Violence Against Women in Bollywood Cinema:

Exploring Gender Differences in the Indian Diaspora

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

This dissertation explores images of violence against women (VAW) in Bollywood cinema, a widely-viewed form of popular culture based in Mumbai, India. Using qualitative methods, this exploratory study fills an important gap in the literature by investigating how Indians who are not US-citizens in the United States perceive, define and interpret the portrayal of VAW in these films. First, the study investigates participants' interpretations of gender and VAW in Bollywood, and further examines if their interpretations reflect their real-life knowledge and observations about VAW. Next, demographic differences among participants will be explored. Using feminist frameworks and a sociological lens, this study draws upon thematic film analysis of women-oriented Bollywood films, film screenings, and eight gender-specific focus groups (N=35).

Gender differences were noted among the participants in the study especially how they interpreted images of men and women, and VAW in Bollywood cinema. Drawn from real-life knowledge and experiences, participants demonstrated awareness of being able to identify different forms of VAW, with some participants providing their definitions (or what it means to them) and its consequences. The female participants defined and identified particularly sexual and domestic violence as not having choices, not having a voice, being forced to have sex or be intimate or being verbally humiliated, and being battered. But most of the male participants perceived violence as mainly physical abuse against the women, and did not identify forms of harassment or verbal intimidation as a type of violence. Second, all the participants strongly believed that gender roles in Bollywood cinema were interpreted through the representation of one-dimensional, stereotypical characters for both men and women in films. However, cultural differences and post-colonial influences were noted among their interpretations of gender roles in their day-to-day lives between India and the United States, with the latter being more progressive and positive. Third, the female participants' interpretations echo the existing literature on the social construction of the raunchy and sexually explicit dance songs in Bollywood cinema and other representations of women. Women

constructed as sex or beauty objects have been purposely made for the male audience, and is intended to be viewed through the male gaze. The female participants expressed concern about the negative messages conveyed by the dance and song lyrics depicted in Bollywood cinema, while two male participants interpreted them as a sign of sexual liberation and women empowerment. Last, exploring this sample of Indian participants' historical, privileged, sociocultural background, and bicultural identities within the diaspora provided an in-depth perspective on their constant negotiation and balance of cultures between their homeland and adopted land. By focusing on this unique group of Indian diaspora in the U.S. and their interpretations of images of VAW in Bollywood cinema has also led to a better understanding of their attitudes and knowledge about gender and gender-based violence. In summary, this group of Indian diasporic group of participants was hopeful to see progressive portrayals of women in recent genres of Bollywood cinema versus stereotypical, sexist and negative images.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Violence against women (VAW) in India is a serious public health epidemic affecting women across all ages, social classes, castes, economic status, education levels, employment status, and geographical regions (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Bhat & Ullman, 2013). Over the past three decades, advocates against gender violence from the Lawyer's Collective, Majlis Law, Breakthrough and other organizations have been working night and day in India to fight for women's rights, to assure their safety, and to provide resources to those affected by gender violence. Few survivors of sexual and domestic violence, including dowry-related violence, report their victimization to the police or their families. When survivors do report, they have been ostracized, publicly shamed and victim-blamed—resulting in secondary victimization (Bhat & Wodda, 2013; Chakravarty, 2015[1]; Lawyer's Collective, 2009; The Prajnya Trust, 2009).

Despite the tireless advocacy of organizations working to reduce gender violence, India grabbed national and international headlines as "no country for women" as New Delhi, the capital of India, was dubbed the "rape capital" (Chakrabarty, 2016). On 16 December 2012, the horrifying gang-rape and death of 'Nirbhaya[2]' (which means fearless), a 23-year old physiotherapy student outraged the nation (Bhatnagar, 2016). Following her death in New Delhi, people organized public rallies, candle light vigils, national debates. There were protests and clashes against the police, accompanied by hundreds of newspaper articles resulting in a radical public discourse on women's status and safety in India (Langton, 2013; Mehta, 2016). The public debates and panel discussions hosted by national news channels raised questions about factors leading to unsafe and hostile environments for women (i.e. cultural norms and popular culture) and identified ways to prevent this cycle of violence (Gopal, 2012; "We the People", 2013). One of the common recurring themes

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[1] For example, the case of late Suzette Jordan, a rape survivor, fought her whole life to bring her perpetrators to justice. http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/suzettes-story/ -Chakravarty, S. (2015).
[2] The Indian Penal Code prohibits media from revealing the victim's name so her real identity was hidden, until her parents agreed to reveal their daughter's real name to the press to commemorate her bravery and courage. The nation lovingly called her 'Nirbhaya', which means fearless in India (Bhatnagar, 2016).

revolving around these televised debates was the role and impact of the Bollywood[3] film industry. Some argued that because full-length feature commercial Hindi[4] films objectified women, mass consumption of this entertainment could be regarded as contributing to sexist, patriarchal and negative attitudes towards women (Indo-Asian News Service, 2013; Manohar & Kline, 2014). Although the current study does not intend to establish a cause-effect relationship between popular culture and its impact on VAW, it is important to examine how representations of women and violence against women in films may inform and shape individual perceptions and attitudes. This chapter begins with an explanation of the purpose of this research followed by an overview of the study. It ends by addressing the research questions and the potential contributions of this study and an outline of the dissertation chapters.

A.   **Purpose of Study**

There is existing literature on how audiences[5] respond to and interpret commercial Hindi films made in India, particularly Bollywood cinema. Using feminist and film and cultural studies perspectives, several scholars have analyzed audience reception to Indian films and investigated the history of cinema, representations of gender, communal violence, diasporas and popularity of this cinema in India and abroad (Banaji, 2005 & 2006; Derne, 1995, 1999 & 2000; Dwyer, 2000; Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004; Manohar & Kline, 2014; Mathur, 2002; Mishra, 2002). However, there is very little emphasis on how audiences perceive and interpret the images of women and violence against them depicted in one form of popular culture in India, particularly Bollywood Hindi cinema. Until now, scholars have focused on the question of what media does to people, i.e. effects of media. This project instead explores the question of 'what people do with the media' borrowed from Schlesinger, Dobash, Dobash and Weaver (1992, p.5). One critical question this study seeks to answer is: What does the audience make of images of women and VAW in Bollywood films? To

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[3] Bollywood cinema is one of the many film industries existing in India. There is regional cinema in every geographical region of India, depending on the dominant spoken and written language used by the local population.
[4] Hindi is one of the dominant languages used in India. Bollywood films are primarily in Hindi as the spoken language.
[5] The term 'audience' and 'film-viewers' are used reciprocally in this study.

date, there have been no studies that primarily use feminist frameworks to analyze how Indian audiences perceive and interpret images of VAW in Bollywood Hindi films. Furthermore, the existing literature fails to address any gender differences in how film audiences interpret VAW in films. More importantly, researchers have focused on studying Indians living in India or settled abroad. The group of Indians who reside in the United States on temporary visas have, so far, been overlooked. This qualitative dissertation will attempt to address these gaps in the literature. In the next section, an overview of the study and research questions is presented.

B.   Study Overview

An exploratory qualitative research framework was used to obtain in-depth insight into the perceptions and interpretations of film audiences who watch Bollywood cinema. Since the purpose of the study is to explore images of VAW in India and their implications, this study focuses on Indians. There has been no study conducted to determine how Indians living in the United States on a non-immigrant (or non-citizen) visa interpret images of VAW in Bollywood cinema. Despite the growing body of literature considering the diasporic population[6] in gender and popular culture studies, not much attention has been given to this group of Indians.

In this study, qualitative data was gathered from eight gender-specific focus group interviews (N=35) after the films were screened to the focus group participants. Further, the questions used in the focus group interviews were drawn from key themes emerging from analyzing selected Bollywood Hindi films. The participant sample for the eight gender-specific focus group interviews included eligible Indians (18 Male, 17 Female, N= 35) who were born and raised in India, living in the United States on a temporary/non-immigrant/non-citizen visa status (at the time of the study, i.e. 2013), who had arrived in the U.S. in 2003 or later (i.e. 10 years before the study was conducted, 2013-2014).

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[6] Diaspora has been defined as "the notion of dispersion of an ethnic population outside its traditional homeland" (Wickramasekara, 2009, p.1)

Important themes were identified from the analysis of films and focus group data along with demographic profiles of the 35 participants. The focus group data was analyzed to recognize the ways in which the unique context and demographics of Indians living in the U.S. might play a role in interpreting the images of VAW in Bollywood cinema. Further, this project also challenges the larger conceptual framework of how gender is socially constructed in these films, such as gender roles and gender relations (Banaji, 2013; Tere, 2012, See West & Zimmerman, 1987). To summarize, the current study aims to better understand how cinematic representations of gender roles, relations, and occupations influence how audiences interpret VAW in Bollywood films.

C.   **Research Questions**

The primary objective of this research is to investigate gender differences in how Indians temporarily residing in the U.S. interpret images of VAW in Bollywood Hindi cinema. In order to address this issue, this study poses three additional questions:

1.   How do Indian film audiences look at, interpret and react to gender roles and gender relations depicted in Bollywood films? In other words, how do these popular culture images compare to their day-to-day observations and experiences of gender roles and gender relations in India and/or the U.S.?

2.   How do Indian film audiences perceive, interpret and justify the prevalence and nature of VAW depicted in Bollywood films? How do their interpretations of VAW depicted in Bollywood films differ from their personal experiences and the experiences of others they know?

3.   Do film audiences' unique demographics, upbringing and other sociocultural factors play a role in their interpretations? How is this manifested?

D.   **Potential Contributions**

This study aims to contribute to an in-depth understanding of how film viewers interpret and react to portrayals of VAW in popular culture using feminist lens. Secondly, this research attempts to add to the existing feminist scholarship on gendered representation in Bollywood cinema in India,

particularly in regards to how these gendered representations may support environments that condone or condemn gender-based violence. Finally, this study is distinctive due to the demographics and context of the sample used for focus group discussions. Indians who were born and raised in India and are now living in the U.S. on a non-immigrant visa are often overlooked in studies due to their transition from one country to another. Additionally, this study also acknowledges the role and importance of examining this privileged group of Indians who have got the opportunity to study, work or live abroad. Hence, investigating this overlooked group of Indians' perceptions and interpretation is essential. The data resulting from the questionnaires and focus group discussions with this subtype of non-immigrant population will provide an in-depth insight about the differences in perceptions and interpretations of this particular group of Indian diaspora, in terms of their background, demographics and other contextual variables.

Third, the interdisciplinary nature of this study will add to the existing literature in the field of criminology, gender and women studies, film and cultural studies, and popular culture. The objective of the study is not to discourage film-makers from contributing to Bollywood cinema or to urge film audiences to avoid viewing these films. Indeed, numerous Hindi films made in India do address social issues, initiate dialogue, create awareness and social action, and portray women in a healthy, non-objectified, non-sexualized way. The key idea is to utilize the findings of this dissertation to closely examine and investigate this unique population sample's film interpretations and real-life knowledge and observations about VAW.

E.   Dissertation Outline

This dissertation consists of eight chapters, including the Introduction section (Chapter 1), the contents of which are outlined in this section.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the problem of VAW in India. The chapter first describes the historical and sociocultural context of the status of women in India and further outlines the definitions, extent and nature of VAW. The second section addresses risk factors such as the culture

of silence and rape myths that contribute to normalizing VAW. Third, the theoretical explanations of VAW particularly in India using a feminist lens are explored, thus explaining some of the sociocultural risk factors. Fourth, the images in popular culture are explained using social construction theory of gender. This section reviews studies of portrayal of women in popular culture in India with an emphasis on representations of women in Bollywood cinema. Summarizing this literature will provide a picture of what studies have been conducted to date in the field of criminology and gender studies. Fifth, this chapter analyzes the impact and influence of Bollywood as a form of popular culture in and outside India, especially in the United States. The next section will further review research that has analyzed images of women in popular culture. This chapter ends with summarizing the literature and its gaps, thus underlining the contributions of this study.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodologies used in the study, starting with explaining the rationale of using qualitative methods. The first section of this chapter explains the impact of my background and personal experiences in shaping my research assumptions, role and positionality. Second, I describe the role of using feminist perspectives in framing of some components of this study such as identifying research methods, highlighting the data collection and analysis phase, and discussing the results. The third section explores the types of qualitative frameworks employed in the study, with an emphasis on the rationale for using thematic film analysis, film screenings and gender-specific focus group interviews. Next, the steps in collecting data using qualitative methods are listed and explained, especially the technicalities, logistics and the hurdles faced during this phase. This chapter concludes with reviewing how the focus group data from this study was prepared, organized and analyzed.

Chapter 4 puts forth a comprehensive profile of the participant population which will contribute to an in-depth understanding of the findings of this study. The chapter first explores the contextual and demographic profile of Indian participants who are not US-citizens. Second, a reflexive analysis is provided drawn from participant observations and memos, in-group dynamics

and narratives, and interactions. Third, the participant demographics in the current study are further explored with a focus on the distinct historical, sociocultural and contextual demographics of this specific Indian diasporic group and what they bring to the table in terms of their interpretations. The next three chapters discuss the results of the study.

Chapter 5 explores findings about participants' interpretations of gender roles and gender relations depicted in Bollywood cinema. To investigate how participants perceived and interpreted VAW, it was important to first scrutinize how they made sense of gender roles and relations both in popular culture and their day-to-day lives. This section further attempts to address the questions of: (a) what kind of themes emerged from analyzing the focus group data for this question posed to the participants, (b) how were men and women depicted in the films screened during the study, and (c) did these images reflect what participants observed and knew in their real lives? Second, the participants' comparisons between gender roles and other portrayals in Bollywood and Hollywood films is outlined. The chapter ends with participants' experiences of living away from home and discussing if their immigrant background has influenced their film interpretations.

Chapter 6 analyzes the findings of how participants define, identify and interpret VAW based on the images in popular culture, and knowledge and experiences in their daily lives. This chapter combines the results from two of the research questions first on the film viewers' way of defining and interpreting images of VAW in Bollywood cinema. Secondly, it addresses if the participants' interpretations reflect their real-life knowledge and attitudes towards VAW Next, it addresses participants' interpretation of risk and protective factors and identifies consequences of VAW. The chapter concludes by highlighting other critical themes that emerged during data analysis such as participants' interpretations of help-seeking by abused women, and possible changes in their knowledge and attitudes towards VAW due to their positionality in the diaspora.

Chapter 7 presents findings regarding gender differences in how Indians interpret images of VAW in Bollywood cinema. In order to better understand the study findings—theorizing the possible

role of acculturation and assimilation in possibly influencing the participants' responses is important due to their unique demographic. This chapter ends by highlighting how participants compared both Indian and the U.S. cultures, hence providing additional insight about the study.

Chapter 8 describes the implications of the findings of this study followed by the study limitations. Next, describes the new directions for research such as recently released genre of films in Bollywood with leading female protagonists, social issues of gender equality and positive notions of feminism and healthy masculinity being depicted in the recent genre of films. Last, recommendations for further research and education are provided.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Women in India often encounter abuse by their spouses, family members, and strangers, and are regarded as subordinate members of society due to their gender (Bhat & Ullman, 2013). Police records (National Crime Records Bureau, 2006; 2008) and empirical evidence demonstrate an increasing trend and never-ending cycle of oppression and atrocities committed against women in the form of violence (See Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005), sexual harassment (Lawyer's Collective, 2009), violations of human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Prajnya Trust, 2009) and degradation of women (Prasad, 1999; Vindhya, 2000). Therefore, it is extremely important to investigate and understand how the historical past of India may have shaped and influenced the image and status of women in Indian society.

