalities are white, middle-class gay men" (7). Mirza (1997) explains,

> [Whiteness is a] powerful places that makes invisible, or re-appropriates things, people and places it does not want to see or hear, and the through misnaming, renaming or not naming at all, invents truth – what we are told is "normal," neutral, universal, simply becomes the way it is. (3)

Fanon (1986) states, "[n]ot only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (110). Ronica finds then that racism and imperialism are not necessarily consequential issues shared by white GLBTIQ members. Race and racialized markers are a fundamental schism between Ronica and the larger queer community, and the white/feminist/queer community does not adequately meet her needs of collectivity.

Unable to accept the mainstream American construction of queer identity, Ronica, who traverses a complex web of social and political structures, involves herself in a small queer South Asian and of color network. Ronica feels more dedicated to the South Asian community and being with other South Asian gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people is valuable to her, "When I hang out with a bunch of people of color who are queer, including South Asian people and whatever, doing it feels really good to me. I feel more dedicated to [South Asians] now." Ronica's insistence in breaking down the opposition between white/feminist/queer culture and South Asian culture is an act in resisting racism on multiple

fronts: it undermines the South Asian/queer that seek to control women's sexuality by marking women who transgress the heterosexual imperative of an imagined South Asian cultural authenticity as "American," and it disrupts the dualistic logic of hegemonic U.S. nationalist discourses that homogenize and subordinate South Asian women as victims of male and family control or exotic erotic objects accessible to white/Western male "heroes" (see Naber 2006, 102-103).

With an air of nostalgia, Ronica explains that such alternative venues apart from mainstream queer networks provide her with an extended family atmosphere:

> [The] place I feel most comfortable in the world – and that doesn't happen that much – [is] when there is a bunch of people in the room who don't speak each other's language very well, but they are committed to communicating with each other…It feels comfortable because communication isn't based on your language skills or your ability to navigate smoothly within a culture. Rather, it is based upon your appreciation of each other and the fact that you want to share this moment together.

Music is yet another space in which Ronica finds comfort:

> [I'm in a] marching band...The idea is that we bring musical ideas into the street that hopefully will influence activist culture to be less myopic and to not have this sense of some lanky white guy with a guitar is what defines activism in America or culture…My band does [this one] song *Ranga Barsey* [a song from one of Amitabh Bhachan's Hindi-language movies]. It is me singing and then a bunch of white and American people doing the call in response. I love this idea that I am teaching them something and they are responding to it. I think there needs to be a concept of trans-culturalization in our culture, in our creating culture, and our creating subculture and counter culture, because otherwise it becomes cultural imperialism...

Rich's notion of politics of location is fruitful here. Since the mid-1980s, a number of exciting events have heralded the emergence of Asian GLBTIQ movements in the United States. The formation of Alliance of Massachusetts Asian Lesbians and Gay Men (AMALGM); Trikone, a regular Bay area gay and lesbian newsletter; and Shamakami, a forum for South Asian feminist lesbians and bisexual women, has added new and

welcome diversity to the voices of GLBTIQ movements in America (see S. Islam 1993).

Within the last two decades, San Francisco and New York City have become spatial sites

that are South Asian- and lesbian-, gay-, bisexual-, transgender-, and queer-friendly.

Ronica is an active participant in the annual South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association

(SALGA) Day Parades in New York City. Ronica's insertion into GLBTIQ communities

outside of the white/feminist/queer constructs demonstrates her movement from the

margin to the center. Meeting in spaces that allow her to positively express both her

queerness and South Asianness enables her to define space from the position of the

subject rather than the object (see Hall 1989 as cited by Kawale 2003, 186). Ronica

reconfigures and transgresses both queer white feminist imperatives and imagined "true"

South Asian culture.

Negotiating the Myth of the Model Minority

My perception of Ronica thus far is that she is an amazingly imaginative woman

with immense healing powers and the resiliency to withstand arduous struggles. The aura

of self-confidence and empathy for others embrace her. Whenever time and money

permit, Ronica offers free services as an acupuncturist, combined with her training in

homeopathic medicine, to comfort and heal sex workers in Calcutta's red light district.

But, Ronica describes how her parents and the community she grew up in on the East

Coast do little to accept her. Ronica's life-choices are not aligned with the prescriptions

put forth by middle-class white American society or even the model South Asian-

American community:

> To me, the typical South Asian [aesthetic] is about the typical [Midwestern] white
> [aesthetic]. I don't get the Midwestern white values that my parents would like

me to have and a lot of their friends' kids have. They are embarrassed that I don't fit those.

Ronica recounts accompanying her parents to an Indian grocery store in Edison, NJ with

her brightly colored hair and multiple body piercing and tattoos:

> When I go out with my family, my parents are always embarrassed of me because there is definitely a lot of pointing that happens…That is more about otherness than anything else. I don't know what kind of otherness to define that as…

Traveling with her parents in a local park is not easier, "I think they are equally

embarrassed of me in both those settings." To ease some of the embarrassment, Ronica

now tries to tone down her appearance when she is with her parents, especially during

pujas or other Hindu prayers and festivals, "I always go with my friends so I am lost in

the crowd...[but] I always tone down the way I look." Expectedly, Ronica chooses not

bring her friends to her parents' home, and in turn, she is unable to integrate her family

life with her friends. She describes it as dysphoria:

> I think they [family and friends] are a big source of conflict for me. The other day I went home to hang out with family and it felt really alienating after a while. Even though there are ways I relate to my family that I can't relate to anybody else, my sexuality and what I think about in the world is really not welcome in my family. I start to feel very shutdown and sort of defensive. Then I came back and I was hanging out with a couple of my friends that are white and transgendered and it felt very alienating to me to hang out in this group of people who can't relate at all to my family reality either. There is definitely this dysphoria feeling for me that happens.

Ronica feels explosive pressure then to categorize her life in binary terms – life with her

family and life outside of her family or with her friends. But she keenly recognizes that

the process of categorization is far more than simple for her. That is, although Ronica

narrates herself as a split subject, her "worlds" are not discreet.

Unlike Islam's (1998) study on immigrant Indian women living in America, the

centrifugal force in shaping Ronica's identity is being both South Asian and queer, in

conjunction. Ronica, like Rupa through her all-Asian and all-women performing arts

collective, attempts to reconstruct the familial within a small group of queer South Asian

friends, "I have created a South Asian community for myself. I can talk about what's

going on with me here more than I can talk about me to my parents. Having South Asian

queer friends has been so good for me," and through community-building as a teacher:

> I am a teacher, I teach martial arts. The martial arts teaching that I do is political.
> A lot of my life is spent doing political work, being an activist, and doing queer
> organizing. And it is based in multiracial environments. I define myself as an
> activist who works with people of color as much as possible…It is definitely a big
> part to be able to combine all of these cultural and sexual identity places together
> and create curriculum.

Shah's (1993) study on South Asian lesbians in the U.S. is useful in comprehending the

links among Ronica's sexuality, gender, and cultural identity and community. Shah finds

that exposure to feminism, activism, and community work and defining one's sexuality

often go hand-in-hand, especially for women.

Ronica's family is also an integral component of her identity and sense of self.

She remains unwilling to erase her ties with her parents and her family's strong-knit

Hindu-Bengali community. Even though Islam's study oversimplifies the multiplicities

and complexities of the woman's lives, her work was pioneering at the time and is

pertinent. Islam (1998) explains, "Identity based on sexuality also has to be analyzed in

terms of the complex web of social relations and the context which frames

them" (76). As a result, both Ronica and her parents engage in an interesting production

of the open secret act:

> They don't [know] and they don't need to. I think it would be such a huge
> deal. We would never recover from it…They know it is a big part of my life to be
> involved with people who are queer. That is the big thing. They choose not to
> know…It is an interesting combination in that my mom will sometimes ask me,

> but she doesn't really want to know the answer. Neither of them really wants to know that I am queer. They would rather that I just kept it to myself.

Like Rupa and her parents, again through silence, Ronica and her parents mutually implicate themselves in keeping the binary between idealized notions of South Asianness and Americanness intact, while masking that at different points the opposition threaten to be one and the same. Through silence and the heterosexual imperative, Ronica demonstrates three narratives. First, through family, women and their sexuality are under surveillance and contained. Second, albeit women are no longer in the locus of their families, they experience an extended sense of self and they are not willing to completely release themselves from those ties. Third, and finally, traveling between and among spaces, the contexts shift, and, thus, the meanings of women's behavior changes.

Confronting Sexual and Racial Binaries

Traveling between and among shifting and contradictory contexts means that Ronica has the burden of continually reconstructing herself. One of her largest self-examinations, without a doubt, has been probing her sexuality. Since the age of raging hormones fifteen, Ronica felt romantic and sexual attraction to both men and women but was unaware that she could be attracted to the latter:

> I had always been attracted to men. In fact, I had always been attracted to women, but nobody had ever told me it was okay to be attracted to women. I started going to clubs and realized a lot of the people I was going to clubs with were gay and I was like, "Whoa, I could do that too."