This chapter reviews a growing body literature on VAW in India. It examines definitions, extent and nature, and sociocultural risk factors. Violence against women in India has been extensively studied by scholars, social service and research organizations and feminists in terms of its definitions, trends and patterns, consequences and feminist interventions to deal with this growing health epidemic. This chapter also reviews the legal, sociocultural, and historical context of VAW. Also, legal definitions, incidence and prevalence, and consequences of VAW in India are summarized. This literature review also explores feminist theoretical frameworks and reviews studies conducted on images of women in popular culture in India, particularly Bollywood cinema.

A.   <u>Historical and Sociocultural Context of Women in India</u>

Few scholars in India have pointed to the significance of India's historical context in shaping the cultural representations and experiences of women. This context plays a critical role in determining the role of women, their status in society and the kinds of oppression they experience. For instance, Uma Chakravarti (1989) argues, "men and women in India, whether or not they have formally learned history, carry with them a sense of the past which they have internalized through the transmission of popular beliefs, mythology, tales of heroism and folklore" (p. 27). Chakravarti

analyzed ancient literatures of India, namely the *Vedic* and *Buddhist* scripts and discovered how these writings were partially responsible for constructing the image of women in terms of duties of the 'faithful' Hindu wife and widow (1989). These ancient Hindu scripts emphasized that the goal of the Hindu woman should be "*pavitrata dharma*" which means devotion to the husband (Chakavarti, 1989 in Sangari & Vaid, 1989, p. 33). Hence, most of the research on colonialism pointed to the idiosyncrasies embedded in Hindu civilization and the oppressive and cruel practices perpetrated against women. In addition, communal and ethnic-centered violence in India has historically played a pivotal role in reinforcing gender-based violence and oppression against women.

Ethnic-centered violence during the Partition between India and Pakistan in 1947 sparked a series of extremely violent communal riots and civil wars between Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and other ethnicities, leading to bloodshed, hatred, and loss of family and property. It is essential to understand the role and status of Indian women within the context of the cultural and political narration of the Partition violence, especially the emergence of the gendered Hindu-Muslim ethnic violence that took place post-1980 (Butalia, 1998; Daiya, 2008; Menon & Bhasin, 1998). As Kavita Daiya (2008) states, "…disenfranchised as sexual objects, communal commodities, and patriarchal property, by both the nation-state and their relations, hundreds of thousands of South Asian women experienced multiple forms of gendered and sexual violence during the Partition" (p. 65).

Scholars have also analyzed oral testimonies and historical archives of the partition of the northern state of Punjab in India in their studies. The findings demonstrated numerous hidden histories of mass rape, abduction, and state recovery of the women affected. The brutal and horrifying experiences of women during the Partition symbolized their traumatic, anguished, and painful past (Butalia, 1998; Menon & Bhasin, 1998). For instance, Chakravarti (1989) puts forth the position of women articulated by James Mill in his work on the history of India:

Hindu women were in a state of dependence more strict and humiliating than that which is

ordained for the weaker sex-Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt, which Hindus

entertain for their women- They are held in extreme degradation, excluded from the sacred

books, deprived of education and (of a share) in the paternal property…that remarkable

barbarity, the wife held unworthy to eat with her husband, is prevalent in Hindustan [India]

(In Sangari & Vaid, 1989, p. 35).

Thus, religious and ancient texts suggest that women not only have experienced struggles in

fighting for their position within the society, but also in the formation of their national identity in

India. Women's suffering of such violence led to the construction of a particular kind of womanhood

in India (Chakravarti, 1989). Similarly, feminists have also explored the intertwined relationship

between religion, traditional customs and oppression of women in the colonial era. For example, the

age old practice of *sati* had been justified as a religious act in religious scriptures. The practice of *sati*

means that a widow does not have the right to live after her husband dies and she is, therefore,

expected to jump into the burning pyre of her deceased husband. Even though the British rule

attempted the abolition of *sati* by criminalizing it in 1829, some have argued that widows were

unable to back out of practicing this custom, and were instead coerced into *sati* by relatives (and

society) for their own gain (Mani, 1987).

Hence, religious practices, ancient traditional customs and scriptures in India can be

considered responsible for constructing the image of women as oppressed, subordinate, helpless and

lacking a voice and safe space to express their concerns. These representations also contribute to a

culture condoning VAW. Similarly, South Asian scholars like Kavita Daiya (2008) argued that men

and women experience ethnic violence differently and these gendered experiences have a profound

impact on their lives. Feminist critiques of nationalism pointed out that the Partition post-1947 had

become a battleground for the regulation of gender, community, national identity and belonging in

South Asia. It also contributed to the "representation of masculine citizenship and ethnic/secular

coupledom, refugee and immigrant experience" in India (Daiya, 2008, p. 25).

Feminists analyzed the communal riots and violent conflicts between members of different ethnic groups located in India and Pakistan due to the ethnic-centered violence that took place during the Partition in 1947. This historical aftermath of the Partition also resulted in violence against women by the opponents in conflict (Butalia, 1998; Daiya, 2008; Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Feminist scholars like Urvashi Butalia (1998), Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin (1998) and Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997) have analyzed the experiences of abducted women in the late 1940s and early 1950s in India during this spate of ethnic violence. For instance, Butalia (1998) showed "how abducted women were denied the right—theoretically every citizen's right—to choose where they wished to live once they were recovered by the state operations of both countries" (p.66). Another form of humiliation and overt form of violence experienced by these abducted women occurred when "the women of one community are sexually assaulted by the men from another community. Such men did so in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous humiliation of the 'other' by 'dishonoring their [the other ethnic group's] women'" (Menon & Bhasin, 1998, p.66).

Thus, oppression of women in India is not a recent phenomenon but instead is a historical and sociocultural end product of victimization and objectification by religious communities, political bodies and the colonial state. These entities silenced women's voices and denied agency to victimized women, so that they were unable to discuss their traumatic experiences (Kleinman, Das, & Lock, 1997). Nonetheless, these sociocultural and historical narratives of women's experiences with oppression, trauma and violence likely contributed to by the present role and status of women in the society. To further highlight the seriousness of VAW in India, the prevalence and incidence studies will be reported in the next section. First, how different forms of VAW are defined as per law will be addressed.

B.   <u>An Overview of VAW in India</u>

Considerable discussions have taken place among criminal justice practitioners, researchers, policymakers, feminists, and social service workers about what VAW in India encompasses and how

to identify it (Agnes, 1995; Bhat & Ullman, 2014; Daiya, 2008; Prajnya Trust, 2009). However, there are inherent and inconsistent underlying notions of how the criminal justice system, lawmakers, healthcare professionals define different types of VAW. Violence against women has been described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse which cuts across geographical, racial, social and economic boundaries in the world" (Chhabra, 2005, p. 772). In 1993, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of VAW provided one of the consensus definitions of VAW:

> Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not to be limited to, the following: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation… (Mathur, 2004, p. 23)

The Declaration explains that VAW results from gender and power inequality between men and women and manifests in physical, psychological, and economic violence both in public and private life, thus requiring governmental action (Fried, 2003). Purkayastha, Subramaniam, Desai, and Bose (2003) summarize most of the feminist literature in India through their definition of VAW:

> …Any form of coercion, power, or control perpetrated against a woman by her intimate partner or extended kin and includes physical, sexual, verbal and mental abuse. In its broadest sense, the definition of violence against women in India also includes topics such as sex-selective feticide (a recent form of violence), female infanticide, and discrimination against women. (p. 505).

Although there is a large amount of literature available in India defining different forms of VAW (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Jaswal, 2000; INCLEN, 1999; Prasad, 1999), this review is limited to studies on forms of sexual violence, domestic, and dowry-related violence in India. To demonstrate the scope, incidence, and serious consequences of VAW in India, it is essential to examine the legal

definitions of domestic violence, dowry-related violence, marital rape, and non-spousal rape and sexual harassment.

1. **Domestic violence**

As per the section 498A of Indian Penal Code (IPC), the criminal law on domestic violence includes any cruelty to a woman by her husband or his relative and will result in a prison sentence of up to three years and a fine. The law further clarifies that cruelties must be interpreted as any 'willful conduct' that may coerce or drive the woman to commit suicide or injure herself (either physically or mentally). The law also criminalizes harassment by any person who is coercing a woman with illegal demands for any money, property or security when a woman is unable or refuses to meet the demand (Bhat & Ullman, 2014, pp. 7). It is important to note that these laws are only meant to protect women when applied to heterosexual couples.

Further, the Protection from Domestic Violence Act and Section 498-A highlights another subtype of domestic violence prevalent in India, namely dowry-related violence and deaths. Scholars assert that marriage and family are extremely critical to India's cultural background but these institutions are also where dowry-related violence takes place (Derne, 1994; Misra & Lowry, 2007; Segal, 1999). Some local organizations like the Lawyers Collective have worked hard to reform laws that criminalized domestic violence but also protected abused women at home. Established in 1980, the Lawyers Collective, a non-governmental organization based in New Delhi and Mumbai, promoted the women's movement to strictly implement laws preventing domestic violence. The Protection from Domestic Violence Act, introduced by the Indian Parliament, was declared to the public in 2002. The Lawyers Collective shunned the original version of the Act because it focused on protecting the abusive husband and validating wife battering. Furthermore, women were not protected at all from their abusive perpetrators in their marital household based on the Act (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Bhat & Ullman, 2014).

Despite the numerous and continued efforts by these agencies and women's organizations, the criminal justice and legal systems in India fail to provide justice to survivors or penalize the perpetrators. Another form of VAW prevalent in India that may co-occur with domestic violence is dowry-related harassment and abuse of women. In the next section, the practice of dowry and dowry-related violence in India is further described.

2. **<u>Dowry-related violence</u>**

The traditional practice of dowry in marriages provides the sociocultural context for triggering domestic violence in India. Johnson and Johnson (2001) state that a dowry can be described as "the property given to the daughter by her parents and family to take her into marriage" (p.1056). The practice of dowry is pivotal to the institution of marriage in some subcultures and states in India because it is "an ancient tradition that involves an ongoing series of gifts both before and after the marriage to appease the husband and the family" (Kumar, 2003, p.31; See Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Bhat & Ullman, 2014; Tichy, Becker & Sisko, 2009).

In cases where the brides' families are unable to meet the dowry demands, young brides in India are often harassed and tortured, both physically and psychologically, by their husbands and in-laws (Kumar, 2003). Women are placed at higher risk of experiencing domestic and dowry-related abuse if they offer lesser dowry amounts to their husbands, resulting in the in-laws' dissatisfaction and further demand for dowry after marriage (Babu & Babu, 2011; Bloch & Rao, 2002; Rocca, Rathod, Falle, Pande & Krishnan, 2009). Unfortunately, the cycle of violence does not stop for many women even if the dowry demand has been met on the wedding day. The bridegrooms and their families often use dowry as a weapon to terrorize the young brides and demand more money and increase materialistic gains. Some abused women are unable to bear the violence and trauma perpetrated due to dowry and may be killed or be forced to commit suicide (Kumar, 2003; Prasad, 1999; Rudd, 2001).

The worst stage of dowry-related violence is termed 'dowry-burning' where the husband and in-laws pour kerosene on the wife/daughter-in-law and burn her alive. These forms of extreme violence are often disguised as 'accidental reasons' or 'kitchen accidents' reports and justified by the husband and his family to the law enforcement officials (Bhat & Ullman, 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Vindhya, 2000). Although laws criminalizing domestic violence aim to prevent husbands and their relatives from abusing women when the dowry is insufficient or absent, the law still fails to protect these women from being attacked in their own households (Srinivasan & Lee, 2004).

With the implementation of the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961, the practice of gifting and receiving dowry in India was criminalized. Because this law was not strictly enforced and unsuccessful, amendments were made to the Act in 1984 and 1986 (Bhat & Ullman, 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 2001). Based on the 'Dowry Death' statute amendment made to section 304 of the IPC, a husband and his relatives would be charged with a crime if his wife died of non-natural causes within 7 years of their marriage (Bhat & Ullman, 2013). Most importantly, it is a crime if a husband and relatives had harassed his wife just before her death. Nonetheless, like other laws criminalizing VAW in India, these amendments for the Dowry Prohibition Act have been futile in curbing the prevalence of dowry-related violence in India (Bhat & Ullman, 2013; Greenberg, 2003). The next section looks at the definitions of some severe forms of sexual violence prevalent in India, namely marital rape, non-spousal rape and sexual harassment.

3.   Marital rape

 In India, marital rape is still not recognized as a criminal offense (Nussbaum, 2002; Sahni, 2017). According to Das (2010), marital rape is defined as "unwanted intercourse by a man on his wife obtained by force, threat of force or physical violence or when she is unable to give consent. In the definition, the words 'unwanted intercourse' includes anal, vaginal and oral penetration perpetrated against the wife's will or without her consent" (pp.62). But the Indian legal system has no separate clear-cut definition addressing marital rape. Based on the Section 375 under the Indian Penal

Code (IPC), if a husband has coerced sex with his wife aged 15 years or older without her consent, then he cannot be convicted for rape. Further, the punishment is less severe for even those few who are prosecuted, especially in cases where the wives reported their sexual violence (Gable, Gostin & Hodge Jr., 2008).

Therefore, the criminal justice system overlooks the serious consequences of marital rape on survivors and fails to recognize marital rape as a criminal offense deserving severe punishment. Basu (2005) further points out two troubling discrepancies in this law. First, rape within marriage is not deemed punishable by the law if the woman is older than fifteen years. Second, coerced sexual intercourse by a married man is punishable by law only if the woman is legally separated from the husband and not living in the same household. Most importantly, Basu (2005) argues that "it must be remembered that situations of marital rape occur within the confines of the home, therefore there are no witnesses to the crime" (in Bhat & Ullman, 2014, p.9). The law against marital rape is complicated and has loopholes that allow husbands to escape prosecution for raping their estranged wives. Forced sexual intercourse is recognized as an offense punishable by 2-7 years of imprisonment if the husband forces his separated wife (living in a different household) in nonconsensual sex (Bhat & Ullman, 2013), however, due to the location-specific context and marital context of the couple, many survivors of marital rape may not come forward to report their victimization. In addition to marital rape, women in India are often victims of rape by non-spousal perpetrators and experience sexual harassment in public places and workplaces, both of which are reviewed.

4. **Non-spousal rape and sexual harassment**

The IPC identifies rape (Sec. 375) and sexual harassment (Sec. 354) cases as the only offenses identifying forms of sexual violence (Kaul, 2007; Lawyer's Collective, 2009). According to IPC Section 375, rape is defined as:

… [a] When a man has sexual intercourse with a woman, against her will, without her consent; [b] with her consent, when consent has been obtained by putting her or any person in

whom she is interested in fear of death or hurt, with when she believes that he is her husband,

[c] with her consent, when consent was given due to unsoundness of mind or intoxication or

administration of stupefying/unwholesome substance because of which she is unable to

understand the nature and circumstances of her act, [d] with or without consent when she is

under 16 years of age…[e] To constitute sexual intercourse, vaginal penetration is essential

(Khan, Bhattacharya, Bhuiya, & Aeron, 2008, pg. 1).

Furthermore, Wax (2008) points to the shortcomings in the law and other reasons such as

family pressure, shame, guilt and inefficient judicial process outcomes. Many of these women may

not even be aware that they are being victimized, especially survivors of marital rape who are older

than 15 or those experiencing other forms of non-penetrative sexual assault (Bhat & Wodda, 2013;

World Health Organization, 2003). However, the World Health Organization (2002) defines rape as

"an act where the survivor has been sexually assaulted in any of the following forms: (1) sexually

violated, (2) penetrated by force, (3) vaginal penetration, non-consensual, (4) anal penetration, non-

consensual and (5) penetrated by an object" (Khan, Bhattacharya, Bhuiya & Aeron, 2008, p.1).