Ronica finds that being queer allows her more options in dating. She is no longer restricted by dominant gender and sexuality divides, along with other forms of stringent categorizations like race. Dating for her is simply a function of whom she is attracted to, regardless of any category-work:

> I don't like the word lesbian. I don't like the word bisexual. I don't like the word gay very much. None of those words really fit. I feel like it has nothing to do with whom I sleep with. I think it has more to do with the idea that my sexuality isn't defined by these boxes that we get into.

Unlike popular belief, being queer does not mean that Ronica dates every human being, is constantly in a relationship, and is perpetually having sex. She emphatically says, "It is definitely not about sleeping with somebody! I haven't slept with everybody I have dated!!!" Like most women, she has thought-provoking rules about dating:

> I tend to not have monogamous relationships with people…I tend to date men very infrequently. Honesty is a big thing for me and being open and clear about where you are coming from…My bar is being able to really relate to somebody and enjoy their company and feel like they're an exceptional person…How did I develop [these rules]? They just seemed right to me. I noticed other people doing them and other people not doing them. I am not willing to be limited by what is okay for people to do. I think really *what ends up being okay is what you feel like is okay*…

What Ronica words begin to suggest is that being queer is more than merely a gender and sexual orientation:

> Queer to me is also a political identity but it is also a product of feeling. The word "queer" is a unifying word which encompasses so many different people, and I feel an affinity with. It's sort of how I feel about the word "South Asian." I would rather use a word for myself that includes a lot of other people, because there is strength in that, rather than to use a word that puts me in a very small category of people.

Ronica emphasizes that "queer" is a political identity and a feeling. She quickly jettisons the homosexual/heterosexual duality, a major ontological dichotomy in the United States. Foucault (1990) calls for the abolition of homosexuality and heterosexuality in favor of infinity of sexualities. Similarly, Désert (1997) explains,

> "Queer" can be defined elastically to include sensibilities other than the normative with a propensity towards, but not exclusive of, the homoerotic. "Queer" is therefore a liberating rubric encompassing multiple sensibilities exclusively or in tandem. (19)

Finally, Butler (1999) argues that queerness is beyond gender – it is an attitude that begins in a place not concerned with binary oppositions. Ronica is adamant in marking the homo-hetero divide as incorrect and she is set out to redefine it.

Just as Ronica breaks up the homosexual/heterosexual binary, she defies the dating/arranged marriage construct, complicating the processes of meeting people and highlighting the many nuances involved in partnership approaches. She is open to meeting potential romantic partners in a variety of ways, ranging from dance clubs to placing matrimonial ads in *India Abroad*:

> I don't have a specific [way of meeting people]. I told my mom after a lot of coercion that I would meet someone in an arranged setting…The main reason I fight against it is because my parents won't put an ad that is reflective of me. If they were to put down what is actually true, then I would be more into it. I don't want to meet some guy who is going to be like "Who the fuck is this?" My friend and I would always talk about how we would like to put an ad in the paper to meet two gay South Asian men that would get our parents off our backs…

While Ronica is not yet thinking about marriage, like Rupa, she is cognizant that her partner will never be fully integrated into her family, even if she is involved with a South Asian man:

> I think that if I was to fall in love with somebody who wasn't trans or a woman, they would have to know where I was coming from. Everyone I have dated has known, and even the men that I have dated some of who are South Asian, that they probably won't meet my parents. They are probably not ever going to get integrated into my family.

The significance of the current discussion is multi-dimensional. Queerness has not even made its way into the thinkable – "that grid of cultural intelligibility that regulates the real and the nameable" (Butler 1991, 20). Like gender and sexuality models, the identities of South Asian-American women are fixated on binaries: the modern and independent South Asian women (Americanized) and the traditional and passive women.

Ronica cannot even begin to identify herself within this dichotomy. Her acceptance of meeting prospective marriage partners through arranged settings shows that she embraces her South Asianness, but in parallel, she takes control of her sexuality and makes decisions to support her lifestyle, i.e. her insistence that the matrimonial ads must reflect her true self. Ronica also points to the heterocentric domestic house (see Désert 1997, 22). The home's configuration presupposes gender roles and social order of age, sexuality, and ownership, prescribed by the spatial configuration of the home. It presupposes who should remain in the home and who should easily traverse the boundary that sets off home space. Like Chicana lesbians, queer South Asian women are a threat to the South Asian community (and the dominant white community) because their existence disrupts the established male order, and it raises the consciousness of many South Asian women regarding their own independence and control.

Defying and traversing dichotomous modes of conceptions has been no facile task. Like Rupa, playing multiple and contentious roles leaves Ronica feeling that defining and performing her sense of self in non-imperialist ways is far more complex than she wants it to be:

> Figuring out how to navigate that fluidity is a life long process. Sometimes you are this identity and sometimes you are this identity. I get to choose that and nobody gets to choose that for me. [But] I don't think that anyone really gets taught that you are allowed to define yourself. And so, allowing myself the freedom to define myself the way that I want is sometimes actually harder than I want it to be.

Cultural identity, for Ronica, is more than separate pieces merely coming together. It is a site of tension, pain, and, alienation that is constantly in motion (see Naber 2006, 103). Still, Ronica confidently articulates her sense of self through doing work that she loves, creating art and music, and socializing with like-minded people,

> I feel like my identity is pretty strong. I feel comfortable with who I am and where I am going in the world. I feel they aren't necessarily these terms that make me feel comfortable so much as the reality that I have created for myself.

Space and place are crucial to a sense of identity because "identity is not just about *who* you are but *where* you are" (Taylor 1997 as cited by Kawale 2003, 195). Even though most public spaces for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders are constructed by whiteness, and non-whites such as South Asians are marginalized consumers of such spaces, Ronica (and Rupa) demonstrates that queers of color do not lack power to construct space.

CHAPTER 8

Contesting the Unitary Self:
The ABCD Conundrum and Sites of Intervention

In ending the fruitful beginnings of the women's life stories, I return to the idea

that American Orientalism places and reads bodies within hierarchical binary codes,

where one has to belong to either/or categories. The ideological hierarchy posed by

Orientalism works within binary codes and allows no values in-between: "a strict

relationship of black and white, good and bad, and us and them is established" (Jain

2005, 2; see also Pigg 1996, 163-164). The discourse is characteristic of the mindset of

anorexics and bulimics who are obsessed "with maintaining a rigidly bounded self"

(Zerubavel 1991, 51).[51] Those that do not fit the binary scheme – the hybrid – "will be

excluded even from simple exclusion" (Jain 2005, 2). The community, media, and

psychological discourse are clear: second-generation South Asian-Americans have no

real placement in society – they are the ABCD conundrum.

The women in my fieldwork show, conversely, that Orientalist descriptions are

not adequate in explaining their lives. Kim's (1982) view of American-born Asian (East

Asian – mostly Chinese and Japanese and some Filipino) authors is insightful:

> For the American-born Asian, the "choice" between Asia and America was false
> because it was in reality a choice between yellow and white. When "Asia" was
> chosen, it was because "American," or white doors seemed closed. Even the
> superficially practical solution to this externally imposed cultural conflict,
> suggested frequently by social psychologists…was a false one because it assumes
> permanent and immutable inferiority to whites on the basis of race. (58)

The static composite identity of South Asians as a group is certainly a false one because

identities in general are continuously shaped and defined. My research participants'

formations of identities (both individual and collective) demand flexibility rather than

following strict principles. Jain (2005) reasons that many concepts – like "ambiguity" – originally related to the marginalized became core-concepts, and, thus, the discourse of difference itself works as a dispositive – "a repressive (power) structure that governs and excludes" (1). And Spivak (1988) argues that the traditional ways of reading texts and the traditional canon of knowledge leave out many important voices from Other Worlds. Hence, there is a growing need for academic departments to become increasingly integrated in order to better understand the world's political, social and economic issues that maintain the hegemonic cultural and economic hierarchy. In identity work, the idea of mobility translates into having many faces and facets instead of being limited to a fixed role/identity (Jain 2005, 3).

Then, what should we learn from my respondents, and how should it influence current work on im/migration studies as well as other fields of relevance in the academy? In this concluding chapter, I outline some of the lessons learned from the project. I find that the theme of identity and shifting identity best captures the class of events described in this research (lesson 1), and marginality and difference are powerful spaces in which identities are produced (lesson 2). My research highlights an individual's agency by showing how individuals use cultural practices in their everyday practices and interactions to construct, negotiate, and respond to their identities (see Jones 2001, 7). I end by offering possible solutions to rigid identity work.

Dissenting Spaces and the Changing Landscape of Otherness

Lesson 1: Identity Grammar and Shifts

My research reveals that South Asian space in America is segregated by race and fragmented through binary conceptualizations of nation(s), sexuality, and gender, but my research participants reconstitute boundaries in enabling ways within the contemporary (post-1965) South Asian-American context. The women selectively accept and maintain certain definitions while rupturing others. Like Simmel's (1950) social type "the stranger," the women in this study are integral elements of groups unmarked by whiteness and groups marked by brownness precisely because they are both outside and confronting community formations. Simmel (1950) writes, "The stranger…is an element of the group itself. His position as a full-fledged member involves both being outside it and confronting it" (402). The women's stories, in concurrence, resist essentialist and racialized notions of what it means to be both South Asian and American in America. And this Simmel (1950) would argue is their assigned position by virtue of specific interactive relations (see 402-408), "He imports qualities into [the group], which do not and cannot stem from the group" (402). Similarly, Stonequist (1937) insists that marginal persons may become pioneers and creative agents in a new social order; through the marginal person, the significance and motives of culture and cultural change are luminously revealed.