Thus, these laws criminalizing rape in India show that sexual coercion in marriage and marital

rape have been neglected in the legal or judicial systems in India. This neglect reflects the tacit

tolerance of VAW in Indian society (Gangoli, 2007). After the Nirbhaya gang rape case, anti-rape

laws in India through the were amended to widen the definition of rape in the Indian Penal Code.

These changes were made to include the multiple forms of sexual abuse endured by women,

particularly marital rape (Sanyal, 2013). Unfortunately, official police and social agency reports in

India do not provide statistics of how many women reported their victimization under these new laws

and how much has it been implemented. Hence, in the absence of such data, it is critical that we

examine the studies of nature and extent of the problem of VAW in India.

C.   __Extent and Nature of VAW in India__

Besides physical, sexual, and psychological abuse inflicted on women by their husbands, other forms of domestic abuse include wife battering, marital rape, dowry burning, and pushing women to commit suicide (See IIPS/ Population Council, 2009; INCLEN, 1999; Krishnan, 2005, National Crime Records Bureau, 2006; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005; Santhya, Haberland, Ram, Sinha, & Mohanty, 2007; Sharma & Gupta, 2004). Since 1953, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has annually compiled and published the crime statistics of all 35 states and union territories as well as 35 megacities at the national level (National Crime Records Bureau, 1986). In 2006, the National Crime Records Bureau reported that every 3 minutes, one crime was perpetrated against a woman; every 15 minutes, one report of molestation was registered; every hour, one sexual harassment report was filed; and every 30 minutes, a rape case was filed (National Crime Records Bureau, 2006). During the first quarter of the year 2008, the capital of India, New Delhi, also called the rape capital, reported filing more than 300 rape and molestation cases (Khan et al., 2008). Next, I focus on studies that describe the nature and extent of various types of VAW in India.

1.   <u>Domestic and intimate partner violence</u>

The criminal justice system in India does not identify intimate partner violence as a separate category but does address the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence perpetrated by the spouse. In a study conducted by Chhabra (2005), a total of 2,000 female healthcare seekers and their accompanying friends and relatives were randomly selected and interviewed by social workers in India. Out of the 2,000 women respondents, 49.6 percent of women reported having been physically assaulted. In addition, 67.47 percent reported being assaulted by their husbands followed by 4 percent by the mother-in-law, 18.3 percent by the father-in-law, and 16.9 percent by other family members and multiple perpetrators. At least 40 percent of those assaulted were physically injured, bruised, burned or had fractures (Chhabra, 2005).

Similarly, Dave and Solanki (2000) analyzed approximately 2,930 Special Cell[7] records accumulated by the Tata Institute for Social Sciences and the Mumbai Police, field-notes from participant observations, 1071 records from the non-cognizable offenses database and 15 criminal cases. In this study, women and social workers provided their written statements documenting their interactions with women and their families who had visited three of the Special Cells in Mumbai. The analysis of these records indicated that 60 percent of women living in joint or extended family households reported mostly being abused by their husbands. In addition, due to the support and encouragement provided by the husband's family members, battered women had to live in a hostile household that condoned and normalized violence against them. Husbands were accused of perpetrating violence by two-thirds of the women, while one-third of the women reported their mother-in-law as accomplices (Bhat & Ullman, 2013).

In 1997, in a two-year multi-site population based study conducted by the International Clinical Epidemiologists Network (INCLEN), a random sample of 10,000 households was surveyed about the prevalence of physical and psychological violence that occurred within the past 12 months and over their lifetime. The results showed that "approximately 43 percent of women reported experiencing at least one kind of psychological violence and 40 percent at least one form of physical violence. Of those reporting physical violence, approximately 50 percent experienced violence when pregnant" (Bhat & Ullman, 2013, p.66).

Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh (a central state in India), a survey was conducted using a representative sample of over 6000 men. The findings showed 7 percent of the respondents reported sexually and physically abusing their wives, and 22 percent reported perpetrating sexual violence (World Health Organization, 2002). Studies show that the typical perpetrators of VAW in India include husbands, the husband's parents and extended family (Datta & Misra, 2000; Menon, 2000;

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[7] With the effort to eradicate VAW, The Special Cell for Women and Children (hereafter, Special Cell) serves women survivors by training social workers located in the police system embedded in the framework that VAW is wrong. Established in 194, the first Special Cell for Women and Children was established with the idea between Bombay Police and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai (TISS, 2011).

Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005; Vindhya, 2000; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). The next section looks at the studies examining the incidence and prevalence of sexual violence and harassment in India.

2. <u>Sexual violence and sexual harassment</u>

Studies on sexual violence reported by survivors indicate that certain risk factors may have triggered the incidents. Santhya, Haberland, Ram, Sinha and Mohanty (2007) conducted a cross-sectional study on 1,664 married young women in two states, namely Gujarat (Western India) and West Bengal (Eastern India) through survey and in-depth interviews. In the sample of 1,664 women, 12 percent reported experiencing frequent unwanted sex while 32 percent of the women had occasionally experienced unwanted sex. The qualitative data demonstrated that women who were unable to conceive, those with lower education and those who tolerated and accepted the norms of wife battering were more likely to suffer frequent unwanted sexual experiences or sexual abuse (in Bhat & Wodda, 2013).

Sexual violence against women in India also manifests in forms such as sexual harassment especially in workplaces or public settings (Bhat & Wodda, 2013; Chaudhuri, 2001). For instance, studies show that sexual harassment is prevalent in workplaces like the healthcare sector and poses an occupational hazard. In a study conducted by Chaudhuri (2006), 135 employees in different healthcare sectors were interviewed individually and in groups. The sample included nurses in private hospitals, the director of four hospitals, the heads of unions and associations, and other hospital support staff members. Most women respondents (77 women) reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment at their current or former workplaces. Out of these 77 women, 27 percent had experienced unwanted touch and 16 percent reported being victimized by sexual gestures. Although none of the respondents reported having been raped, five women stated that they knew others who had been experienced rape or attempted rape in their facility (Chaudhuri, 2006).

Most importantly, the qualitative data in Chaudhuri's (2006) study and the failure to investigate recent cases of sexual harassment cases reported by women in their workplaces in India (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2017) demonstrate that sexual harassment against women in the workplace was regarded as 'normal', harmless and part and parcel of women's work life. Respondents also reported that they dealt with the topic of sexual harassment at their workplaces with fear, reluctance, discomfort, and denial and they described an atmosphere of judgment towards survivors of sexual harassment. Hence, most of the research on VAW in India reveals several risk factors, both at the individual and collective level, that trigger incidents of violence within and outside the confines of the home (INCLEN, 1999; Jaswal, 2000; IIPS/ Population Council, 2009; Rao et al., 2000; Prasad, 1999; Vindhya, 2000). Studies of domestic violence conducted by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) show that survivors reported that the following risk factors may have triggered domestic violence in their lives, including: dowry demands, husbands' suspicion of survivors' infidelity, survivors refusing sexual intercourse, abusers' alcoholism, survivors' demanding money and so on (IIPS/ Population Council, 2009; INCLEN, 1999; See Begum et al., 2015; Jaswal, 2000; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005; Prasad, 1999; Sabarwal, Santhya & Jejeebhoy, 2014; Rao et al.; 2000; Vindhya, 2000). All forms of VAW have serious consequences for women's physical and emotional well-being and psychological health.

Unfortunately, there has been very little attention given to research on survivors of rape in India until the Nirbhaya gang-rape case in December 2012. Even though Ashraf (1997), Mahanta (1993), Prasad (1999) and Verma (1979) have conducted studies of rape in India, there has been no focus on studying the culturally specific effects of rape on women in the Indian context. In a study conducted by Bajpai (1997), a sample of 56 victims of rape from Madhya Pradesh (central state in India) were interviewed and administered certain psychological tests. The respondents in the sample reported experiencing a various range of consequences such as depression, anxiety, shock, lack of self-image, vulnerability, neurosis and adjustment problems. Among the sample of 56 victims, 39.28

percent of victims reported high and average degrees of depression while 32.14 percent of women experienced greater neurosis. Since rape survivors are humiliated and degraded due to their victimization, they find their image and worth being diminished due to this experience. In this study, about 42.85 percent of victims had a low self-concept based on the findings of Scale Measuring the Self-Concept (SMSP). In addition, they also reported social consequences of being a rape survivor such as family conflicts, loss of employment, reduced wages and social rejection in India (Bajpai, 1997).

Studies of VAW in India indicate that domestic violence has short and long-term effects on survivors and their families. For instance, Chowdhary and Patel (2008) conducted a population-based cohort study of 3000 women who had attended a primary health clinic in Goa. Of the 3000 women randomly sampled, structured interviews were conducted with 1750 married women. In this study, 16.5 percent of women reported experiencing lifetime spousal violence and 13.1 percent experienced recent violent incidents. However, respondents reported serious health problems as a result of trauma and victimization. For example, 29.57% reported suffering from Dysmenorrhea, 28.8% from low body mass index, 19.3% from anemia, 15.6% from non-menstrual abdominal pain, and 13.6% experienced abnormal vaginal discharge (Chowdhary & Patel, 2008; See Bhat & Ullman, 2013).

Further, studies showed that survivors of domestic violence in India reported physical and psychological effects such as suicidal ideation, alienation from others, insomnia and sleep problems, and shame and guilt (Desai, 2005; INCELN, 1999; Jaswal, 2000). Survivors of VAW in India are less likely to report their victimization to police officials due to the stigma attached of being a victim. Survivors of VAW have shared their violent experiences with scholars doing qualitative research or by reporting their injuries and health problems to health clinics and physicians in India (See Jaswal, 2000; Prasad, 1999). The next section explores why survivors of VAW in India face barriers to reporting and help-seeking in their day-to-day lives.

D. **Culture of Silence and Rape Myths**

In India, there is strong cultural and societal pressure to keep violence "behind the closed doors" and to normalize women's victimization experiences (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Boyle, Georgiades, Cullen, & Racine, 2009). Thus, in addition to the trauma and health consequences faced by sexually abused women, they also struggle in an environment that condones violence and thwarts their help-seeking efforts. Family matters are viewed as a private sphere of life and not to be intervened in by non-family members. Within the four walls of the household, due to the clear distinction between the private vs. public, a 'culture of silence' is expected and reinforced when family violence and abuse occurs. This deters non-family members from serving as bystanders or concerned well-wishers, thus resulting in criminal justice personnel responding to victims in the most insensitive, apathetic, traumatic and discouraging manner. After this harrowing ordeal, survivors end up experiencing re-victimization and repeated trauma due to interactions with criminal justice and healthcare institutions and their deeply embedded victim-blaming practices (Bhat & Ullman, 2013; See Prasad, 1999; Shirwadkar, 2009).

Societal responses and attitudes towards survivors of VAW, especially rape, are also perpetuated by rape myths embedded in the society, and lead to victim-blaming. It is critical to closely examine and understand the impact of rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes, as they pose further challenges to survivors (Bajpai, 2006). Yet, few empirical studies consider how rape myths, survivors' respectability, lifestyle and past sexual history play roles in them being held responsible for their victimization in India. One such vignette study conducted by Kanekar and Kolsawalla (1980) used a sample of undergraduate and graduate students from India to study the role of rape victims' respectability, attractiveness and provocativeness in blaming victims for their rape. In this study, males were more likely than females to assign responsibility to the rape victim for their victimization. Further, in the provocative scenario, males were more likely to recommend a shorter sentence to the offender than females. This confirms the finding that males are more likely to use the victims' provocativeness as a justification for her rape than females (Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1980).

Burt (1980), who studied the concept of 'rape myths' extensively, found that rape myth acceptance is linked to sex-role stereotyping and false sexual beliefs. Burt (1980) argued that rape myths trivialize the seriousness and impact of rape on the victims and place blame on victims. Scholars studying rape point to the role of stereotypes, attitudes and myths responsible for creating an insensitive and apathetic environment for victims. Rape myths include: 'women ask to be raped', 'women enjoy the experience of being raped', 'only bad and loose girls get raped', 'husbands cannot rape their wives', 'it is justified if women dressed 'inappropriately' and 'indecently' get raped', 'most rapists wait to attack women in dark alleys' and 'victims who used drugs or were drunk are responsible for being raped' (Erez & Bhat, 2010; Malamuth and Check, 1985; Torrey, 1991). Future empirical research examining public perceptions and interpretations of VAW in India may help explain societal reactions towards survivors. The next section presents theoretical frameworks further explaining the prevalence and patterns of VAW in India, particularly highlighting feminist perspectives.

E.   **Theorizing VAW in India Using a Feminist Lens**

India witnessed a remarkable series of initiatives and calls for action by the Indian women's movement and the state as well as pro-women legislation during the 1970s and 1980s. These new laws created in the 1980s had symbolic significance, but were meaningless and barely feasible in practice and thus, were rarely implemented. Flavia Agnes, a women's rights lawyer and activist in the women's movement in India for the past two decades, stated, "If oppression could be tackled by passing laws, then this decade would have been adjudged a golden period for Indian women… almost every single campaign against violence on women resulted in new legislation" (Agnes, 1992, p.17).

In the 1970s-1980s a rise in dowry-related violence and subsequent uproar by the feminist movement led to a growing recognition of VAW in India as a serious social problem. In the 1980s, the Criminal Law Amendment Committee (1982) was pressured by women's organizations to reinforce strict enforcement of laws and provide legislative protection to women who experienced

dowry-related and domestic violence. Due to rigorous campaigning, activism, and lobbying, critical amendments were incorporated in the Indian Penal Code, the Indian Evidence Act, and the Dowry Prohibition Act. These reforms were aimed at providing women legal protection from marital and domestic abuse, and dowry-related violence (Kishwar, 2001; Lawyer's Collective, 2009; Yusuf, 2010).

Despite the legal remedies and state interventions, it is essential to acknowledge that VAW in any country cannot be prevented or curbed by the law alone. To assist the law and state, other significant stakeholders such as criminal justice practitioners, healthcare professionals, research-based organizations, women's groups, victim advocates, and human rights activists must engage in collaborative and coordinated responses to deal with this pervasive form of violence (Mitra, 1999). There is often a wide gap between the law and its implementation by criminal justice professionals due to discrepancies in legal definitions, lack of strict law enforcement, and the perception of VAW as a "private matter" (Prasad, 1999).

Feminist theories have helped to explain how societal organizations reinforce attitudes and reactions to VAW in India. The feminist perspective primarily focuses on the concept and impact of patriarchy and the societal organizations that help reinforce it. Studies show that VAW in India is primarily attributed to "historically male-dominated social structures and socialization practices teaching men and women gender-specific roles" (Jasinski, 2001, p.12). But what is patriarchy and how can we define this significant concept embedded in feminist analysis of VAW? Ray (2008) provides a provisional definition of patriarchy:

> Patriarchy is based on a system of power relations which are hierarchical and unequal where men control women's production, reproduction and sexuality. It imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in society which strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women. Patriarchy is not a constant and gender relations which are dynamic and complex have changed over the periods of history. The nature of control and subjugation

of women varies from one society to the other as it differs due to the differences in class, caste, religion, region, ethnicity and the socio-cultural practices.