Here, my respondents highlight the problems within western feminist discourse, and they connect with Mohanty's (1988) work on the instability of race, class, and gender. The women shatter the composite single Third World Woman by showcasing the emergence of their own complex identities and cultural practices, adding to the mix of

race, class, and gender liminality and practice circulating in South Asian-American discourses. My interviewees construct notions of what it means to be South Asian women in America. They shape their identities and develop complex experiences of authentic selves by refocusing their sense of self and identity in multiple ways.

My informants' experiences are certainly race-, class-, and gender-specific negotiations of a transnational experience of crafting identity. Though, the conceptual insights gained from studying second-generation South Asian-American women should not be limited. In following Brekhus (2003), my ethnographic grounded theory remains close to the data throughout the research process, but I do not eschew broad theoretical questions for narrower substantive questions. Through my interviews, I determined that identity is the issue that best captures the class of events. I focus on broader theoretical or epistemological concerns – identity, identity grammar, and shifts in identity grammar (see Brekhus 2003).

I show through my data that each of the spaces – i.e. shopping mall versus a Bengali gathering – in which women perform their identities are based on different sets of values. That is, social space varies by the configuration and exclusivity of the groups occupying it; space may be subdivided for social purposes and framed in boundaries, such that boundaries provide configurations for experience and interaction; and, localizing of social interaction in space influences social formations (Simmel 1950; Lechner 1991). Hence, there are contentious debates and disputes over the "proper" way to perform South Asian, American, and (second-generation) South Asian-American identities (see also Brekhus 2003). The women in this study exhibit what Wayne Brekhus (2003) would categorize as "commuter" or "chameleon." My respondents, like

many of the suburban gay men in Brekhus' study, do identity as a verb and value "identity mobility." As adults, the women develop the ability to move in and out of different identities and fit into multiple social contexts. The comments made by the women I interviewed demonstrate that there is far less coherence among social groups and less uniformity in their worldviews.

I, therefore, do not attempt to develop here a general theory from a specific ethnographic case in the tradition of Erving Goffman, because like Frankenburg (1994) and Jones (2001) I find that few women are able to simply draw on one discursive repertoire to understand their identities. My interviewees could move through discourses in which they criticized American Orientalism at one moment to expressions of pride in being American and Western at another (see Jones 2001, Chapter 5). The internal contradictions in many of my interviews illustrate the struggles of my respondents to define a response to both South Asianness and Americanness that made sense to them.

An intriguing theme emerges from the empirical story: conflict has important implications for social-identity. Bauman (2004) writes about himself, "In each and every place I was – sometimes slightly, at some other times blatantly – 'out of place'" (12). Conflict is broadly integral to general identity theory development and it is often a result of most of us being not just exposed to one community of ideas and principles at a time (see Bauman 2004, 12-13). Bauman (2004) comments, "[F]inding identity to be a bunch of problems rather than a single-issue campaign is a feature I share with a much greater number, practically with all men and women of the 'liquid modern' era" (12). While the experiences of my respondents are unique, their comments are not analytically unique. The peculiarities of the women's biographies dramatize the fragmented nature of identity

or the trouble most of us have with resolving the issue of *la mêmete* (the consistency and continuity of our identity over time) (Bauman 2004, 13).

The women in this study share stories of vexing dilemmas and haunting choices that make "identity" a grave and controversial concern. Bauman (2004) writes, "Identity-seekers invariably face the daunting task of 'squaring a circle'" (10). And, "'belonging' and 'identity' are not cut in rock, and they are not secured by a lifelong guarantee, that they are eminently negotiable and revocable…" (11) Bauman argues about identity that one has to make choices, make them repeatedly, revise choices already made on another occasion, and reconcile contradictory and incompatible demands. Similar to the ways in which Bauman deals with his struggles in regards to his national identity (9-10), my informants begin to deal with identity as a task to be performed, and to be performed over and over again rather than in a "one-off fashion" (12). The women demonstrate that they are wholly or in part everywhere and not completely anywhere. They teach us that the more one practices the skills needed to get by ambivalent situations, the less overwhelming the challenges become (see Bauman 2004, 13-14).

The generic analytic lens of identity transcends the specific factual content and context of the twenty-five second-generation South Asian-American women I was studying, highlighting that identity distinctions are not only important to my informants, but I would argue also to Protestants or Democrats for example. Since "South Asian" is salient as a marked attribute within the context of U.S. immigration laws along with post-9/11, South Asian-American women are perhaps more aware of they way they manage their identity (across time and space). This makes them an ideal case study for identity management. My informants reveal the process of identity management á la Bauman

(2004) and that it is not uniquely a second-generation South Asian-American enterprise.

Brekhus (2003) writes, "One's grammatical treatment of gay identity (and I will posit, of

other identities) is seldom static over the course of a lifetime" (136). Similarly, the

women's identity grammar change over time and these trajectories are related to

variables, like age, and we should be able to see the same identity disputes across groups.

Lesson 2: Marginality as a Space of Power

My research participants' possibilities of producing their identities within various

forms of Otherness (i.e. desiness and blackness) and normativeness (i.e. whiteness)

simultaneously indicate that there is a (historical) shift in the relation of identity and

difference and center and periphery. Brooks (2002) shows through unionization struggles

in the garment industry race, class, gender, and cultural difference represents a high

value/surplus potential which can be exploited through spatial transfers. In Brooks'

study, for example, the alignment of whiteness – GAP, Inc. – with Judith Viera's

testimony, an El Salvadorian garment worker, shows raced and cultured bodies as the

driving force of the labor campaign. That is, in a global economy, images, knowledge,

and aesthetics are based on difference. Otherness becomes a source of income for the

global cultural industry, and the binary relation of Us and Other(s) no longer works

well.[52] The shift in the relationship between identity and Otherness, in effect, means

Otherness must be constructed in different ways. Jain (2005) writes,

> There exists multiple hierarchies in the (everyday) practice of differentiation, and
> the construction of otherness in this day and age occurs in a complex situation of
> manifold uncertainties and ambivalence: clear, binary differences disappear, and,
> we, therefore, have to carefully (re-)map the new landscape of difference. (1)

Attributes that were originally assigned to the marginal place of difference need to migrate to the core.

The historical shifts in an ever changing global economy, does not indicate, however, that concepts in the social sciences (i.e. cultural and postcolonial studies) used to study Otherness and difference are no longer appreciated. Chakrabarty (2000) finds that "Nativism" is no answer to Eurocentrism because the universals propounded by European Enlightenment remain indispensable to any social critique that seeks to address issues of social justice and equity. Brooks' (2002) research show that despite a "successful" labor campaign, the women working in the garment factory, DINIDEX, in El Salvador had little alternatives to participate or contest the politics of the work place. Meaning, we do not see a simple reversal in the relations of identity, Otherness, and difference. Similar modes of exclusion are still at work; the white male still dominates. But, the images attached to categories have changed.

The women's "double movements" (á la Polanyi) and multiple contradictory alliances challenge "*both* a system of rule *and* a system of knowledge and representation" (Massey 1999, 31). Soja's (1996) thoughts about space, place, city, region, and urban fabric are insightful here. Focusing on the interplay between the concept of "Firstspace" ("the directly- experienced world of empirically measurable and mapable phenomena" (17)) and "Secondspace" ("the 'conceived' space more concerned with images and representations of spatiality" (18)), Soja argues the "spatiality of human life becomes passive…two terms are never enough to deal with the real and imagined world" (19-20). Soja suggests a third possibility, "[The 'Thirdspace'] works to break down the categorically closed logic of the 'either-or' in favor of a different, more flexible and

expansive logic of the 'both-and-also' " (20). The conceptualization of the Thirdspace (or the "Other") challenges the way we look at things, the way we perceive them, and the way we seek to understand the spatiality of human life.

The difference between thinking about Orientalist stories spatially and a-spatially is considerable and significant (Massey 1999, 28). This dissertation calls for a need to construct identity in relation to an occupied space and vis-à-vis categories like gender, generation, class, race, regional distinctions, etc. (see Brady 2002). Such a critique helps to uncover how the women I interviewed create and enact racial, ethnic, class, gender, sexual, and cultural categories, and how these identity categories become a crucial tool for managing the women's lives. What is at issue here is geographical imaginations. In spatial figurations, previously unrelated temporalities may come into contact or be torn apart; places and spaces no longer represent distinct coherence, becoming the foci of the unrelated. This study illustrates that while my research participants embrace the white male order, as the "subaltern" (Chakrabarty 2000), the women also refuse to be exploited when they are incompatible to hegemonic order. In evaluating the women's stories, what I hope to offer is a conception of difference not as a fixed category but as certain relation (see Douglas 1996/2001; Zerubavel 1991; Jain 2005) and a new (imaginary) hierarchy of difference, which, however, is based on the same old hierarchies. I highlight that marginality is a powerful space in which (racial, ethnic, class, sexual, gender, and cultural) identities are produced and consumed daily.

How then do we begin to re-negotiate the boundaries of identity in order to encompass marginality and multiplicity?