Hence, feminist theories provide an encompassing explanation of VAW in India by critiquing the historical and sociocultural context, which led to victimization and objectification of women by religious parties, political bodies and the state (Kleinman, Das & Lock, 1997). Menon and Bhasin (1998) highlight the link between the symbolic constructions of women as bearer of 'national honor' and the Partition's gendered and ethnic-centered violence in India. For instance, communal violence against women was manifested in sexual violence that women experienced during the Partition. Furthermore, feminist theorists and activists have not only challenged the legal definitions of sexual violence in legislation in India, but have also intervened to fight for women's rights. Menon (2000) summarizes how feminists define rape: (a) rape is violence, not sex, (b) rape is violence but a unique form of violence because of its sexual character, and (c) rape is violence and violence precisely is sex (p. 71). In summary, feminists argue that the division of the world into public versus private spheres has resulted in the poor and oppressive treatment of women experiencing violence within their homes (Mooney, 2000).

Based on feminist theories, sexual coercion and sexual violence are deeply embedded in the power imbalances incorporated in the patriarchal structure of society. Women are conditioned to be passive and submissive to advances in heterosexual romantic relationships whereas men are taught to assert their sexuality aggressively and coerce women into having sex (Hines, 2007). Menon has analyzed the role of feminist intervention:

The universality of women's experience of sexual violence has always provided an immediate entry point for feminist intervention. Whatever the analysis of patriarchy and its relationship to class, caste, community or race, feminist politics of all hues is able to relate directly to sexual violation- experienced in different ways and to differing degrees- but an intrinsic part of women's lives (Menon, 2000, p.66).

Despite feminist interventions and advocacy, survivors of VAW seeking help and justice have to first deal with organizations such as police, courts, healthcare, mental health, and women's organizations (Campbell, 1998). The women affected by domestic or sexual violence end up experiencing secondary victimization and additional trauma while reporting and seeking justice in courts, as judges and lawyers question their sexual history, motives and engage in victim-blaming (Bhat & Wodda, 2013).

In addition, the state agencies, politicians and religious leaders themselves have been responsible in promoting rape myths, fostering negative attitudes, and blaming the survivors. A critically acclaimed feminist in India, Kavitha Krishnan (2014), also the Secretary of the All-India Progressive Women's Association, argues that the public and political dialogue on gender has been practically absent or troubling in the election agenda. The topic of women and their safety has always been used as an excuse to incite communal and caste violence, and attain favorable votes from the masses. Being disappointed with not witnessing the 'gender revolution' in politics in India has become the least of her worries. Besides being overlooked and neglected in politics, law and society, women in India are being used as pawns in elections. For example, Mulayam Singh, the leader for the Samajwadi Party (SP) belittled rape survivors by commenting that 'boys commit mistakes' and Abu Azmi, the president of the Maharashtra state branch of the Samajwadi Party (SP) said that in addition to punishing men (as rapists), women should also be hanged for being raped or engaging in sex outside marriage. These statements contribute to a culture that not only tolerates but misunderstands the nature of rape. The concept of 'consent' and holding perpetrators accountable instead of survivors does not even exist (Krishnan, 2014).

The national campaign titled Daughters of India was launched in 2015 just as British film-maker Leslie Udwin's documentary *India's Daughter* was released. Udwin's film shed light on the gang-rape and death of 'Nirbhaya' in North Delhi, and included interviews with Nirbhaya's attackers and other rapists behind bars in India. The documentary was banned nationally from being publicly

screened by many state and political agencies because they believed the interview excerpts with rapists inside prison may 'encourage and incite violence against women' (Park & Singh, 2015). Feminists expressed their concern over the title of the documentary and the accompanying national campaign focusing on women's safety through their role as daughters, as the title reinforces the patriarchal notion of the need to protect our daughters. In an interview, Kavitha Krishnan states,

> Indian anti-rape protestors themselves have unambiguously rejected the patriarchal language which denotes women as daughters, wives or sisters entitled to protection in that capacity rather than as human beings who will assert themselves and resist attacks on their bodies and rights (in Gopal, 2015).

The anti-rape movement grew in force following the 'Nirbhaya' gang-rape case, and feminist scholars argued that VAW in India, especially sexual violence becomes more complex when we consider factors such as caste oppression and socioeconomic inequality. Violence against women, particularly by male perpetrators in India, should be viewed and critiqued through the lens of intersectionality (Dey & Orton, 2016). Those women who belong to the lower scheduled caste[8] and the economically disadvantaged are at a much higher risk of experiencing some form of interpersonal violence. Those who encounter either sexual or domestic violence, and sometimes brutal and humiliating treatment by upper-caste men end up facing multiple, complex and traumatizing barriers in reporting and seeking help (Francis, Loxton & James, 2016).

To better understand and explain the prevalence of this form of gender violence in India, it is important to understand that VAW is often the product of multiple forms of oppression and discrimination. Sexual violence, domestic violence and other forms of violence may occur due to several risk factors such as caste oppression, social class discrimination, political beliefs; and deeply

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[8] India historically has a hierarchical caste system, with the population belonging to the scheduled castes or the 'Dalits' (also known as untouchables) occupying the lowest rank in this hierarchy thus experiencing more oppression and violence by those occupying a higher status in the caste hierarchy.

embedded patriarchal notions of gender, and religious and social norms in the name of traditions and family honor (Dey & Orton, 2016).

Other factors that may contribute to an environment condoning VAW and other forms of harassment and abuse may include images of women in popular culture and the often harmful messages conveyed to audiences. Scholars have empirically studied the effect, implications and impact of images in popular culture on violence, particularly VAW (Pamecha, 2002; Rajan, 2006; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003). How do audiences interpret these representations of women and VAW? What are the implications of these contextual gender norms and larger frameworks condoning or condemning VAW? The next section briefly explains how representations of gender and VAW in popular culture leads to a hostile environment condoning VAW drawn from social construction theory and vice-versa.

F.   <u>**Social Construction of Gender and VAW in Popular Culture**</u>

This section explores social constructionist theory relevant to media imagery that may provide another perspective about how the public perceptions and interpretations about VAW in films are created and shaped by popular culture. Gergen (1985) defines social constructionist theory as "inquiries concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (p.266). The social constructionist theory further argues that through media imagery and popular culture, individuals learn the process of "constructing their social realities and sharing common meanings from four sources: personal experiences, significant others (family, friends), social groups and other institutions (schools, government agencies) and the mass media" (Surette, 1998, p.6). In order to closely examine the social construction of a social problem in mass media, it is extremely important to scrutinize the social construction of reality combining two different approaches. The two approaches are as an indispensable element of the relationship between the culture and the society and as one type of media effect (Adoni & Mane, 1984).

Social constructionist theories seek to explain how and why people view the world and events in specific ways and how media helps to construct and shape these notions. Social constructionists have argued that people create their reality derived from the world they believe exists and based on their individual knowledge and experience with other people. This leads to people acting in accordance with their constructed view of reality (Surette, 1998, p.5). Underlying this theoretical perspective, Surette (1998) states that culture and history are extremely significant in constructing how we perceive and understand reality:

> …conceptions about the nature of society are shared conceptions: They permit meaningful social behavior precisely to the degree that they are held in common with, or at least understood by others. It is for this reason that our conceptions of the social world are constructed (p.5-6).

Hence, it is essential to further explore the representation of women and portrayal of VAW in mass media, especially by understanding the sociocultural and historical contexts of India. Culture has been described as a "tool kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying figurations to solve different kinds of problems" (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson, 1992, pg. 389). Thus, social constructionist theory can be a useful framework to help understand how culture, history and shared collective experiences influence public perceptions and interpretations of VAW depicted in popular culture. The following section explores the Bollywood industry in terms of global reach and audience impact. Additionally, studies of images of gender, especially women in Bollywood cinema, are reviewed to explain the social constructionist and feminist perspectives in detail.

G.   Global Reach and Impact of Bollywood Cinema in India

Between 1990 and 1999, India witnessed an increase in globalization due to the more widespread access and availability of satellite TV, which brought Hollywood movies into Indian homes. In 1991 300,000 homes in India had access to television—by 1999, this number had increased

to 24 million homes (Derne, 2005). This growing population of Indian television viewers was matched by an increase in the production and direction of feature films in India. In the past 17 years, India has witnessed an increasing number of households having television accompanied by cable channels and subscriptions to Indian movie channels. Last year, the domestic box office revenue collection itself generated a whopping 23 billion Rupees (USD 338 million) by the Bollywood film industry (Jamkhandikar, 2016). Additionally, India ranks top third from top five international Asian global box office markets (Frater, 2016).

Globalization has not only impacted the television and feature film industry but has also influenced music videos and news coverage in India. Thussu (2007) explains, "[the] localization of global genres (such as soap operas and music videos) and editorial priorities (moving from English-language transnational news networks such as the BBC and CNN to Hindi-language news channels) lends a more 'authentic' voice and therefore a greater degree of credibility to the output…such indigenization whether it is in the realm of popular entertainment or TV news is an increasingly important dimension of globalization discourse" (p.596).

Popular culture has been defined or described in different ways. First, people engaging in cultural practices can be referred as popular culture. Second, this term also refers to symbolic cultural blueprints whose primary goals are production of meaning. Milestone and Meyer (2012) define popular culture as "a range of cultural texts which signify meaning through words, images or practices" (p.5). Popular culture in India has entered the lives of the middle-class people through globalization, technological advancement and the introduction of new media. Media plays a significant role in shaping and molding public opinion in any modern society. It is created and designed in such a way that presents news, opinions and events catering to what readers and audiences expect and like (Kalam, 2002). Further, Dasgupta, Sinha and Chakravarti (2012) state that "popular culture represents society…it tracks society's consolidation of traditional norms and its subversions as well" (p.8). To date, full length feature films in India may be regarded as one of the top widely

viewed forms of popular culture and hence it is important to closely examine the content of these films made in India.

Movies have been the most popular medium of mass entertainment and communication in India, particularly Bollywood film industry produces one of the most established, commercially popular, and globally viewed forms of popular culture (Banaji, 2006; Derne, 1999; Tirumala, 2009). Although popular culture is thought to represent society, feminist scholars have criticized the media in India for completely neglecting issues of gender injustice, gender bias and oppression of women (Dasgupta, Sinha & Chakravarti, 2012). Bathla (1998) argues "the silence of the media on women's issues and the movement also hints at the insignificance attached to women as citizens and to their participation in the public sphere" (in Dasgupta, Sinha & Chakravarti, 2012, p.7). Despite the ongoing debate about the impact of media on violence, most scholars agree that observing violence on TV and films significantly increases aggressive and violent behavior of viewers (See Anderson, 1997; Berkowitz, 1993; Eron, 1982; Geen, 1990; Huesmann, 1986).

Several scholars have examined the relationship between media, aggression, and violent behavior (Anderson, 1997; Anderson, Carnagey & Eubanks, 2003; Bushman & Geen, 1990; Dill, Anderson, Anderson & Deusur, 1997). Studies have also shown that exposure to violent sexuality in films, magazines, and music significantly contributes to men's acceptance of interpersonal violence and rape myths. These effects of sexually violent depictions in mass media not only support a cultural environment that fosters sexist ideologies, but also results in sex-role stereotyping by men and negative attitudes towards women (Flood & Pease, 2009; Lawrence & Joyner, 1991; Malamuth & Check, 1985). Nonetheless, the glamorized and eroticized portrayal of VAW in popular culture can be traced back to the depictions of Indian women, particularly in Bollywood films. This brings us to the next section, which covers how Indian women are portrayed in one form of popular culture, namely commercial films.

H.   Portrayal of Women in Bollywood Cinema

In this section, the studies reviewed are drawn from feminist critiques, film and psychoanalytical theories, and social learning perspectives. These theoretical frameworks help explain the role and impact of gendered representations of women and suggest how they may influence audience perceptions and attitudes. Violence against women is often depicted through physical forms of abuse and injury in mass media, but subtle forms such as structural violence are often overlooked. Galtung (1969) explains structural violence as "the systematic exclusion of a group from the resources needed to develop their full potential" (in Mukherjee et al., 2011, p.593). As Galtung (1969) pointed out, "Structural violence is silent . . . structural violence may be seen as about as natural as the air around us" (p.173).

Further, Link and Phelan (2001) have also stated that when marginalized groups do not accept their assigned rigid non-dominant status and are not acknowledged for their sexual identity, then indirect forms of oppression against them gradually turn to direct forms, such as violence and abuse. The social construction of structural violence against women in mass media can be represented by the subordinate gender roles of women, glamorized and sensationalized imagery of their bodies, and exploitation of women's sexuality for men's pleasure-seeking. Dasgupta, Sinha and Chakravarti (2012) explain that the constructions of images of women in films, television and advertisements in all cultures are primarily concerned with marketing elegance, sexuality, glamour and their bodies (See Kilbourne, 2010; Newsom, 2011).

Audiences and readers who consume pop culture images of women receive contradictory messages about the ideal Indian woman. On one hand, the traditional Indian woman is shown as the maternal figure, self-sacrificing caregiver, thus emphasizing her role in the family, community and the nation. For example, married women in visual representations of popular culture are depicted as wearing the *sari*, the traditional national attire for Indian women, while unmarried women on screen are portrayed as wearing western clothes, and are depicted as fiercely independent working women (Banaji, 2006). On the other hand, the depiction of idealized, glamorous celebrities often results in

unhappiness with one's own health and physique. For example, women in popular culture are constructed and visualized to be thinner and slimmer with the concept of 'size zero' promoted by the Bollywood actress Kareena Kapoor (Dasgupta, Sinha and Chakravarti, 2012). Every film actress regardless of Hollywood or Bollywood cinema is often scrutinized and body-shamed or glamorized if they lose weight or wear a two-piece bikini in a film.

The literature on media representation of women indicates that exposure to sexually violent and inappropriate content in media such as pornography, sexually explicit images of women and violence directed towards women results in the acceptance of rape myths, an increase in aggression among angered subjects, and increased likelihood of VAW and treating women as sex objects (Allen, D'Alessio & Brezgel, 1995; Derne, 1995; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003). Although the study of media impact on violent behavior does not imply a direct causal relationship, research findings demonstrate that violent depictions in media are likely to trigger aggressive, violent and anti-social behavior among children and adolescents (Anderson et al., 2003; Wood, Wong & Chachere, 1991; Wood, 2001). Studying the impact of media on crime, justice and violence may provide a unique insight into the contextual understanding of society.

There have been several studies conducted on the representation of gender, relationships, oppression and societal violence in popular culture in India (Banaji, 2005 & 2006; Dasgupta, Sinha & Chakravarti, 2012; Derne, 1999; Ramasubramanian, 2005; Virdi, 1999). However, there are few studies that have analyzed the depictions of gender-based violence in popular culture in India (Derne, 1999; Mathur, 2004). In this study, feature films have been selected as the form of popular culture that will be analyzed for the meanings, perceptions and interpretations this visual medium has to offer to audiences. According to Jain and Rai (2002):

> [Films] offers choices, which the written narrative may not. There is a greater freedom in the choice of perspective; the agencies are multiple- camera eye, narrator, lights, use of space, the spoken dialogue, body language, facial expression as well as the silences. Against such a

background, deviations immediately send out signals. They raise questions and problematize

issues (pp.9).

The film industry in India is one of the most popular forms of mass media in the country. Feature

films in India are usually multi-lingual, multi-regional and provide the most common form of

entertainment among the population. The first Indian film was produced in 1913 by Dhundiraj

Govind Dadasaheb Phalke and from 1913-1981, more than 15,000 feature films were produced in

India (Mishra, 2002). Derne (1995) estimated that about 90-100 million viewers go to cinema

theaters to watch films every week in India. Although most films in India are produced by the

Bollywood industry and primarily use Hindi as the spoken language, some individual states such as

Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kolkata and many others produce and direct films in other Indian

languages (Tirumala, 2009).

According to the report by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2008), Bollywood made 1,200

feature-length films, whereas 694 major films were produced in the United States. Out of the top 10

film producing countries, India ranked the highest (UNESCO, 2009). Indian cinema has not only

received critical acclaim and popularity in India, but is also enjoyed by a crossover audience in other

countries. This widespread appeal has created a unique niche for Bollywood musicals among Non-

Resident Indians (NRI) and foreign populations; thus fostering globalization (Gopalan, 2002).

Nonetheless, while Bollywood films have been criticized by urban, educated and elite Indian viewers

for depicting unrealistic content and escapist fantasies, going to the movies in India is widely popular

(Banaji, 2006; Derne, 1999; Dickey & Dudrah, 2010).

Due to social media, Bollywood actors and actresses are becoming more visible in television

and films outside of India. For example, Bollywood actress Priyanka Chopra obtained a leading

protagonist in an American TV series produced by ABC, starring in *Quantico* (Hoffman, 2016).

Actress Aishwarya Rai was invited to appear on *The Oprah Winfrey Show,* and actors like Amitabh

Bachchan (*The Great Gatsby,* 2013*)*, Irrfan Khan (*The Life of Pi,* 2012; *Jurassic World,* 2015;

Inferno, 2016), and Anil Kapoor *(Slumdog Millionaire,* 2008 and *Mission Impossible 4: The Ghost Protocol,* 2013) all have had cameo or important roles in Hollywood films. Likewise, Hollywood actors and musicians are now wanting to be a part of the Bollywood cinema and award shows (Hindustan Times, 2013). Das Gupta (1988) describes Indian cinema as:

> Cinemas are the temples of modern India…they are designed to seduce: monumental spaces gleam with light and color, vestibules are plastered with posters of gods and goddesses, red carpets exude desire and wantonness. Devotees come in huge numbers to worship, to 'take *darsana*', at the shrine of the new image, the oneiric image that will create their new gods and even their new beliefs (in Mishra, 2002, p.1).

Within the context of Indian commercial cinema, Hindi feature films and Bollywood cinema boasts of producing the largest number of films in the world and most interestingly, the population of movie goers includes people of all ages, gender, socio-economic status, castes and various geographical locations within India (See Derne, 1995; Gopalan, 2002; Nair, Barman *&* Chattopadhyay, 1999). India hosts several film industries in many states that produce films in a variety of languages. For example, Bollywood is the unofficial name of the Hindi film industry originated in Mumbai (earlier known as Bombay), India. The films made in Bollywood may frequently or occasionally use English or other Indian languages as a medium of communication between the actors, but they primarily use Hindi. In 2009, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics reported that out of the films produced by India, 18.2 percent of films were in Hindi followed by 16.9 percent in Telugu language, 14.8 percent in Tamil, 13.7 percent in Kannada and 7.7 percent in Marathi (UNESCO, 2009). In this study, the terms 'Bollywood films' and 'Hindi films' are used synonymously.

Three of the significant themes underlying Bollywood films are the representation of the 'binary of modernity/ tradition' resulting from the epics, namely *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the fight between 'good versus the evil' and the struggle to establish national and gender identity (See

Barnouw & Krishnaswamy, 1980; Gopalan, 2002; Jain & Rai, 2002; Mishra, 2002). The strengths of certain distinctive patterns and trends of Indian cinema have been termed by Gopalan (2002) as a "constellation of interruptions" (P.3). Scholars like Rosie Thomas (1985) have explored the generic expectations framed by Hindi films by linking the narrative mode to the spectatorial response of this form of mass media. Thomas observes:

> Hindi films work to offer the viewer a position of coherence and mastery, both through narrative closure and by providing a focus for identification within the film… However, spectacular and emotional excess will be invariably be privileged over linear narrative development. The spectator is expected to be involved not primarily through anticipation of what will happen next, but through how it will happen and affective involvement in the happening: excitement, thrill, fear, envy, wonder, not to mention the eroticism which lies beneath the desire for spectacle itself (In Banaji, 2006, p.5).

While film audiences enjoy Bollywood films because they are entertaining, with foot-tapping and soulful songs and dance sequences, and although these films help people escape their day-to-day stresses of life (Jaikumar, 2003; Philip, 2014); there are also reasons for disliking them. Hindi films have been critiqued for deceiving the audience into believing the cultural imagination and the world that they portray. For example, Banaji (2006) points to one of the most widely popular films in Bollywood, *Sholay* (the title means Embers, directed in 1975), in which a righteous woman dances on broken glass until her feet bleed to ensure that the villain does not kill her lover. Also in *Sholay*, a man who has no arms is able to kick his enemy to death. Critics such as those from educated/elite Indian social circles, urban Indian viewers, and South-Asian youth in London have condemned Bollywood feature films for its 'escapist patterns' and 'not being realistic' (Banaji, 2005; Derne, 2000; Gillespie, 1995). The images of women's bodies and sexuality depicted in Bollywood films also work to normalize and condone less visible forms of VAW in India, which is discussed in the next section.

1.   **<u>Representation of women's bodies and sexuality</u>**

According to Derne (1999), portrayals in Hindi films have fabricated a "privileged arena for construction of sexuality" (p.328) for the common masses because they reinforce messages about how men and women should behave in a sexual intimate relationship (in Ramasubramanian and Oliver, 2003). Further, scholars have found that the film medium is an influential and significant mode of communication with children and adolescents (mainly teenage boys). Like other forms of visual mass media, films not only reinforce ideas of power and violence, but also serve as sexual scripts that promote dominant norms of gender inequality and false notions of love and sexuality (Poudyal, 2002).

Cultural studies and media theorists have argued that popular media like Hindi cinema or Bollywood movies in India have a profound influence on the way the population incorporates gender norms and roles in society (Agarwal, 2002; Banaji, 2006; Daiya, 2008; Derne, 1999; Mathur, 2002; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003). Since Bollywood is the major player of mass media in India, it is crucial to comprehend the social and cultural mechanisms through which symbolic communication affects people's minds, emotions and behavior (See Bandura, 2001; Bagchi, 1996).

Datta (2000) suggested that a patriarchal version of female sexuality is consistently observed in mainstream films in India. Hence, female characters depicted on screen are often viewed from the male gaze. That is, female sexuality viewed from the masculine perspective is portrayed in media (See Mulvey, 2009). The film *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love* by Mira Nair particularly "exoticises and essentializes female sexuality in India, more as consumer product from the western economy submitting to neo-colonial demands of the market" (Datta, 2000, p.80). If the 'male gaze' version of female sexuality has been constructed in Bollywood films, then Hollywood films portray more about sex and less about female sexuality (Datta, 2000).

Film theorists have primarily focused on the role of the male gaze and the contribution of film-viewing technologies. Mulvey (1988) argued that "the gaze of the camera, the gaze of men within a narrative on the screen, and the gaze of male spectators in cinema halls all create the woman

as a spectacle for male desire" (p.242). Grounded in psychoanalytical theory, Mulvey (1988) identified one of the primary pleasures of films through the concept of "scopophilia - using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight" (p. 244). Therefore, Mulvey (1988) points out that advanced technology of film places women being looked at by men.

According to some feminist scholars like Andrea Dworkin (1995) and Catharine MacKinnon (1986), even when pornography may not be overtly violent, it still portrays women as subordinate and submissive, with their role created for others' sexual gratification. In addition, pornography even positions women as accommodating and tolerant of any sexual advance by men. Prolonged exposure to viewing women as inferior to men leads to the cultural acceptance of women as sex objects and reinforces aggressive, negative and discriminatory behavior by men (Dworkin, 1995). MacKinnon (1989) argues that the social construction of sexuality positions women's sexuality as being socially used by males: "Woman through male eyes is sex object, that by which man knows himself at once as man and as subject" (In Derne & Jadwin, 2000, pg. 244). Feminist activists like MacKinnon and others have recognized the objectification of women's oppression, especially in pornography, films, advertising and beauty contests, thus criticizing them as representing women as sex objects (Gandhi & Shah, 1992, p.68).

The effect of representations of gender, violence, love, romance and sexuality depicted in Hindi cinema can be explained by the social cognitive theory proposed by Albert Bandura (2001). According to this theory, cognitive factors enable individuals to partially decide "on which environmental events to observe, what meaning to ascribe to these events, and determine if they would have any lasting consequences" (p.267). Bandura (2001) suggests symbols play a critical role in conveying meanings and form to the targeted audience:

> It is with symbols that people process and transforms transient experiences into cognitive models that serve as guides for judgment and action. Through symbols, people give meaning, form, and continuity to their experiences. People gain understanding of causal

relationships and expand their knowledge by operating symbolically on the wealth of

information derived from personal and vicarious experiences. They generate solutions to

problems, evaluate their likely outcomes, and pick suitable options without having to go

through a laborious behavioral search. Through the medium of symbols people can

communicate with others at any distance in time and space (Bandura, 2001, p.267).

Thus, representations of women in Hindi films symbolize structural forms of violence against

women. Scholars have analyzed the different ways in which the camera depicts the actresses in Hindi

films. For example, "in a symbolic simulation of 'coitus interruptus' to discussions of censorship,

voyeuristic pleasure during dance sequences, sado-masochistic pleasure in watching heroic suffering

and female authority in the rape-revenge genre of mainstream cinema" (in Banaji, 2006, p.14; See

Gopalan, 2002; Kasbekar, 2001; Mazumdar, 2000; Virdi, 2003). Next, I review studies that closely

examine the process through which audiences may construct their notions of masculinity and

femininity depicted in Hindi films in India.

2.   **Violence against women: Femininity vs. masculinity**

Studies have shown that stereotypes and negative portrayals of women in popular Hindi films

in India result in female viewers normalizing and tolerating sexual violence in their relationships with

men. These portrayals also glamorize men's abuse and sexual harassment of women in public (See

Banaji, 2006; Mathur, 2002; Mishra, 2002; Nair, 2002; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003). The

depiction of glamorized images of women and femininity in Bollywood movies have resulted in the

emergence and manifestation of macho and masculine appearance and behavior towards women. For

example, the Hindi film, *Dil* (means 'heart', directed in 1990) shows a tough acting, street-smart

college student actor who at the beginning, harasses and teases the female protagonist in the film but

eventually wins her affection and gains her attention through passive forms of aggression

(Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003).

Similarly, Malati Mathur (2002) in her essay "Courting: Hindi Film Ishtyle" points out how courtship in Hindi films is being depicted as crude, demeaning, aggressive and insensitive to women. Mathur (2002) gives an example of male chauvinism and eve-teasing (sexual harassment of women on the streets in public) embedded in a dialogue made by the actor Govinda in a Bollywood movie, *Jodi No. 1* (means Couple No.1, directed in 2001): "I kissed her [to make her accept my proposal] but it didn't work. Do you think I should rape her now?" (Cited in Jain & Rai, 2002, p.59). Hence, such scenes exemplify an ambiance that accepts and condones violence, harassment and aggression to express love and affection (Derne, 1999; Ravindran, 2001).

Studies conducted by Ramasubramanian (2005), Ramasubramanian and Oliver (2003), Derne (1995, 1999) and Banaji (2005, 2006) have found a significant impact of the portrayal of sexually explicit and violent films on viewers of Hindi films. Through a qualitative content analysis of a few selected Hindi films, Derne (1999) concluded that the notion of using force and physical aggression as legitimate methods of expressing love and romance were strongly reinforced in these movies. Virdi (1999) analyzed three Hindi films, *Teesri Manzil* (means 'Third Floor' 1965), *Aradhana* (means 'Prayer', 1965) and *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* (means 'Scales of Injustice', 1980). According to Virdi (1999), representations of women in Hindi films have shifted to violence committed against them, especially rape. The analysis of these films indicated a "discursive history in which revenge ultimately displaces the repression and erasure of rape, or reverence of the female protagonist's suffering" (p. 18). Virdi (1999) also recommends perceiving the influence of shifting trends in women's representations in terms of increasing eroticization of women, especially stereotypes of female imagery. Further, the analysis also indicated heated debates and anxieties about the 'rape and revenge' theme in the 1980s era. Furthermore, female protagonists were used as a medium through which revenge was disguised in Hindi films. This implies that it is not only the notions of femininity that are unhealthy and negative through the female characters, but these films often portray many male characters that promote toxic

masculinity. An examination of the male protagonists represented in any form of popular culture should receive the same amount of consideration as the female protagonists.

In the study conducted by Ramasubramanian and Oliver (2003), an exploratory content analysis of nine popular Hindi films (selected from the box office hits) was conducted to examine portrayals of sexual violence. Results suggested that moderate sexual violence was portrayed as "fun, enjoyable, and a normal expression of romantic love" (p.327). In addition, women were more likely to be victims than men, and heroes committing sexual violence were common. Even though sexual violence was depicted in these Hindi films as a serious social problem, it is disturbing that moderate sexual violence was portrayed as fun, romantic behavior. Scholars have also asserted that exposure to sexually explicit and violent material may be linked to sexual violence (Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, 1995). What makes Bollywood films unique are the song and dance sequences in most films. Even though these musical sequences may not depict visible forms of VAW, the camera focus, the heroine's clothing and the representation of sexual display provides a deeper insight of how this VAW supportive culture is promoted. The next section briefly looks at studies that have examined these musical sequences in Bollywood films.

3.   Gendered song and dance sequences

Banaji (2002, 2006), Bhattacharjya (2009), Datta (2000) and Dwyer (2000) have addressed the role of film music, songs and dance sequences especially in Bollywood in affirming these dialogues of sexual differences among men and women. What sets Bollywood apart from Hollywood films is the inevitable inclusion of dance and song sequences in a vast majority of Indian films. The inclusion of song and dance sequences appears to be a constant in most commercial Hindi films and most of these sequences revolve around the main male and female protagonists. Dwyer (2000) points out that frequent depiction of erotic desires in terms of romance are often played out "through the use of song, fetishization, and metaphor…In most mainstream films… film songs and their picturization provide greater opportunities for sexual display than dialogue and narrative sections of the films, with

their specific images of clothes, body and body language, while the song lyrics are largely to do with sexuality, ranging from romance to suggestive and overt lyrics..." (p. 188).

For instance, the past decade has witnessed an increase in raunchy dance sequences, called 'item numbers', implying teasing the woman who is dancing in the song as a sexual object or property. In these item numbers, one or more women will dance to the tunes of a commercial foot-tapping dance music and the spectators are men who are shown to be mesmerized by her dance and glamour. Also, these item dance numbers rarely are relevant to the plot of the story and are usually performed by another actress in a guest appearance (Sarkar, 2012). In addition to the representation of women in dance and song sequences in Hindi cinema, it is critically important to understand the character roles of women in these films.

4.   **Characterizing women in Hindi cinema**

Feminists and film critics have conducted studies on the different women characters depicted in Hindi films (Agarwal, 2002; Banaji, 2006; Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004; Mathur, 2002; V. Mathur, 2002; Rao, 1988). Feminist scholars like Agarwal (2002) and Pamecha (2002) examined the subordinate positions of different women protagonists in several Hindi films, especially representation of women from ethnic minority groups, the ideal Indian mother, sex-workers, survivors of sexual violence and women struggling for their rights.

In summary, most women characters were glamorized for their beauty and sexuality and represented as oppressed and helpless in these films. As Pamecha (2002) quotes: "the female body becomes the site of contestation between power and powerlessness, between imposition and freedom, between the system and the individual…The moment there is a protest, all social institutions-marriage, family, law- all ideas of respectability and loyalty conspire to silence the female voice" (p.236). Richards (1995) has argued that the Hindi film inculcates the "traditional patriarchal views of society, which fearful of female sexuality, demands of the woman a subjugation of her desires" (in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, 2004, p.79; See Mehta, 2002; Pamecha, 2002).