Working-the-Hyphen: Re-Negotiating the Boundaries of Identity

The political, economic, and social processes that historically bind the East and West (and the North and South) points to a particular process of cultural exchange that occurs transatlanticly, through texts, readers, writers, and other critical institutions. These intersections constitute a distinctive arena of cultural power (Cohen and Dever 2002): the cultural displacement model plays a key role in perpetuating the cultural authority of the West. The ABCD construct implicates itself in the project of empire and consolidation of the nation-state. The chapters in this dissertation intervene in this process by both vindicating and challenging the imagined contours of the nation-state. The herstories of the twenty-five women I interviewed whole-heartedly propose a new approach that criticizes and examines the unclear boundaries implied in Orientalist dichotomies. Indeed, there is a call for broadening the range of "Others," highlighting the various discourses deployed to construct "Otherness" and analyze the politics of difference (see Sum 1999).

The politics of difference begins with constructed boundaries between the "East" and "West." Going beyond such binary views of inside/outside, Sum (1999) argues, "Not only are there *different types of other on the outside*, there can also be *different types of other on the inside*" (100) [emphasis added]. Like Brooks (2002, 2004, 2007/In press), Puar (1993, 1994a, 1994b), and Jain (2005), Sum demands a continual re-articulation of insider/outsider distinctions. The same discursive repertoire of the hegemonic center is still of interest, but alternative accounts are considered by inverting the otherizing cultural categories and explanations promoted by the hegemonic center (101). The

answer, therefore, is not to do away with categories or create additional legitimate categories (see Gerson and Peiss 1985).

The process of dividing is the first step in making sense out of chaos (Zerubavel 1991, 1). (Zerubavel (1991) points out that, after all, the first three days of the Creation were devoted to making distinctions!) Difference (and similarity) exists between and among groups of people and they have very real effects and consequences; difference simply cannot be erased. Second, a firm boundary "makes it absolutely clear who is included in the group" by separating "them from nonmembers" helping "members develop a distinct collective identity;" boundaries "allow us to perceive any 'thing' at all" (Zerubavel 1991, 118). Hence, there is a need for multiple identity spaces with dialectical and symbiotic relationships with each other. An expansion and blending of identity categories seems more appropriate and fruitful, where "Mutuality and interdependence replace oppositional difference and exclusivity" (Puar 1994a, 27).

In creating fluid identity categories, a flexible social order is primary: "Flexible people notice structures yet feel comfortable destroying them from time to time" (Zerubavel 1991, 120). Meaning, the flexible mind challenges and defies any rigid classification system by being aware that any "thing" can be categorized in more than one mental context. Zerubavel (1991) writes,

> Cow, for example, can be grouped together with both *cat* and *corn* as a word that begins with *c*, only with *cat* as a word that denotes animal, and only with *corn* as a word that denotes an edible object. (121)

The flexible mind promotes "plastic notion of meaning" by avoiding closure. While boundaries support the notion of separate spheres with distinct and uncrossable lines, the flexible mind suggests permeability and malleability of the lines, allowing for the

expression of commonality in a bifurcated model. Precisely in such a socio-cognitive context, Gerson and Peiss (1985) develop and incorporate the idea of permeable boundaries in gender studies. By concentrating on shifting and re-shifting boundaries, it becomes possible to interpret and negotiate bodies outside of current socialized stereotypes, reading bodies in multiple manners and not just through universalized experiences. That is, we can begin to experience a paradigm shift in our perceptions of nationality, citizenship, gender, race, ethnicity, and other identity categories, and, hence, our understanding of exactly who is an American. The idea, then, is to "work" the feature of permeability of boundaries (Fine 1994).

Visweswaran (1993), even though aware of the elements of struggle in claiming the hyphen, vehemently argues against the hyphen, writing about the differential though contradictory predicaments of the hyphen. First, the increasing currency of terms like "Indian-American" or "South Asian-American" worries Visweswaran. She argues such terms signal a "continual virulence of identity politics" in America as newer groups adopt their hyphens to others never adopting them, like immigrant Puerto Ricans (302). The hyphen in "South Asian-American" retains the imaginary in the nation-state: "It is a hyphen that signals desire (and the ability) to be both 'here' and 'there'" (302). Yet, the post-colonial nature of this hyphen should not be obscured. For African-Americans, for example, the notion of a diaspora with a "land of return" is rather problematic. Moreover, too few "Anglo-Americans" recognize the etymologies of "Native American" or "American Indian." Similarly, too few "Indian-Americans" recognize how the hyphen participates in the erasure of those continents "long before Columbus got lost" (303). The relationship between hyphenated identities and post-colonial identities reveal that it

is not possible to hyphenate all identities: "It seems strange to speak of Bengali-Indians (or Bengali-Americans)…it is not absurd to note that a Gujarati Samaj…finds potent expression on American soil" (304).

Second, the hyphen enacts a shuttling between two or more worlds (304). It is a deliberately constructed coalitional identity: "An inclusive political term of solidarity for those diverse Asian backgrounds with attempt to distance itself from the logic of nation-states" (305). And it has more often than not marked a moved towards the center in the U.S.:

> Hyphenated identities have typically signaled a politics of assimilation in this country…In fact, the place of South Asian in the U.S. has often been to work against coalitions with people of color…Hyphenated Indians are anxious to prove that they too stand for the same liberal values of 'competition' and 'free market'. (305)

Third, and finally, Grewal (1994) suggests that encompassing a hyphenated identity emphasizes multiculturalism rather than a continued critique on the State and the U.S. as an empire:

> Absent the examination of the narration of the "American" nation as well as of the continued incorporation of racial inequalities in the movements of transnational capital and labor…the debates on assimilation and nonassimilation might elide the important projects of complicity with and utilizations of difference by transnational capital. (53)

While I agree that studies of acculturation are highly problematic, I, against Visweswaran and Grewal's wishes, confidently offer a hyphenated identity as a solution.

Butler's (1997) notion of the performative as political strategy multiplies the sites of possible intervention:

> Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure opposition" but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure. (241)

By opening the epistemological space for contestation from within the regime(s) of power, Butler makes possible feminist challenges to patriarchal authority in the terms and on the grounds of the authority itself. A flexible and fluid understanding of American (and South Asian) provides more viable choices for minority groups. Working the hyphen makes it possible to explore, perform, and exhibit the experiences of living simultaneously in multiple places, cultures, languages, and realities at once - the solution to Othering. I reconnect with both Purkayastha (2005) and Maira (2002) here. The forty-eight interviewees in Purkayastha's study demonstrate through pan-ethnic identities that they are both attached to heritage and celebrate reinvention of (new) traditions, often in the same temporal and spatial locations. Maira's in-depth, open-ended interviews with twenty-four Indian American college students show that the second-generation produce and participate in performances of culture that simultaneously remix elements of " tradition" and "modernity", "the authentic" and "the hybrid" (195). The experiences of the women in my research call for a theory of identity in cultural practices that transcends old binaries of essentialization, while still being able to encompass both possibilities as aspects of the lived realities of social actors (see also Maira 2002). The hyphen, even within hegemonic tropes, allows us to realize immigrant cultural productions in problematic ways and articulate transnational connections which oppose narrations of the nation as a state.

In former years, South Asian writers in America expressed a desire to belong to the main currents of American life and culture. Today's writers, like Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni (1995), Tanuja Desai Hidier (2002), Jhumpa Lahiri (2003), and Samina Ali (2004), are still concerned with defining their identity and roots in America. Only

recently has there been an increased awareness of multiplicateous elements involved in identity-making for South Asian-Americans, especially women, through performing arts collectives, like *Mango Tribe*, *Yoni Ki Baat: Talks of the Vagina,* and *The Secret Life of My Vagina*, and documentaries, like *Brown like Dat: South Asians and Hip Hop* (2005). The poets, artists, and performers who regularly participate in such projects give rise to a new voice that reflects diverse tendencies. In all fairness, there are fluctuations in the recent literature between self-contempt and self-affirmation, however, like the women who belong to the performing arts collective, more contemporary South Asian-American writers need to challenge old myths and stereotypes.

As I approach my final words, the women in my fieldwork are constructing diasporic identities that simultaneously both assert a sense of belonging to the locality in which they grew up in and also proclaiming a "difference" that marks their experiences of being an "Other." Contrary to the clash of culture thesis, women are not abandoning cultural traditions, but, rather, they are re-defining them both within the context of an imagined "true" South Asian culture and hegemonic U.S. nationalism. Sandoval (1990) would argue that a reconstituted understanding of these women is based on a "self-conscious flexibility of identity" and not a unitary sense of self (66). My respondents show that they are pushing up against the boundaries of old structures and helping to reconstitute the boundaries in more enabling ways within a South Asian-American post-1965 context. The twenty-five women I interviewed indicate that being a South Asian-American woman means that they (and I) live our lives within different, multiplicateous, contradictory, and complex experiences. Together, the women excitedly show us what it means to be human, what we are connected to, and what we are separate from. In this

way, we can remind ourselves of Trinh Minh-ha's (1991) description of becoming Asian-American:

> Becoming Asian-American affirms itself at once as a transient and constant state: One is born over and over again as hyphen rather than as fixed entity, thereby refusing to settle down in one (tubicolous) world or another. The hyphenated condition certainly does not limit itself to a duality between two cultural heritages. (157)

Reconfiguring the boundaries of identity may seem infeasible and even unfathomable now. In the aftermath of terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, the Department of Justice used immigration laws to arrest and detain over 1,100 immigrants, and Arabs and Muslims are now the most visible and feared racialized illegal immigrants, immigrants, and citizens (Ngai 2004). I revisit Rupa's poignant words here,

> I was born here [the United States] but there is part of me that feels like I do not belong here. I currently embody everything that the majority of, at least eligible, voters hate. *I am queer, Muslim, and brown*. What else is there?

Ngai (2004) writes, "Even as immigrants have become larger and more visible part of American society, alienage remains a conspicuous category of legal, cultural, and political difference" (269). Nevertheless, the twenty-five second-generation South Asian-American women's stories encourage us that it is at this moment of rigidity that resistance should be mobilized.

In this project, I set out to explore what it means to be a second-generation South Asian-American woman and how South Asianness, Americanness, and South Asian-Americanness are constructed. My interest is in how individuals contest, reject, and affirm their identities in everyday interactions using cultural practices. Although we have seen the possible linkages between "second-generation" and "ABCD," most evidence has pointed to ways in which these notions of South Asian-Americanness are essentialized

stereotypes. My interviewees actively engage with simplistic definitions of both South

Asianness and Americanness to reinterpret them, reject them, or reinvoke them. But, the

women work to construct their identities by supplementing their hegemonic definitions of

South Asian and American with their own, more individualized versions. This study

shows that no one way exists to define a second-generation South Asian-American

identity.

Although the study focuses on one group, my findings are important for other

groups. I have analyzed how individuals carry out identity work to help construct their

identities, and I have investigated the emergent status of identities. Despite the

discourses of naturalness that surround identities, in similar fashion to Jones (2001), I

have pointed to their dynamic, contested, and contradictory characteristics. In ending,

what I try to offer in this dissertation is a better articulation of South Asian-American

ethnic theoretical perspectives, using the perspectives as a case study to make larger

comments on the nature of identity. Mohanty (1988) proposes that a better theoretical

model involves intersectionality, constructing the category of women in a variety of

political contexts with identity variables that often exist simultaneously and on top of one

another. Like Mohanty (1988) and Anzaldúa (2001), I have tried to produce an analysis

that is politically focused and highly context-specific, mindful of links between women

and groups of women without falling into false generalizations, and that acknowledges

both the contradictions and commonalities in women's experiences. Still, my

respondents confront and rupture the discursive horizon of identity theory. What the

women I interviewed in this study show us about identity is indeed relevant to a general

theory of identity. The world views and identity management strategies of my

respondents inform us about the ways in which social actors create, organize, present, and transform their identities. Through the women's voices, I address the need to and how to discuss complexities – a much necessary direction in identity theory within the context of im/migration studies.

APPENDIX A

RESPONDENT EVALUTION

Dear Participant:

Thank you so much for taking the time to take part in this study. Your involvement in this project has allowed me to produce invaluable research on a topic that requires much needed academic and social attention. The study is now complete and I hope the report I have written accurately and successfully represent your voice and your story. If you choose to read the report, then I would greatly appreciate it if you could take a moment to respond to this evaluation. The evaluation will enable me to partially measure the effectiveness of the study. Please type in your answers within the body of this MS Word document. The "X" indicates where you should begin typing your response. Upon completion, please email this document to me as an attachment at rokbad@gmail.com. If you have questions or concerns about the evaluation, or you need to contact me for any other reason, please email or call me (408-688-4771).

Sincerely,

Roksana Badruddoja

What did you learn about yourself in reading this report, if anything?

X

Of all the things discussed in the report, which one interested you most?

X

Which aspects of the report did you agree with?

X

Which aspects did you disagree with?

X

What areas would you like to hear more about?

X

How did you feel after reading the report?

X

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE[1]

Filing/Transcript Identification Information

Interview #:

Tape #:

Date of interview:

Length of interview:

Introduction and Statement of Confidentiality:

The focus of the interview is to understand how South Asian-American women think

about themselves. I am trying to identify the key issues with which women struggle,

adapt, or conform to in order to make sense of themselves and their social worlds. How

women speak about these struggles will provide an insight into how they experience the

world. I will suggest the topic areas below as starting points for our conversations.

The interview is confidential - I ensure that your identity is accessible only to me and my

research adviser - and we will go at your pace. You must tell me if you want to spend

more time on answers, go back over material, and raise issues and questions I may not

have considered. Please feel free to question me during the interview if you need

clarification about anything, and please let me know if you are uncomfortable at any

---

1 This interview guide is loosely based on one created by Anne Byrne for her study entitled "Singular Identities: Managing Stigma, Resisting Voices" (2000) published in *Women's Studies Review* (Vol. 7, Pp.13-24), and by one created by Katharine W. Jones for her dissertation entitled "Accept on Privilege: Negotiating English identities in an American context" (1998) at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. I wish to thank them for allowing the use of their interview guide and other printed material.

point in time. Lastly, the interview guide is only a guide, it may seem repetitive. And, you may refuse to answer any question if you wish.

Interviewee/Interview Identification Information

Name (or pseudo name):

Address:

Phone # and E-mail:

Interview #:

Tape #:

Date of interview:

Length of interview:

Construct 1: ON BEING…YOU

In this section, I would like to discuss your sense of self or who you are. I have a series of questions to get our conversation started. However, feel free to address other issues that you think are related to your sense of self.

What words, phrases or labels come to your mind when you think about yourself as a child of immigrants? What does being these descriptions mean to you?

What words, phrases, or labels would you use to describe your heritage or ethnic group? What does being these descriptions mean to you?

If someone were to ask you, "Tell me about yourself," what would you say or how would you describe yourself?

What forces do you think has helped you to see yourself in the ways you have described to me so far?

How do you think your family members see you? If they had to describe you, what would they say about you? What about your friends? Can you speculate what strangers would say?

In the instances you just described to me, in what ways do you think you match or don't match the image(s) you think are drawn about you? How does this make you feel and why?

Tell me about some scenarios where you were really conscious about yourself, and what you did in those situations? Include what aspects of yourself you emphasized and de-emphasized here.

Are there any situations in which you felt embarrassed by being who you are? Can you describe some of these situations to me, again including what aspects of yourself you emphasized and de-emphasized.

Can you describe some situations where you felt the need to explain or defend who you are to others? Include what aspects of yourself you emphasized and de-emphasized here. How did this make you feel?

Are there times where you felt excluded by being who you are? Please describe some instances to me.

What do you think you miss out on or are constrained by, by being you, if anything?

On the other hand, what do you think you gain most by being who you are?

Are there times where you felt proud of who you are, privileged of who you are, or being you worked for you? Describe some instances to me, including what aspects of yourself you emphasized and de-emphasized here.

Describe some situations in which you felt a sense of belonging by being you.

Finally, how do you think any of what we have talked about today would be different if you were a man? Could you just speculate? How about if you were not a child of immigrants? What about if you were not (race/ethnicity/heritage she identifies, if any)?

Construct 2: BARGAINING WITH IDENTITIES

I would like to know some things about your daily life now. I will suggest several topic areas to discuss. Some of the topics are related to each other and some are not. If you feel that changing from one topic to the next is disrupting your train of thought and our conversation, please feel free to take a moment for yourself. Before I introduce these particular topics, I was hoping that we could talk a little bit about your routines and then discuss your thoughts on culture.

First…

Think about a typical day in your life and walk me through it. What kinds of things make up your routine during a typical week? A typical weekend?

What aspects of your day you just described make you feel like good about yourself?

Make you feel bad about yourself?

Second…

If we define culture broadly as the ways people eat, dress, talk, spend their leisure time, etc., what do you consider to be your culture?

What aspects of what you just told me about culture do you value and de-value?

Food

What do you typically have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner?

What would be a treat to have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner?

Can you describe how you were introduced to some of these food items?

Tell me about some of the dishes you like to cook and in what situations you would cook these items?

How do you organize your cooking ingredients in your kitchen cabinets?

Entertainment

What do you do for entertainment during the week (books, magazines, movies, tv, etc.)? Weekend?

What radio stations do you listen to?

How do you arrange your music, movies, books, etc.?

Language

What languages do you speak and how were you exposed to these languages?

Can you describe situations in which you would speak these languages?

Are there situations where you mix these languages? Describe a scenario to me?

Festivities

What would be an ideal holiday or holidays for you?

How do you celebrate these holidays, touching upon who you celebrate with, what you wear, what role you play in these events, etc.?

Clothing

Can you tell me what you would wear throughout a typical weekday? Weekend? How about on special occasions?

Given what you have just told me, can you describe your sense of style and how you developed it?

Describe how you arrange your clothing in your closet and drawers?

Religion

Can you tell me a little bit about the role of religion in your life and how it has developed such a role?

Friends

Tell me a little bit about some of your close friends.

Can you describe how you met some of your key friends?

The Party Circuit

Describe a typical night out to me from beginning to end.

How does going out make you feel?

If you had to share the events of a typical night out with your family members, how would you describe the evening to them?

Education & Work

Describe your educational history to me.