On the contrary, scholars have also investigated the negative women characters depicted in Hindi cinema, labeling them as the vamp or the deviant woman defying the traditional norms of society (See Chatterjee, 2002; Rao, 1988; V. Mathur, 2002). According to Rao (1988), this trend of avenging women closely reflects what she terms as 'cultural schizophrenia in our society' (P.35). Furthermore, Rao (1995) suggests that depiction of women in Hindi films was degrading and dichotomized women into the 'vamp/prostitute/dancing girl' category versus 'the chaste wife' (as in Banaji, 2006, p.16). The characterization of women in Bollywood films has also been influenced by the sufferings and oppression of Indian women during past historical events.

South Asian scholars like Butalia (1998) and Menon and Bhasin (1998) have documented the gendered nature of inter-ethnic and communal violence in India. Khan (2009) explained,

> …Women are chaste mothers, wives, and daughters of the nation. Yet even chaste women can fall victim to sexual violence and other forms of discrimination. Women as biological reproducers of national and ethnic communities are also positioned as signifiers of ethnic/national differences. Further, feminist analysis identifies a connection between nationalism and militarism. Women's mobility and sexuality is strictly monitored, particularly in times of crisis, wars, and environmental disasters, to ensure that the boundaries of the nation will be maintained (p.133).

The imagery of victimized women and survivors of the Partition in India was depicted in several Hindi films such as *Pinjar* (means 'cage', directed in 2003), *Earth* 1947 (directed in 1998) and *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (means 'Revolutionary Movement: A Love Story', directed in 2001. Daiya (2008) argued that "*Pinjar*'s feminist critique of the somatic and psychological violence suffered by women at the hands of men - both their abductors and in their own families - suggests that this ethnic violence emerges from the generalized patriarchal inequalities that saturate women's lives" (p.176). These findings reflect the historical and political context of women in India constructed in Hindi films through the lens of the female protagonist.

A few studies have also focused on two critical interdependent themes that are centered on women characters, namely motherhood and religion in India. For example, Mathur (2002) and Celly (2002) point to the powerful women characters portrayed in Hindi films, but often overlooked. The mother's roles in Hindi cinema are represented as inheriting all the power, knowledge and wisdom from the 'mother goddess' tradition of Indian culture. At the same time, the Indian mother in Hindi cinema is depicted as the self-sacrificing and victimized women in charge of serving her husband and children (See Bose, 2006; Mishra, 2002; Mathur, 2002). This suggests that although goddesses are worshipped, idolized and revered in India, attitudes towards women seem prejudiced and negative, both onscreen and off-screen. An organization, Taproot, created a social media awareness campaign titled 'Abused Indian Goddesses,' which addressed this disturbing double standard prevailing in India of how women are ill-treated, abused and battered and on the other hand, Hindu goddesses are idolized (Jha, 2013). These trends reflect the Madonna/Whore dichotomy evidenced by patriarchal norms deeply embedded in society. The goal of this dichotomy and sexist ideologies is to control women and objectify their bodies (Steinstra, 1996).

Bollywood films have gone beyond geographic boundaries to reach new audiences far beyond India. This sudden surge can be attributed to the South Asian immigrant population in the United States, advanced technology (e.g., Internet), theaters playing foreign language films, and ethnic stores selling and renting DVDs and VCDs of popular films (Das Dasgupta, 1996; Punathambekar, 2010). Further, Tirumala (2009) explains that this gradual increase in access and popularity of Bollywood Hindi films across the world can be accounted for by the distribution and promotion of films in an overseas market, such as the United Kingdom, Caribbean, Africa and United States.

Since the present study is based in Chicago, the focus is on different avenues for watching Indian, especially Bollywood Hindi cinema. For example, a number of stores located on the famous Devon Avenue in the North Side of Chicago sell film DVDs and music recordings. A few theaters in the city and mostly in the suburbs play Indian movies, including Bollywood Hindi films.

Additionally, YouTube and Nextflix service has released a list of Bollywood Hindi movies as a part of their online streaming collection. There are always bootlegged versions online that are easily available for audiences. Due to the export and marketing of Bollywood films outside India, the Bollywood film industry has carved a niche in the lives and hearts of South Asian diaspora families as it helps them stay connected to their home country and ethnic roots (Tirumala, 2009). This chapter concludes by addressing what's missing in the literature and how this current study fills in a gap in the literature.

J.   Identifying the Gaps

In this chapter, existing studies have been reviewed on representation of images in popular culture, namely films and their impact on audiences. A majority of the studies reviewed so far have primarily captured the underlying themes of gender in popular culture, followed by sexual violence using content analysis of films. Two of the remaining studies by Banaji (2006) or Derne (1999) have conducted participant observation of movie goers outside cinema theaters and also interviewed them.

What is missing in the literature is how Indians in the U.S. diaspora interpret these images of VAW in Bollywood cinema, particularly the gender differences in film interpretations. Examining gender differences in how film audiences interpret images of gender or violence in any form of popular culture is important to gain an in-depth understanding of the risk factors that may result in VAW. Although this study focuses on the gender differences between male and female interpretations, it does not intend to trivialize or overlook the gender fluidity beyond the binary divide. Indians who are transgender and non-gender conforming should be included in future studies in order to investigate their interpretation of gender-violence. However, this requires separate consideration due to the significant implications. The next section explains the research methodologies that are used in this study.

III.   METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I first describe the research methodology used in the study, particularly the rationales of adopting thematic film analysis, film screenings and focus group interviews. This chapter also includes an overview of my role as a researcher, positionality, experiences and assumptions made and the implications on interpreting the findings. Second, I explain how qualitative data was collected, and additionally underline the hurdles and practical considerations of using these research methods. Third, the chapter concludes with exploring how the data was prepared, organized and further analyzed.

A.   **Introduction**

The research methodology used in this study was aimed at examining gender differences in how Indian film audiences interpret onscreen images of VAW in one form of popular culture in India, namely Bollywood Hindi cinema. This qualitative study also attempted to address these secondary research questions: (a) How do Indian film audiences look at, interpret and react to gender roles and gender relations depicted in Bollywood films? How do these images in popular culture compare to their day-to-day observations and experiences of gender roles and gender relations in India or/ and the United States? (b) How do they perceive, interpret and justify the prevalence and nature of VAW depicted in Bollywood films? How do their interpretations of VAW depicted in Bollywood films differ from their personal experiences and the experiences of others they know? and (c) What sociocultural factors such as their demographics and upbringing play a role in their interpretations? In the next section, I provide a rationale for using qualitative research methods (for thematic film analysis, film screenings, and focus group interviews) in the current study.

B.   **Why Qualitative Methods?**

For this dissertation, I employed qualitative methods, including the study of films through a sociological lens and focus group interviews. The goal of my study was to explore how film audiences react to and interpret onscreen images and scenes of VAW in Bollywood cinema. Gunter

(2000) argues that critical and interpretivist perspectives inquire about people's interactions and the ability to interpret media. These interactions depend on the role of various communities or groups from where they have learned their standards. Since it may be difficult to quantify the process, Gunter (2000) suggests that qualitative and ethnomethodological methods such as field observations, interviews, and focus groups would be most effective (in Sanda, 2014).

Additionally, Sandelowski (2000) emphasizes that qualitative research methods are open to receiving direct responses to specific relevant questions like "What are the concerns of people about an event? What are people's responses (e.g., thoughts, feelings, attitudes) toward an event?" (p. 337). Qualitative data analysis is rooted in the "related processes of describing phenomena, classifying it, and seeing how our concepts interconnect" (Dey, 1993, P. 32). Feminist focus group scholars such as Wilkinson (1999) suggest that the social context of focus group interviews is instrumental in observing how meaning is constructed. This interactive feature of focus group data provides an in-depth insight into the participants' interpretations and context which cannot be observed outside the group through other quantitative or other qualitative methods.

In this study, I examined participants' responses to onscreen VAW (phenomena) in one form of popular culture (event) in India. To analyze and scrutinize representations of onscreen VAW and their interpretations, I used qualitative methods such as cinematic sociological study of film in conjunction with focus group interviews. These methods were used in an effort to reach a deeper understanding of the context of VAW as well as the problem of VAW itself. Furthermore, qualitative methods serve to identify trends and patterns based on contextual variables and demographic differences of the participants and do a comparative analysis between their film interpretations (Sofaer, 1999, P. 1102). Before I continue to examine the qualitative methods used in the study, it is important to address my role, assumptions and positionality as the researcher.

C.   **Researcher Assumptions, Role and Positionality**

I begin this section by first explaining my background and experiences to shed some light on my assumptions and positionality regarding this dissertation research. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2011), the researcher's personal experiences, conceptions of self and others, historical context, gender, socioeconomic status, race and national identity influences the interactive process of research (See Gibbons, 2010). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) highlight the role of the researcher and the process of interpretation:

> All research is interpretive: guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Some beliefs may be taken for granted, invisible, or only assumed, whereas others are highly problematic and controversial. Each interpretive paradigm makes particular demands on the researcher, including the questions that are asked and the interpretations that are brought to them (p. 13).

This description emphasizes the significance of incorporating the researcher's role and inferences in interpreting the findings of this research project. Gibbons (2010) suggests that a research project can be considerably influenced by the researcher's positionality (i.e. her social and political position through her subject matter and respondents) and this must be addressed while discussing the findings (p. 53). Therefore, I begin by describing how Bollywood Hindi films became a part of my childhood and adolescence. I provide an overview of my personal history, and describe how my desire to volunteer and work odd jobs as a high school and college student in Mumbai ran contrary to gender norms in the 1990s and, unfortunately, left me vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault.

1.   **Bhats and Bollywood**

In Mumbai, I was brought up in a household listening to classical and contemporary Bollywood music, and watching Bollywood Hindi movies with my late maternal grandmother, Nirmala Bhat. She was a devoted fan of the late Bollywood actress Nargis and iconic Bollywood

actor, Amitabh Bachchan (73 years as of 2016). In my grandmother's younger days, she used to take strolls around the block where Mr. Bachchan lived in Juhu (a neighborhood in Mumbai), hoping to catch a glimpse of him entering or exiting his bungalow. As a kid, I loved spending time with her as we sat and watched his films, stage concerts and interviews. At one point in time, my mother was so fed up with me being glued to the television and ignoring my school work that I had curfew hours for watching television or movies with my grandmother. Thanks to her, I remember having a huge crush on Amitabh Bachchan at that early age. The Hindi films made in Bollywood and the dance/music played an integral part of my childhood and influenced the way I thought about gender and violence.

2.   **Personal history**

I am a post-graduate, cisgender, heterosexual Indian woman born and raised in the city of Mumbai, India. I have been living in the United States on a F-1 student non-immigrant visa from 2004 onwards to pursue my graduate studies. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from University of Mumbai, India. In the 1980s, my family struggled yet enjoyed a simple middle-class lifestyle. But I am aware of my privileged upbringing as I have completed higher education in India and abroad, have had access to basic and important amenities, traveled and dined, and spent quality time with my family and friends. I am also conscious of my intermediate spoken and written English language skills acquired from schooling in India.

I worked part-time and volunteered on different short-term projects from an early age, for fun, experience and extra income in jobs such as tutoring and sales. I remember receiving mixed responses from friends, relatives and acquaintances about working during college as, unlike the culture in America where teens and young adults are expected to start working part time in the summer or during the academic year, it was unexpected in India, especially in the 1990s, for young girls from middle and upper class families to work after high school or while completing college. On one hand, my parents encouraged and supported me to take up work projects or work part-time to gain experience, make connections and learn the value of hard-earned money. On the other hand,

when I told people I was working part-time at an international and popular fast-food restaurant while completing my undergraduate degree at an elite, upper class, popular girls' college in Mumbai, people either gasped or expressed concern. They assumed I worked due to family financial strains, which wasn't the case. In addition to my day-to-day lived experiences of street sexual harassment, my ambition challenged traditional Indian gender norms and increased the risk of harm. In the following section, I provide further details about my encounters and experiences with sexual violence and harassment in India to empower my feminist voice.

3. **Surviving gender violence**

During college, I volunteered in the National Cadet Corps program (like ROTC in the United States) and was sexually assaulted by a senior male officer. I also prevented my colleague from being assaulted at the same time. When I worked at a fast-food restaurant in Mumbai, I had my first experience with sexual harassment at work with a male colleague. In addition, I was forced to be intimate by a date after I said 'no', and he blamed 'his yearn for intimacy' on romance in Bollywood cinema. Regrettably, I did not report any of these or other multiple forms of daily harassment and gender violence to my parents, my younger sister, the police or other authorities due to feelings of shame and guilt, and to prevent the further trauma of victim-blaming. My family would have been supportive but due to the pain from the trauma and victimization, it took me almost a decade to even be able to acknowledge my role as a survivor of sexual assault and gender violence. Only in the past five years did I start sharing my experiences of sexual assault with my younger sister, partner and close friends in the United States. As a survivor of sexual harassment and sexual violence, I have been committed to learning and actively advocating for the rights of survivors of gender-based violence.

Although I have long been an ardent fan of certain Indian films and Bollywood culture, my personal experience with sexual violence prompted me to look more critically at music and films I had previously uncritically consumed. Some of the ways that sexual violence is depicted in

Bollywood films suggests that being aggressive and forceful is romantic or a sign of love. As a college student in Mumbai studying psychology, I realized how traumatizing, unpleasant and wrong these attitudes were, particularly when I personally experienced sexual harassment and sexual violence. Additionally, I saw women in Bollywood cinema, especially in the 1980s-1990s being depicted as unconditionally loving, self-sacrificing and submissive. These representations may have led me, my peers and other audiences to believe in the notion of an 'ideal' Indian woman. I argue that these messages reinforced by popular culture, especially Bollywood cinema, result in unrealistic, conservative, unjust societal expectations and moral policing of women in India.

As a doctoral student at UIC, I have conducted research and reviewed literature on different cross-cultural aspects of gender-violence, particularly VAW. In this graduate student journey, I have been fortunate to have interacted and worked with other advocates, directors and leaders who work towards preventing gender violence at UIC and in Chicagoland. I have had four academic publications addressing different aspects of gender violence including a book chapter, two encyclopedia entries and one literature review in a peer-reviewed journal. I have also completed my 40-hour Illinois certified Domestic Violence training in 2012 after which I briefly volunteered at a multi-cultural and multi-lingual not for profit organization for domestic violence survivors in Chicago. In Fall of 2015, I participated in the Stop Street Harassment Blog Correspondent Program by submitting blogs on different cross-cultural aspects of gender violence both in India and the United States[9]. While completing the writing of my dissertation, I also recently started working as a Training and Technical Assistance Specialist at the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA), a state coalition that works towards preventing sexual violence through outreach and education. In the next section, I focus particularly on my role and experience as a non-immigrant living away from India.

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[9] For my blogs on Stop Street Harassment, click here: http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/?s=meghna+bhat

4.   <u>**Being a non-immigrant**</u>

Drawn from my role as a non-immigrant visa holder and my peers' experiences living away from India—I have noticed that individuals who have traveled abroad or who are currently living away from home for tourism, work or studies are more likely to expand their knowledge and be informed civilians about their home away from home. Like me, most tend to go outside their comfort zone to learn about new cultures, interact with people of diverse backgrounds and become more sensitive, tolerant and liberal towards social issues. This observation is based on my personal experiences as an Indian on a temporary visa in the United States. Indians, like all immigrants around the world, tend to be dedicated, hard-working and value their freedom, hard-earned income and cultural context. I also realized that in many social science studies I reviewed as a graduate student, our voices as an Indian holding a non-immigrant visa are missing in the literature.