What role has education played in your life and why it has played such a role?

How did you come to choose your field and profession?

Tell me about your professional life. What do you do at work?

How would you describe yourself at work?

If your co-workers had to describe you, what do you think they would say?

What do you have on your desk at work?

Activities

Describe your involvement in politics, voluntary activities, or community affairs.

Can you explain how you became involved in such activities and what they bring to your life?

Family

Tell me a little bit about your family and what role they've played in your life.

Can you describe some of the experiences you've had while growing up in you family?

What about your siblings' experiences?

Tell me a little bit about your extended family members such as you grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins?

Coupling & Parenting

What kinds of rules do you have about coupling practices such as dating and marriage?

How did you come to develop these rules?

Can you tell me about what you think some of the satisfactory ways of meeting eligible partners are?

Do you think you can describe some of the expectations your family and friends have of you in terms of coupling?

Can you tell me a little bit about your coupling experiences?

If you have children, tell me about your children?

Can you describe your feelings about being a mommy?

Miscellaneous

When you moved in your place of residence, what things did you do to make you feel more at home here?

What are a few things you do to cheer yourself up when you feel down or lonely?

Construct 3: DEMOGRAPHICS

Respondent will complete before the interview.

Construct 4: ENDING REMARKS

The interview is over…

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Are there any questions you want to ask me?

Finally, what did you think about the interview?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Study of the Self-Identities of South Asian American Women
Fall 2004

Research Study:

I, Roksana Badruddoja, am working on a dissertation at the Department of Sociology at

the Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. I invite you to participate in a study that

is designed to help understand how South Asian-American women think about

themselves. This consent form gives you detailed information about the research and in

what ways you will be asked to participate. After reading this information sheet, <u>if you

still wish to join the study, please provide your initials on each page and your signature

with a date at the end of the form.</u> Please return the form to me when we meet. If you

need additional information and have question or concerns, you are welcome to contact

me and/or Dr. Ethel C. Brooks, my adviser. Our contact information is listed below.

Purpose:

I am interested in your experiences and narratives. The goal of the study is to outline

how South Asian-American women think about themselves and how they articulate their

sense of self to others; how they think others see them and what language others use to

talk about them; what forces shape their identities; and what aspects of their identity they

maintain, adapt, adopt, and reject; and how do they accomplish all this.

Procedures:

You are asked to voluntarily take part in this study by sharing your experiences. I will

conduct an autobiographical interview with you, recording our session to later be

transcribed for analysis. <u>If you agree to be audio taped, then please provide an additional</u>

<u>signature with a date for audio tape consent at the end of the form.</u> The interview session

should take approximately two to four hours to complete**,** and we do not have to complete

the session in one sitting. In May 2005, I will share the transcript results with you for

your feedback in the form of a written evaluation. And, you are welcome to contact me

to obtain final research results in August 2006.

Subjects:

A sample of twenty-five women will be asked to participate in this study. I will contact

participants from social and cultural organizations and electronic forums across the U.S.

Risks & Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks to any of the procedures used in and for completing this

study. However, if you feel that participating in this research has caused you

psychological injury, please contact me or my adviser. We will provide you with a list of

trained mental health professionals working in your area. Your health insurance carrier or

third party payor will be billed for the cost of any mental health services you access. You

will receive no direct benefit from participation in this study, but it may help us to better

understand the social placement of South Asian American women in American society.

Confidentiality:

To ensure your privacy, any information that is obtained in connection with this study

and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only

with your permission or as required by law. When the results of the research are

published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal

your identity. Research data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home, and my

adviser and I will be the only ones to have access to the interview material. Finally, as

mandated by law, all research data will be destroyed by January 2010.

Costs & Payments to the Subject:

There will be no financial costs or financial payments to you for your participation in this

study. Additionally, refusal to participate will involve no penalty, and you may withdraw

at any time without penalty (please notify me if you decide to withdraw). You can also

refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

And, I may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing

so. For instance, if necessary information is incomplete, I may not be able to use the data

in the final analysis.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about this study, please contact:

Roksana Badruddoja Rahman (Principal Investigator)

Department of Sociology at Rutgers University

54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854-8045

Tel: (732)241-4894   Email: rbadruddojar@yahoo.com

Dr. Ethel C. Brooks (Adviser)

Departments of Gender and Women's Studies & Sociology at Rutgers University

162 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Tel: (732) 932-9331   Email: ebrooks@rci.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the

Sponsored Programs Administrator at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects,

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 3 Rutgers Plaza, New Brunswick, NJ

08901-8559, Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104, Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Thank you for your time.

Signatures for Consent:

I understand and agree with the statements above and I consent to the terms and stipulations of the study.

Respondent Signature_____

Date _____

Investigator Signature_____

Date _____

I consent to being audio taped during the interview session.

Respondent Signature_____

Date _____

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

Dear Participant:

In order to spend more time together discussing important and interesting issues during the interview, I would greatly appreciate it if you could answer these questions as best as possible before our meeting. There are 21 short questions that should not take more than 15 minutes to answer. Please type in your answers within the body of this MS Word document. The "X" indicates where you should begin typing your answers. Upon completion, please attach this document to an email to me at rbadruddojar@yahoo.com. If you experience problems emailing the questionnaire to me as an attachment, please contact me via telephone (732-241-4894). If you have any other questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me via email or telephone.

Sincerely,

Roksana Badruddoja

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1. How old are you? **X**

2. Where were you born? **X**

> If non-U.S. birth…

> a. How old were you when you immigrated to the United States? **X**

> b. How old were you when you were naturalized? **X**

3. Which city and state did you primarily grow up in? **X**

4. Where do you live now? **X**

5. Between the ages of 0 and 18, did you ever visit South Asia? **X**

If yes…

a. What areas in South Asia did you visit? **X**

b. What was the frequency of these trips? **X**

c. What were some of the reasons for the visit? **X**

6. Between the ages of 0 and 18, did you ever temporarily live in South Asia?

If yes…

a. Where in South Asia did you live? **X**

b. From what ages did you live there? **X**

c. What were some of the reasons you temporarily lived in South Asia? **X**

7. Where was your mother born and raised? **X**

8. Where was your father born and raised? **X**

9. Which South Asian country or countries do you consider as your ancestral heritage? **X**

10. Which South Asian language(s) are you most comfortable speaking, if any? **X**

11. What is your religious affiliation, if any? **X**

12. What is your highest degree earned and from what academic institution? **X**

13. What do you do for a living? **X**

14. What is your marital/coupling status? **X**

15. Do you have children? **X**

If yes…

a. How many, and what are their ages and sexes? **X**

16. Do you live with anyone? **X**

If yes…

a. Who are all the people living in your household? **X**

17. Pooling together the wages and earnings of everyone who lives in your house, what is the income they all bring in together in one year? **X**

18. Are you a homeowner? **X**

19. Where do your parents live? **X**

20. What do they (your parents) do for a living? **X**

21. Starting with the oldest and ending with the youngest, please tell me the following things about your siblings: gender, age, current marital status, occupation, and the highest level of education they completed? **X**

NOTES

1 This project is an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved and confidential study. I allowed the women to choose their pseudonyms. In most case, my respondents felt comfortable in using their birth names. Some women chose alternate names and some asked me to provide an alias.

2 American Orientalism is a view that incorporates a socially-constructed division of the world into two distinct and mutually exclusive categories with particular hierarchical features attached to each side, one that empowers "whiteness" (and maleness and heterosexuality) and marginalizes non-whites (and femaleness and non-heterosexuality) (see Fanon 1986; McIntosh 1988; Puar & Rai 2002). The principal use is in reference to the values U.S. Orientalism imputes to the two zones. The bulk of U.S. intellectuals saw the Orient as poor, unfree, and ahistorical, marking the Asian as undynamic and placing Asia under a Eurocentric rule and gaze (Prashad 2000, 12). The Orient is also imagined as feminine - passive, spiritual, and traditional, and in contrast, the Occident is frequently configured as masculine - aggressive, rational, and modern (Yoshihara 2003). Yet, within the gender divide in Orientalist traditions, the sexual norms of the Orient, such as the "Middle East," are interpreted as paradoxically repressed and perverse – the Orient is "the site of carefully suppressed animalistic sexual instincts" (Puar 2004, 526). The occidental constructions of the Orient, then, tend to posit the East as the polar and frequently inferior opposite of the West (Said 1979): the "East" is static and unfree and the "West" is dynamic and free.

3 A "shalwar kameez" is an outfit for women consisting of loose pants, a long tailored shirt, and a long piece of material draped over the chest.

4 Pollution, uncleanness, or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained. It breaches classifications and is anomalous or ambiguous (Douglas 2001, 2).

5 Such "polarization" or "mental fencing" is characteristic of boundary-work (mutual exclusivity), and it is a way in which individuals (or organizations) can simplify and order their environment (Zerubavel 1991).

6 For example, Blacks are made visible and invisible at the same time under the gaze. When Black youth are seen it is often with a specific gaze that sees the "troublemaker" "the school skipper" or the "criminal." Thus they are seen and constrained by a gaze that is intended to control physical and social movements (Kelly 1998, 19).

7 In the way that "second-generation" is used in this study, Samina Ali and her protagonist Layla are both part of the first cohort of the 1.5 generation, arriving to the U.S. after 4 but before 13. Nevertheless, Ali's text falls under the rubric of second-generation South Asian-American literature.

8 Watching Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman's "Born Into Brothels" (Motion Pictures Academy of Arts and Sciences 2005), a documentary about the red-light district in Calcutta, audiences are immune to another Sonagachi, one where sex workers have organized for their rights, won battles against police harassment, registered significant gains against Human Immunodeficiency Virus, and where there is a vibrant movement for the legalization of the profession.

9 One does not have to consciously negotiate/reject/appropriate/manage identity in order to be an agent (Freeman 2000).

10 To Samina Ali's credit, she develops a complex representation of women's agency within the constructs of gender, class, and sexuality. Ali vividly illustrates Layla's efforts in terminating her pregnancy from a previous relationship – a white boyfriend from college who would sneak into her bedroom at night – soon after she arrives in India for her marriage. Ali additionally touches upon sexual experimentation between Layla and her female cousin Henna during her trips to India; to eventually succumbing to her marriage; to using oral sex, the help of an alim's mystical powers, and the offering of a Green Card as weapons to woo her new husband (who at the end of the narrative reveals that he is gay). Like the women in this study, Layla manipulates the dynamics of gender and culture in multiple ways.

11 I offer personal story here. Growing up in white, upper middle-class suburbia, I was far too comfortable with the privileges of being "white." Through the interviews, my connections to whiteness and brownness changed in parallel ways. A lucid example lie in my relationship with my mentor and dissertation advisor Ethel C. Brooks, whom I initially read as a "typical"/stereotypical white American female body in academics interested in third world feminist studies. My interactions with Ethel began in a graduate course she offered in methods in Fall 2002. In her introduction on the first day of class, she mentioned that she lived in Dhaka, Bangladesh for some time to conduct research for her dissertation. When it was my turn to introduce myself, I felt the need to state that my parents consider themselves to be from Bangladesh, but I also wanted to make clear that I am a second-generation American of South Asian descent. I was taken aback and discomforted when she publicly greeted me in Bengali as a response to my introduction in class.

A series of interactions between us that semester left me uncomfortable not only with Ethel but also with myself. I felt inadequate because Ethel spoke "my language" better and was more familiar with "my customs." However, over the course of my residence in the department since August 2000, interacting with particular faculty members and colleagues and embarking on this dissertation, I have become more comfortable "in my own skin." Eviatar Zerubavel handed me my first Rabindranath Tagore novel, and Alena Alamgir welcomed me into the program precisely because of my Bangladeshi heritage! The changes in my relationship with Ethel moved from my treatment of her as an "outsider" and my own insistence upon my whiteness to interacting with her as an "insider" and treating myself as "brown."

12 I have edited my respondents' quotes into a readable form, including cutting repetitive words, rearranging the order of the narratives, and simplifying elaborate explanations (see Naber 2006). Still, I maintain the originality of the women's words as much as possible.

13 For example, Mohanty (1993) argues that the construction of femininity and masculinity among Hindu-Indians, especially in relation to the idea of the nation, are central to Hindu fundamentalist rhetoric and mobilization. She writes, "Religious fundamentalist constructions of women embody the nexus of morality, sexuality and Nation…Women are not only mobilized in the 'service' of the Nation, but they also become the ground on which the discourse of morality and nationalism are written" (356).

14 In October of 1965, amendments to the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act repealed the national origins quota system (Ngai 2004).

15 In 1964, the U.S. and Mexican government-instituted Bracero program of 1942 ended, a program under which more than three million Mexicans – and many blacks from the Caribbean – entered the U.S. to labor in the agricultural fields. (Massey 2002).

16 Under the lottery program, 55,000 people are randomly selected by computer each year for purposes of achieving diversity from countries with low percentages of immigration to the U.S. Applicants have to meet certain education and financial requirements in order to be eligible. In addition, employers had to certify a migrant's eligibility for labor before having them.

17 The model minority image exacerbates the threat of competition among older residents or citizens, and economic frustration among unemployed laborers fan racial antagonism, leading to violent assaults against South Asians. In 1987, youth gangs known as *Dot Busters* (in reference to the red dot or *bindi* many South Asian women wear in the middle of their foreheads) attacked and murdered several members of the community in Jersey City (Prashad 2000).

18 The first desis or people of South Asian descent came to North America in the late 1700s as workers on Yankee clipper ships that traded between New England and India (Prashad 2000). More arrived decades later as indentured servants, and in the wake of the indenture migration came a "tide of turbans" or Punjabis to the western coast. Between the late 1800s and early 1900s, more than six thousand Punjabis entered the United States through Canada, Washington, and then California (Prashad 2000). Many Punjabis who ended up in California had served overseas in the British Indian army or police in China and crossed the Pacific for better wages in railroad, lumbering, and agricultural work. On arrival in California, a few sold tamales from carts in San Francisco, but the majority began as migrant laborers, moving in groups with a "boss man" who knew English and made contracts with employers (Leonard 1992). Indian-Americans became the newest members to be targeted by the San Francisco-based group Asiatic Exclusion League who, by 1909, successfully pressured U.S. immigration officials to deny admission to Indian immigrants (Maira 2002). Still, Punjabi men continued to arrive in the Imperial Valley in California between 1900 and 1917 for permanent settlement (Leonard 1997).

19 The desi immigrant most commonly enters U.S. political discourse by highlighting lack of individual economic growth for South Asians in America (Prashad 2000). A study conducted by Maxine Fisher in the 1970s found that most Indians did not find work commensurate with their qualifications (Prashad 2000). In 1995, the Glass Ceiling Commission reported that despite high qualifications, Asians did not rise within their firms or institutions (Prashad 2000). More recently, Hyun (2005) exposed both personal and organizational barriers to success for Asians in corporate America. Nevertheless, rumors of opportunity, success, and rapid mobility circulate among desis and hopefuls "back home."

20 The world and home divide is grounded in an "insider/outsider" distinction. South Asians generally distinguish between "insiders," family members and close friends, and "outsiders," all others (Das Dasgupta and Warrier 1997). Personal matters are concealed from outsiders at all costs. When a woman, for example, discloses private information such as physical abuse to an outsider, she brings shame to

herself and her family. A transgressor is usually considered a traitor and may be sanctioned by being excommunicated (Das Dasgupta and Warrier 1997).

21 Immigrants are the fastest growing component of the American population and their presence has made the racial and ethnic composition more complex, reshaping neighborhoods, economy, and politics. There are more than 30 million foreign-born persons in the United States, together with their children, accounting for 70 percent of the growth in the nation's population. They come from virtually every country in the world and range in background and socioeconomic level. These flows show no signs of declining, and hence, the U.S.-born and/or reared children's course of adaptations will set the long-term character of ethnic communities (Portes 2001).

22 The second-generation respondents in CILS believe that no matter how much education they attain, they will always be subject to the effects of discrimination and are astutely aware that that they must sharply increase their educational attainment in order to reach the upper half of the "hourglass" labor market.

23 The United States generated a great demand for industrial labor during the first three decades of the twentieth century, which many first-generation European immigrants filled. With the continuing labor demand, second-generation Europeans entertained the possibility of gradual upward mobility without much need for advanced degrees. By the 1960s, the structure of the market changed due to the influence of technological innovation and foreign competition. The manufacturing sector was replaced by the service sector, bifurcated into menial jobs versus professional jobs.

24 Labor market conditions include the availability of jobs that accept or even prefer immigrant workers versus a labor market prejudice against particular immigrant groups. Local social relationships involve the public perception in a local area of particular immigrant groups and their "co-ethnic communities" (co-ethnic communities refer to the level of social solidarity and pooled access to resources of ethnic communities). Public perception can range from seeing immigrants as positive contributors to society (myth of the ideal minority group) versus viewing them as a drain on resources. And, co-ethnic communities can either assist new immigrants by providing preferred access to resources or ignore new immigrants.   Finally, immigrant parents' human capital affects the educational outcomes of their "American" children; parents with higher levels of education are in a better position to support their children's adaptation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

25 The musical fusion allows for a certain amount of social fusion. However, both Prashad and Maira warn that these new cultural products do not necessarily create a "hybrid" youth; the only black people on the South Asian-American music scene are security guards (Maira 2002, 12). In this regard, Maira shows how the adoption of black styles by desi youth is less part of a rebellion against power structures and more about taking a generational stance against parents.

26 Maira provides two central explanations for the coexistence of a hybrid culture with a valorization of authenticity. First, ethnic segregation on college campuses and multiculturalism demand the second-generation to enact in authentic performances of being Indian rather than participating in the coming of age rituals of normative American youth culture. Second, and more importantly, due to the parents' fossilized version of Indian culture and stress on its incommensurability from the American, and the youths' own experiences of racial and cultural stigmatization, the second-generation actively engage in compartmentalizing between their "Indian" and "American" lives while growing up. The stories Maira shares with us speak to the role of boundaries and marking insiders and outsiders in Indian American youth subcultures and the ways in which being Indian has always been defined against those who are not truly Indian (14).