In this role as an international student from India and a graduate student, I am conscious of the privileges I have experienced in this journey. This includes access to people for the purposes of this dissertation, such as faculty mentors and advisers, inspiring colleagues and their expertise, and participants who invested their time to provide their experiences and insights (Gibbons, 2010). I am also mindful that my personal and work experiences range from surviving sexual violence to advocating for the survivors of gender violence, conducting research on prevention and intervention to volunteering in this movement to reduce gender violence. They are all likely to shape my interpretations of my experiences during my dissertation study. However, the purpose of mindfully selecting this research problem and methodologies was not to scientifically study the cause-effect relationship between popular culture and audience reception. I did not intend to study my participants directly or to indoctrinate a consciousness and empowerment approach among my participants (Gibbons, 2010). The main objective of this study was to explore a gap in literature about the relationship between the images of VAW in cinema and film audiences' definitions, interpretations

and reactions to the violence. In this study, I discovered my role as an interpreter of these participants' responses and reactions. According to Stake (1995),

> The researcher can take on various roles including that of teacher, advocate, evaluator, biographer, or interpreter. An interpreter is the one who studies a problem or puzzle with the intent to connect it to known things, to find new connections and make them comprehensible to others (in Gibbons, 2010, P. 54).

To summarize, my assumptions and experiences highlighted above demonstrate the insight and experiences I have contributed to shape this study, particularly the hurdles that I encountered. I now explain the role of feminist voice and feminist research perspectives in the study by taking ownership of my dissertation and what it offers.

D.   Feminist Research Perspectives

Unlike other inquiries, feminist perspectives place women as the focus of research and conducts studies beneficial to women. Allen and Baber (1992) explain that "feminists engage the academic and scientific systems they criticize by asking new questions" (p.2). I was deeply committed to place representations of women as the focus of this study. As one may have noted, feminist research also has inspired me to use a more active feminist voice in writing my dissertation and discussing the results later in this document. Scholars have applied feminist theories within a wide variety of research designs and methodologies (Allen & Baber, 1992; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Peplau & Conrad, 1989). Like other researchers, feminists follow the same techniques to conduct research and discuss their findings. For example, we collect data, interview participants, observe people's behaviors and examine archives and documents.

In this qualitative study, I applied feminist research perspectives to many exploratory phases of a larger research study. First, I explore an understudied research topic of how representations of VAW in popular culture in India may shape and influence audiences. Secondly, my personal narratives about my role, assumptions, experiences and positionality described in the previous section

inform my feminist approach to the findings of this study. Third, using focus groups in this study fills a gap in the literature as it has been rarely used by feminist researchers despite its advantages (Pini, 2002; Wilkinson, 1999). Through focus group data, Frances Montell (1999) explores how women's constructions of sex may be influenced by images in popular culture. Montell (1999) argues, "more than most other methods, group interviews provide feminists with the opportunity to conduct research that is consciousness raising and empowering" (in Pini, 2002, p. 341). Although my study was not designed with the aim to raise consciousness among participants, I hope that the study findings will be used to educate and empower readers. I also use feminist theories as the primary framework to study the selected Bollywood films. Fourth, another objective of using focus groups with a feminist lens is to maximize participants' interaction within the group discussion. Pini (2002) argues that focus groups have the potential to (a) diffuse the power dynamics within group interactions and hierarchical research relationships, (b) collectively construct and generate knowledge about the subject such as women's lives, and (c) empowering study participants to 'challenge, critique and learn from each other' (pp. 341-342). Fifth, a feminist voice was used to discuss the study and challenge the role of my personal observations and data collection methods and any impact on the findings (Gibbons, 2010). Last, irrespective of the differences among scholars using feminist frameworks, the study results aim to contribute to creating social change.

To closely study Bollywood films, I chose qualitative focus group data as the primary approach because it will help understand the themes of the everyday lived experiences from participants' own interpretations about VAW representation. In the following section, I will further elaborate on why selected Bollywood films were studied and analyzed using sociological theories and explain the sampling approach.

E.   <u>**Applying Qualitative Methods**</u>

This section describes the two-phase approach to examine the research participants'

definitions, interpretations, and reactions from their unique perspectives: (a) thematic film-analysis

and (b) focus group interviews (which include film screening).

1.   <u>**Thematic film analysis**</u>

This study focuses on the film viewers' experiences with and interpretation of onscreen

portrayals of VAW in full-feature length Hindi films made by the Bollywood industry in India. I

selected Bollywood Hindi films as the medium of popular culture as they have a profound, long-term,

and global impact on its audiences (Banaji, 2006; Dudrah, 2006). Outside India, westerners may

perceive Bollywood films more distinct and amusing compared to Hollywood, due to the former's

element of colorful dance and song sequences. Sutherland and Feltey (2013) helped me consider how

our real world and daily social lives are often reflected in and influenced by films. My study applied a

sociological framework[10] to analyzing Bollywood films for the following reasons. First, I was born

and brought up in the city of Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay), the heart of the Bollywood

Hindi film industry and the place where it originated and evolved and am, therefore, familiar with the

cultural relevance of these films. Also, because I was raised in a family of movie buffs, I frequently

watched and thoroughly enjoyed Bollywood cinema together with my parents, my sister, and my

older relatives. As a child, watching Bollywood films was an enjoyable and exciting experience,

where I uncritically consumed onscreen representations and the messages they attempted to convey to

the audience. As an adult and a researcher, Sutherland and Feltey's (2013) explanation of film-

viewing experiences reflects my experience now:

> Reading films with a sociological eye makes us conscious of ourselves as we watch movies.
>
> In a sense, we move from our seats in the theater to the projection booth. From there we can

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[10] The sociological framework is concerned with the social construction of realty. Using this lens, I read the films about the impact of repetition of images in popular culture, or the socializing effects of film on the audiences (Sutherland & Feltey, 2013, p.8)

look at the audience as they "see" the film. Also, we can appreciate the film as *film,* a strip of

material that produces images and ideas. From this angle, we can recognize the social nature

of the movie experience—people coming together for entertainment, for storytelling, for a

view of our culture as well as the cultures of others (p. 5).

Sociologically viewing a film includes decoding meanings and symbols from the film's

content and further interpreting images and representations as a critique. Using a sociological lens to

study films, I too argue that viewing films using these frameworks will give us an insight into the

stories narrated through the film and furthermore, how an examination of these narrations can

contribute to a better understanding of society (Sutherland & Feltey, 2013). Hence, applying a

sociological lens (Denzin, 1989/2013) to study films in this context has been instrumental in

identifying important interrelated and underlying themes as well as designing the focus group

interview questions.

**2.	Focus Group Interviews**

Since the 1980s, academic researchers began to adopt these traditions as an instrument to test

audience reception (Gunter, 2000). Although I have explained the role of using a feminist focus

group framework earlier, it is also important to understand the nature and impact of using focus

groups as a research method. Focus groups, also known as group interviews, bring together a group

of people to discuss an issue or social problem in the presence of a moderator. Lunt and Livingstone

(1996) also suggest that group discussions can be conducted under different conditions depending on

the size and dynamics of the group, types of questions asked, and validation of the consistency, and

reliability of responses. Leavy (2007) explains that focus groups have been mainly used for three

purposes in academic research: exploratory, evaluation, and multi-method research projects. The

current study has an exploratory purpose. Exploratory research is appropriate when there is very little

information about a topic and the researcher is able to obtain any information such as individuals'

attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, reactions, feelings, and personal experiences. The best part is the ability to get all this data from a group of participants at once (Leavy, 2007).

The types of questions that were being explored in this research were more conducive to qualitative methods. The researcher must formulate very open-ended initial questions asking individuals to describe their experiences and responses about a certain topic. Eventually, specific questions or "probes" may also be posed to these individuals. In contrast, quantitative research incudes more close-ended questions leaving less choices for a wide range of responses. Capturing the film viewers' immediate film interpretations and experiences of watching any instances of VAW in Bollywood cinema is the reason I first decided to screen the film to participants before conducting the focus group discussions.

Conducting focus groups requires asking a series of open-ended questions and probes (if applicable) to a small group of individuals. Using a single consistent set of questions during a series of sessions will assist the moderator in identifying similarities and differences in responses of diverse groups of participants. Focus group may have certain limitations in terms of being time-consuming, participant bias, group dynamics and cumbersome data analysis. However, I had to keep in mind that engaging focus group techniques means that individual opinions may be distorted by group influences. Focus group data reflect collective notions shared and discussed by the participants of the group (Gunter, 2000). Scholars such as Katz and Liebes (1984), Lunt and Livingstone (1996), and Morley (1980, 1981) conducted studies using focus groups to examine the impact of television programs on audiences (Angrosino, 2007). By using focus groups to explore how people make sense of and understand images of VAW in films, my dissertation will add to the growing body of literature on popular culture and audience reception. More importantly, I believe this study will contribute to an in-depth understanding of how images in popular culture may affect the audiences' perceptions, interpretations and attitudes towards VAW.

In addition, Toseland, Jones, and Gellis (2004) point out that group dynamics are dependent on communication and interaction trends and patterns. They suggest that the communication style of participants in a group shapes the group dynamics such as the extent of participants' involvement. Since India is a collectivist society, focus group discussions was ideal in exploring the interpretations of this group of Indian diasporic film audiences in the U.S. rather than one-to-one interviews (English, 2016). In the current study, I used focus groups to observe participants watching films and note their reactions. I am applying sociological perspectives not only to interpret Bollywood films, but also to understand the ways in which this specific population sample (audience) 'sees' films (Sutherland & Feltey, 2013). Leavy (2007) explains that focus group interviews are very efficient in obtaining data from either "difficult," "marginalized," or "silenced" groups in the society, in terms of their feelings, attitudes, and experiences of groups, for example, women, and racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities. Most scholars of popular culture and audience reception studying the South Asian diaspora community end up combining all subtypes of South Asian immigrants and nonimmigrants in one group (Banaji, 2006; Bhattacharjya, 2009). Thus, the individual voices of those Indians living in the United States on a temporary visa[11] are often missing in these studies.

Feminist researchers seek to explore the group interaction and "multivocal narrative" that takes place during focus group interviews. According to Leavy (2007), focus groups are expected to create a "happening," which is a "conversation that, while prearranged and focused by the researcher, remains a dynamic narrative process. Within the context, group members communicate their thoughts, feelings and experiences on their own terms" (Leavy, 2007, p. 173). Since I conducted this study to understand how public perceptions and interpretations are constructed and influenced by the portrayal of VAW in Bollywood films, focus group interviewing helped to explain the collective shared experiences of the Indian film viewers. Kitzinger (1994) argues that group communication plays an important role in effective focus group discussions because we can prioritize the

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[11] This type of visa category has been explained in detail in Chapter V.

participants' context, their understanding of concepts, language and their interpretation of understanding the world and its happenings. Focus groups have the potential to identify group interactions and deeply understand discussions, which other conventional one-to-one interviews or questionnaires do not (Leavy, 2007).

Kitzinger (1994) suggests that group dynamics within focus groups work best when the participants lead the moderator into new and interesting directions of interaction. When this occurs, participants may agree and have similar experiences or may be argumentative due to different experiences, as demonstrated by questioning or disagreeing with other participants. Focus group interviewing ensures that all participants of different backgrounds, contexts, and lifestyles will be approached using the same frameworks and standardized questions (Schlesinger et al., 1992). Further, ethnographic findings by Banaji (2006) and Derne (1999) highlight both the collective experiences of watching Bollywood cinema and enjoying this form of entertainment with family and friends (e.g., discussing favorite films and actors) as a common experience to connect, socialize, and bond with others. Hence, focus group discussions were ideal for this study. In the next section, I demonstrate why gender-specific discussions were used to study participants' reactions and interpretations.

a. <u>Why gender-specific focus groups?</u>

My dissertation research will be the first to compare men's and women's interpretations of and reactions to such films and their real-life knowledge, thus emphasizing the need to have gender-specific focus group discussions. As mentioned earlier, this study acknowledges the limitation of restricting the gender differences to the binary divide of male and female, and does not include transgender individuals. Gender-specific focus groups also allow men and women to have a space of their own in a supportive atmosphere where they feel comfortable expressing their views and responses in a group context. Hence, this arrangement ensured that the female interpretations and participation would not be dampened or distorted by the presence of males and vice versa

(Schlesinger et al., 1992). In order to encourage maximum interaction and facilitate discussion between research participants, I conducted single gender focus groups facilitated by moderators of the same gender.

I believe it was important to closely identify any contextual differences in terms of the participants' geographic locations, exposure to different gender roles and relations, and interaction with members of the same and opposite sex. This may be because they may be feeling oppressed, repressed, and very rarely find a supportive atmosphere to discuss their personal experiences. On the contrary, having gender workshops with male participants could lead to participants displaying anxieties, insecurities, and hostilities that they bring with them (Bhasin, 1996). Depending on the number of inquiries received for the study and total eligible participants, there was also a possibility of having at least one mixed focus group comprising of both male and female participants to see if their reactions and interpretations about the films screened and this subject would be different. This did not occur due to participants' unavailability and other hurdles, and hence the focus groups in this study remained single gender.

In addition to focus groups, I also used brief demographics questionnaires to collect data about the participants' backgrounds and their own reactions to the screened Bollywood films in the study. The participants self-reported their demographics such as their age, visa status, education and employment level, length of stay in the U.S. etc. These responses helped providing further clarity and understanding of their responses. In addition to the brief demographic questionnaires completed by the participants, this stage of data collection included screening one of the two Bollywood films to the group of participants followed by the focus group discussion on the same day. The next section explains why showing films to the participants was critical to understanding their responses during the focus group interviews.

b. <u>**Why screen films?**</u>

Katz and Liebes (1984) studied how television viewers from different cultures perceive and interpret popular television programs through focus group discussions. In their study, the researchers analyzed the television program *Dallas* by thoroughly examining the conversations and reactions about *Dallas* among groups of family and friends in different subcultures. According to Katz and Liebes (1984), "viewing [of television programs] takes place at home and, in most countries, is done in the presence of family and friends. During and after the program, people discuss what they have seen, and come to collective understandings. These understandings draw on a variety of interpretive tools (p.28)." Although this quote on viewing television shows may not resonate with the experience of viewing Bollywood films in India or abroad, film viewers prefer to watch Bollywood films with their family, friends, and other film viewers in a cinema theater for entertainment purposes, depending on the genre and plot of the film screened (Derne, 1995).

Popular Hindi films are automatically becoming a part of the passive viewers' lives within the four walls of the households because films are being screened or repeated on television after releasing in the theater. As Katz and Liebes (1984) suggest, the TV program is "read" by the viewers as negotiating between their own cultures and the story on the screen and this interaction takes place naturally among the viewers themselves (p. 28). Mankekar (1993) explains that by "examining the viewer's active interaction with television texts, we can envision popular culture as a site of struggle and not simply of domination, an arena of consent and resistance, partly where hegemony rises, and where it is secured" (p. 544). Furthermore, Banaji (2006) highlights:

> …the immediate context of the social act of viewing Hindi films in a group, along with members of an audience, in a quasi-public space such as a cinema hall or a crowded living room, can have a profound impact on the nature of spectatorship, inflecting and even coloring entirely the experience of film viewing and the interpretation of particular sequences in films (in Vandevelde, Meers, Bauwel & Winkel, 2015, p. 89).