27 Portes and Rumbaut (2001) explain that there is a single, "right" way for all second-generation children to adapt to American life; the most successful of the second-generation are not those who quickly learn "American ways," who switch from their parents' language to English, and fit in seamlessly at school, but rather those who grow up under the umbrella of an ethnic community and nurtured by old-country customs and traditional mores. This phase of selective acculturation will eventually pave the way for future generations to become "full-fledged Americans."

28 Purkayastha (2005) includes the first cohort of the 1.5 generation (ages 6 to 13) in her conceptualization of the category "second-generation."

29 Theorization about the difference between first- and second-generation South Asian-Americans in terms of tension between contrasting desires to both assimilate and present ethnic identity is an important and much needed direction in the general sociology of immigration beyond the specific South Asian case. With the current data set, I am unable to explicitly theorize much more than I do about this difference. This is a

project that I hope to work on in the future by incorporating the voices of first-generation immigrant parents.

30 Dasgupta and Warrier (1985) that while the countries that constitute South Asia are all separate nations and the regions are not monolithic, they share 5,000 years of continuity in time and space that allows one to consider them as a social and cultural whole.

31 I am interested in understanding what kinds of practices citizenship evokes, where it is enacted, and what is its site of activation. In this dissertation, I argue for a definition of citizenship that draws less on drawing national/physical boundaries and more on symbolic terms. I, therefore, divert my attention from merely linking citizenship to legal rights and protection under the law, opting for a flexible, dynamic, and dialectical understanding of citizenship. Ong (1999) coins the term "flexible citizenship" to refer to people who live and work in one country while seeking citizenship elsewhere. Ong's framework allows me to make distinctions among wealthy South Asians who travel to the U.S. simply to give birth for citizenship rights and then return to their homeland versus those children who arrive to the U.S. as infants and remain here.

32 Even though sociologists dissent from a simplistic understanding of race, the repeated use of race as a conceptual category has the potential of homogenization within a category (Martin and Yeung 2003). Yet, to rely on the arbitrary nature of boundary-making in order to ignore the role race plays in American life is absurd. Bonilla-Silva (1999) argues that while race is contingent, it is also socially real. Racism remains an important mechanism of cultural production and reproduction in the U.S. Race, then, is commonly understood as a key category in American culture, but there is no consensus as to whether and how to use it. The forced antimony of race, racial identity, racial discrimination, and perceptions of race make race a key issue for contemporary sociological analysis. Though I suggest that racial differences are important, I do not imply that the issues surrounding racial difference are settled or normalized. In other words, I use race in my analysis - my choice is deliberate and reflexive - but I refuse to subscribe to simple, essentialist, biological theories of race. For example, in constructing the interview guide for this study, I did not offer the term "race" or constructed racial categories to talk about the women's lives in America. Rather, I hoped that my research participants would offer labels to describe themselves. I began the interviews with general questions about where the women thought they traced their heritage and lineage to and what that meant to them. The dialogue about heritage and lineage quickly turned to geographic areas in South Asia to race and ethnicity.

33 Visweswaran (1997) argues that even as we move away from a racially bifurcated system, the centuries-long black and white polarization simply cast the identities of South Asian groups in the U.S. as either symbolically whitened or blackened, or to place Asian groups in a mediating position between blacks and whites.

34 "NRI" is an official category developed by the Indian government to refer to people of Indian heritage who live abroad. The purpose of such a category is to provide financial incentives to Indians living abroad in order to encourage direct investments to India.

35 Poore (1998) writes, "The term 'Asian' which should include South Asians, continues to privilege East or Southeast Asians, rendering South Asians as the nonexistent among Asians and non-Asians alike. I have actually talked to East Asians who do not consider South Asians to 'be' Asians because they have never recognized 'that part of the world' to be part of Asia. Rather, they see South Asia and Asians to be off by themselves somewhere" (25).

36 Though British imperialism unified South Asia as never before, the British conquest opened the age of modern imperialism, changing the content of old social identities – agrarian based – to positioning new ones along national lines. Literate urban cultural activists – mostly Brahmans – produced national identities (1905-1920) that by the end of the nineteenth century mobilized public support to challenge British supremacy in the name of nationalism (Ludden 2002, 141). The provincial public mobilization of national identity around official identities produced strident opposition to Congress called an end to communal representation, particularly in Bengal and Punjab (see Ludden 2002, 218-221). The administrative partitioning of states along linguistic lines in independent India in 1956 coupled with the multiple partitions of the war-torn area made Hindi-Brahmin-Indian ascendancy possible.

37 Even though I, as a Bangladeshi-American, continue to make such slippages, using "Indian" and "South Asian" interchangeably to refer to myself and all things connected to the South Asia, I recognize the nationalist and class motives behind the labeling process.

38 Islam (1993) exclaims, "South Asian is a category fast catching on in academic and literary arenas. However, some of us remained invisible in the new name, devoured by the multicultural zeal. The ideal of multiculturalism assumes that everyone placed in these categories has equal space and voice within and between them. But a new hierarchy has emerged in which certain voices have been privileged and have developed their own hegemonic power…I wanted to know why Indian Americans wanted to claim the term South Asian when they were speaking only of themselves" (242-243).

39 I have chosen the name "Shaam" and "Sam" to protect Padmini's confidentiality.

40 The present socio-economic account includes women but the narrative is far less than gender-neutral. Women rarely appear as actors in economic literature. When they do appear, it is in the form of the unskilled labor market on the production side and on the consumption side, they are consuming agents within the context of their role as cultural transmitters. Raghuram (2003) writes, "In such analysis material culture are preserved through the consumption practices of diasporic women" (69). Here, then, consumption is not only for pleasure but it is also part of duty.

41 See also e-article entitled "Culture clash for Asian teens" by Nerissa Pacio in South Herald (June 29, 2004) (http://www.sunherald.com/mld/sunherald/living/9035886.htm).

42 "Code-switching" is selecting or altering linguistic elements in order to contextualize conversational interaction.

43 The women I interviewed suggest to me that the ways in which Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are celebrated in America are an expression of "white" culture, often times leaving out holiday traditions of other Americans like blacks and Latinos. Unanimously, the women in this study equate America and Americans to whites and whiteness. For example, Urmila says, "Regardless of whether rap and hip hop are popular in white clubs right now…I still…feel like a typical American person is this white sort of mainstream…"

44 The significance and consequence of apparel dictates my own attire for interviews with women. Spending significant time with my research participants during their off-work hours meant that I would wear casual clothing. On most occasions, I wore jeans and semi-form-fitting t-shirts with matching hoodies. The one time I wore dress pants and a formal blouse with heels, I felt distant from the woman I was sharing steaming coffee and bagels and cream cheese with while talking to her about intimate details of her life. She arrived in my hotel room with a faded pair of jeans and an equally comfortable top. Even though the woman and I are close in age, I felt much older than the woman, like I was her mother or older sister. I also felt more poised and mature - authoritative. I expect that meeting women in a sari or shalwar kameez would have provided for an equally distancing situation, one dictated by the first-generation versus second-generation model.

45 While my focus on consumption may perhaps be culturally deterministic, like Raghuram (2003), my attempt is to overturn the economic determinism of production studies model and to recognize the spatio-temporal contingency of the products and processes. In other words, I study meanings without posting those meanings as universal.

46 Even though caste is a socially-constructed entity, it is an example of a status system and it is a form of social closure (Aneesh and Borocz 2000).

47 Rushdie (2005) maps traditionalism and modernism in the context of Islam in ways that reify the category "backward Muslim" (see e-article entitled "Muslims unite! A new Reformation will bring your faith into the modern era" in TimesOnLine, August 11, 2005, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,1072-1729998,00.html).

48 Visweswaran (1994) suggests that contradiction (and silence) is a site of resistance to social structures and to hegemonic ethnographic practices. Visweswaran argues that listening to contradictions is a tool for examining the unvoiced workings of cultural ideology and resistance. By doing so, I learn that I must preempt the narrative linearity assumed by white liberal gazes and I must envision this dissertation as a project of building non-linear narratives and chronologies with no fixed beginning and end.

49 "Sam" and "Samantha" are pseudonyms that I have chosen to protect Rupa's confidentiality.

50 Unlike many of the women in the ethnography, Ronica identifies her friends within gender, sexuality, race, and occupation constructs. Some of Ronica's closest friends include her ex-partner who is a queer South Asian woman activist of mixed race, a white transman - transitioning from female to male - who works as a waiter in a local restaurant, another white transperson who is a student and loves to talk about race and class, and, finally, her best friend is a queer white woman who is a double leg amputee studying to be a physical therapist.

51 In opposition to a rigid mind set is the fuzzy mind. The fuzzy mind feels aversion toward all boundaries, challenges conventional and arbitrary distinctions, and gravitates toward ambiguities. Its mental fluidity represents semi-post-modernist ideology and characterizes the worlds of infants, before individuation, which is "manifested in pronounced preference for open, unbroken spaces over bounded, compartmentalized ones" (Zerubavel 1991, 85).

52 Said (2001) was acutely aware of the pervasive power of imperialism as one of the major causes of globalization. So too, Brooks (2002) argues that multinational corporations or MNCs are the masters of the new imperialism in a globalizing world.

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May 1996   Bachelor of Science in Advertising (Illinois State Scholar)
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PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

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August 1998 -   Human Rights Executive Director, Khizer Foundation International,
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