The data analyzed in this study are drawn from thematic film analysis, film screening, and focus group interviews. Notes from participant observations during film screenings were recorded by the facilitator and incorporated into memos for data analysis (Saldana, 2012). In summary, the prime purpose of screening a film before the focus group discussion on the same day was to elicit the participants' immediate impressions and reactions to the film. In other words, I used the film screening as a point of reference to guide focus group discussions and provide an opportunity for the group to discuss other films. The next section explains in detail how data was collected in the first phase of thematic film analysis. I also present the synopsis of the two films, logistics of the sampling process, and the process of analyzing these films.

F.   Data Collection

In the current study, data collection was comprised of seven steps: First, I developed a set of criteria to select Bollywood films that would be used for screening before the focus group interviews. Second, based on the criteria, I reviewed studies, feminist essays, news articles, blogs and box office collection data and completed the film selection process. Third, I analyzed the two selected films using Denzin's sociological approach to study and analyze films (1989/2013). The fourth step included using themes that emerged from analysis of these two films to create questions and develop a discussion guide for focus group interviews. Fifth, I conducted mock focus group and brainstorming sessions with colleagues and friends to test film themes and focus group questions. The sixth step included creating a criteria of recruiting participants for the focus group interviews. Seventh, on the day of the study, participants completed a brief demographic survey, watched one of the two Bollywood films, and participated in a gender-specific focus group discussion. Eight gender-specific focus groups of 35 eligible participants were completed. In the next two sections, I first describe the process of sampling and selecting the Bollywood films and further examine the approach of analyzing films.

1.   Sampling Bollywood films

Selective sampling was used in this study to determine which Bollywood films were best suited for thematic analysis, film screening, and focus group discussion. According to Teddlie and Yu (2007), selective or purposive sampling is defined as a kind of sampling in which "particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be determined easily as well from other choices" (p. 77). Selective or purposive sampling techniques are mostly used in qualitative studies and the units selected can be individuals, groups of individuals, institutions, and so on (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In the first part of this study, two Bollywood films form the unit of analysis. Patton (1990) states that "the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposive sampling" (p.169). In order to determine which two information-rich Bollywood films would form the core of my study, I first established a set of criteria to assist in the process of narrowing my selection from hundreds of thousands of available Bollywood films to two.

In this research, I focused on how Bollywood cinema constructs images of women and violence against them. The objective was to examine the themes, issues, and subjects that surfaced from film audiences' understanding of VAW in their daily lives, and their interpretation of gender violence in popular culture. Since the primary purpose of the study was to examine representations of VAW in commercial cinema, I prioritized this criterion. I also prioritized films with a female protagonist or main plot focused on a woman or women. Additional criteria included that the film (a), have more than two leading Bollywood stars (actors/actresses), (b) was publicly labeled or reviewed as 'women-centric/women-oriented', and (c) must have been released to the audience in the years after 2000, thus spanning 2000-2013. I ultimately selected two films using a specific set of criteria (See Table I).

TABLE I: Criteria to select Bollywood Films

Criterion	*Lajja*	*The Dirty Picture*
Multi-starrer film having more than two leading known Bollywood stars	Yes (2006, 2015)	Yes (2012; 2015)
Bollywood Hindi Film	Yes (2006; 2015)	Yes (2012; 2015)
Reviewed as "woman-centric" or "woman-oriented"	Yes (2006; 2015)	Yes (2012; 2015)
Presence of VAW	Yes (2006; 2015)	Yes (2012; 2015)
Female protagonist/main plot centered around woman/women	Yes (2006; 2015)	Yes (2012; 2015)
Released between 2000-2013	2001 (2006; 2015)	2011 (2012; 2015)

For instance, my search was comprised of online reviews, public movie forums, search results of fan list on top "women-centric films" by news channels and Bollywood fans, informal discussions with my social circle, and the literature on Bollywood Hindi films (Jain & Rai, 2002; Kaushal, 2013; Sarkar, 2012). A total of five Bollywood films repeatedly emerged in these sources: *Astitva* (2000), *Lajja* (2001), *Satta (2003), Fashion* (2008), and *The Dirty Picture* (2011). Based on this list of five films, I finally shortlisted *Lajja* (2001) and *The Dirty Picture* (2011) because both these films were commonly perceived as the most woman-centric films in in the literature reviewed (both formal and informal).

Additionally, these films represented women and men from different geographic regions in India. The former film depicts women experiencing one or more forms of VAW. The female protagonist in the latter film challenges the notion of relationships, women's bodies, sexuality, and suitable careers. These themes were important to me as a feminist researcher, therefore I selected films that would prompt the focus groups to discuss a wide variety of topics such as VAW, gender equality, oppression and representation of women in cinema. Tere (2012) argues that, "it is necessary to understand that such portrayals find rationale in the power structures that govern Indian society. These power structures do not impart any agency to women…the inclination to portray women as ideal stems from the social and cultural context in which we reside" (p. 6). In the next section, I

provide the synopses of these films and explain my rationale for choosing these two particular films

(see Figures 1 and 2 for the film posters).

Figure 1. Poster of the film *Lajja* (Shame),
2001 (Source: Film DVD Cover)

Figure 2. Poster of the film *The Dirty
Picture,* 2011 (Source: Film DVD Cover)

The first film I selected was *Lajja* (2001) directed by Rajkumar Santoshi. This film has a range of acting stalwarts such as Madhuri Dixit, Rekha, Manisha Koirala, Jackie Shroff, and Ajay Devgan among many other supporting actors. In this film, the director weaves the stories of four women who have been oppressed and victimized by in some form of abuse and violence by men. According to Banaji (2006), "it is the portrayal of rape [in *Lajja*] that must not be forgotten…that is the portrayal of a woman being raped on screen in this Bollywood film" (p. 46). This film consists of some more visible forms of VAW against female protagonists, and thus warrants attention.

The film *Lajja* begins with the story of a young married woman, Vaidehi (Manisha Koirala) living with her husband in the United States. She leaves the U.S. after being abused and assaulted by her rich husband, Raghu (Jackie Shroff). When she reaches India, her parents reject her and blame her for leaving her husband. Therefore, she leaves on a journey to save herself and her unborn child. During this journey of saving herself from a manhunt initiated by her abusive husband, she meets two other female protagonists, Mailthili, Janaki and Ram Dulari. The first is Maithili (Mahima Chaudhary), an urban yet traditional and simple girl, who has canceled her own wedding ceremony after experiencing dowry harassment from her fiancé and his parents. Next is Janaki (Madhuri Dixit), a bold, street smart, unapologetic young pregnant unwed theater actress who lives in a village. She is publicly assaulted and humiliated, and, finally institutionalized, for challenging the patriarchal motifs of a Hindu mythology play. Last is Ram Dulari (Rekha), the oldest female protagonist in the village, a single parent of an educated son working in the city. She belongs to scheduled caste in the village, and is an entrepreneur who gives employment opportunities to other women. As a vigilante against many forms of gender violence and other forms of caste oppression from landlords, Ram Dulaari does not survive after being gang raped and is burnt alive by the village goons. The local thief, Raju (Anil Kapoor) and the Robin Hood-cum-exiled-vigilante leader Bulwa (Ajay Devgan) are men and were represented as saviors and protectors of the female protagonists.

The second film that I analyzed in this study was the controversial but commercially successful and critically acclaimed film *The Dirty Picture*, released in 2011. This film, directed by Milan Luthria, is a biographical sketch based on the life of a South Indian female actress, Silk Smitha, popular for her erotic films and overt sexuality. Tere (2012) explains that among many contemporary films, "*The Dirty Picture* (2011) has pictured extraordinary themes and portrayed women as central to the story line. These films have forced creators to take a fresh look at different roles played by women and introspect into the kind of typecast that was being perpetuated earlier" (p. 4). The bold images and representations of the female protagonist, Silk (aka Reshma) in *The Dirty Picture* are unapologetic about her sexuality and body, a rare theme in in Bollywood cinema. In this biopic, the actress, Silk Smitha, was unapologetic about her brazen sexuality (on and off screen) and her non-conventional erotic roles in the South Indian film industry. She rose to stardom due to these roles but also for some of her hard-hitting performances in other films. Unfortunately, the actress Silk ended her life, which was reflected in this film.

In summary, I chose these two films for the following reasons. First, they spanned across a decade, which I thought would help to identify differences in representations and themes across time. Second, they had leading female protagonists and were labeled as "woman-oriented" films (see Table II for a list of characters in the selected films). Important themes were identified using a sociological lens to analyze these two films (Denzin, 1989). In the next section, I discuss why a sociological lens was adopted to analyze these films, and provide further details of how these films were studied.

TABLE II: List of Characters from Selected Films

Lajja	**Actor/ress performing the role**
Vaidehi - 1st leading female protagonist	Manisha Koirala
Raghu - Vaidehi's husband	Jackie Shroff
Maithili- 2nd female protagonist	Mahima Chaudhry
Raju- low-key thief, lives in same village as Maithili	Anil Kapoor
Jaanki- drama artist, lives in a village	Madhuri Dixit

Purshottam- Drama theater owner and director, married	Tinu Anand
Bulwa- village vigilante aka Robin Hood, rebel	Ajay Devgan
Ram Dulaari- low caste owner of small women-employed and self- sufficient business, has a son, abandoned by her husband	Rekha
The exploitative and abusive village landlord	Danny Denzogpa
The Dirty Picture	**Actor/ress performing the role**
Reshma aka Silk Smitha- small town village girl who becomes a movie star and film producer	Vidya Balan
Suryakanth or Surya- huge celebrity, well-known movie actor, married with a child	Naseruddin Shah
Ramakanth- Surya's younger brother, aspiring script writer, fan of Silk	Tusshar Kapoor
Abraham- A film director	Emraan Hashmi

2.   **Analyzing Bollywood films**

In order to analyze the two Bollywood Hindi films, *Lajja* and *The Dirty Picture*, I followed Norman Denzin's (1989/2013) sociological approach to analyzing films. Denzin's methodology included "reading the text of the film at multiple levels and attending to implied as well as explicit content" (Denzin, 1989/2013, p. 13). Building on Denzin's approach (1989/2013), I took the following steps to study and analyze these films:

1.   I first selected two films using purposive sampling and viewed each film five times. This gave me the flexibility and choice to stop, rewind and note any impressions of the film. Bollywood films are notorious for their lengthy format and duration (Dudrah, 2006). For example, *Lajja* ran for 3 hours 22 minutes and *The Dirty Picture* lasted for 2 hours 20 minutes.

2.   Next, I outlined the narrative themes of the film by studying the topics important to the study (such as how are men and women depicted, gender roles and relations, VAW), and also examined topics that were not visibly depicted (such as caste, social class, role of allies in VAW, support for survivors of VAW).

3.	I then conducted a closer reading of the film and identified any predominant similar or contradictory interpretations. Denzin (1989/2013) argues that this is "how the film created its meanings through the organization of signifying practices that organize the film's reality" (Denzin, 1989/2013, pp. 13–14). For instance, in *Lajja*, the local thief and well-wisher Raghu lends his own stolen funds to Maithili's parents for her dowry. But Maithili stands up against the dowry harassment perpetrated by her fiancée and his family leading to her wedding being canceled. She is praised by her grandmother for her bravery. But, her father is shown shattered, disheartened and embarrassed by his daughter's courageous action, with the fear that nobody will ask her hand for marriage. Thus, these interpretations signify parallel yet contradictory and confusing meanings about the implications of dowry practice in India resulting in condemning VAW.

4.	The last step included comparing the hegemonic and contradictory themes present in the films. Hegemonic themes refer to emerging politically and socially dominant themes relevant to the topic of gender and VAW. For example, in this study, political, state and social control of women's bodies and identities and roles in India. Contradictory themes refer to those themes that were not overtly visible but prevalent and critical to the larger research questions of the study. For instance, social class, depiction of masculinity, and the role of allies in preventing VAW. The three questions suggested by Denzin (1989/2013) were: (a) What is the story being told through the film, and how is it supported explicitly in how the characters are portrayed, (b) What do they say (and how they say it), and the events that construct a storyline? and (c) How does this compare to the underlying ideological forces of the film? (in Denzin, 1989/2013, Pg. 14).

After studying these two films using Denzin's sociological approach, I identified major recurring themes emerging from the film analysis, noted important quotes from the films, and used these to create questions for focus group discussions. Examples of major themes included women

represented in Bollywood cinema solely for male gaze, and the role of specific kinds of Bollywood dance and song sequences leading to an environment condoning VAW. I also added these film analysis notes to my memos for data analysis. The next section briefly explains how I tested and challenged the focus group questionnaire and study format by brainstorming the questions with colleagues and social contacts.

a. Informal mock focus groups

Mock focus group discussions have been found essential in conducting focus group discussion studies (Wong, 2008). To ensure the questions were correctly framed and understood and to encourage maximum input from research participants, I conducted informal, unconventional mock focus group sessions which also served as brainstorming discussions with different groups (none of whom later served as eligible participants). These small brainstorming sessions were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UIC and my colleagues or friends were not required to sign consent forms. I did not audiotape or videotape these brainstorming discussions and only general discussions and feedback on the film and themes were written down in my notes. To prevent any unanticipated problems in the focus group interview phase, I showed both films to two groups representing different ethnicities and backgrounds. The first group included 3 graduate students, who were my colleagues from the Criminology, Law, and Justice department at UIC and who were interested and available to brainstorm with me about my data collection process. None of them were Indian or South Asian, and hence provided their unbiased perspectives and reactions to the films. For instance, one student self-reported as Black, the second Caucasian and the third of mixed race/multiracial (Black/ Hispanic). It was the first time they all watched these two Bollywood films, *Lajja* and *The Dirty Picture*. I showed them each of the two films on separate days in our department conference room at UIC. The second group included 4–5 friends who were South Asian (i.e. Indians). Without revealing the reason or background of the study, I invited them home to watch this Bollywood film. Both the mock film screening and brainstorming sessions were conducted in the

summer of 2013. In addition to the themes derived from analyzing the two films, the feedback and insights received from these discussants in these mock-cum-brainstorming sessions were instrumental in creating and finalizing my research questions for the focus group interviews. This next section describes the main data collection.

3.   Film screenings and focus group interviews

In this section, I examine the recruitment and eligibility of participants, important logistics, and the brief demographic questionnaire that was given to each participant. I first discuss the details of how participants were recruited based on their eligibility, followed by how data collection was implemented. Last, I explain some of the challenges faced during the data collection process.

a.   Recruitment and eligibility

To recruit eligible and potential participants for the focus group discussions, I created flyers (Appendix A) and composed email and phone scripts (Appendices B and C) that were approved by the IRB at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). These flyers called for individuals who are (1) of Indian origin, (2) must be in the United States holding a valid non-immigrant visa[12] including green card residency, (3) born and raised in India, (4) should have first arrived in the USA before 2003[13], and (5) must be able to understand Hindi (in the films screened), speak in English, and interact with other participants. The flyers also mentioned that they would be compensated for their participation and served light refreshments at the film screenings. I used an independent Google voice phone number on the recruitment flyers, and the calls were forwarded to my cell phone. The voicemail for this Google voice phone number was recorded informing interested participants that they had reached the voicemail inbox for this study.

To reach a diverse group of Indian participants, I sent out IRB-approved flyers and emails to undergraduate and graduate student organizations, campus-wide list serves, clubs and international

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[12] Indians who are not US citizens yet usually hold the non-immigrant visa and may be recently accepted for permanent residency in the United States. Further details are provided in Chapter IV.

[13] Since both the selected Bollywood films were released between 2000 and 2011, this criterion was included to study the differences in interpretations of participants during that decade, hence participants who arrived between 2003 and 2013 were considered.

student offices in the University of Illinois at Chicago, DePaul University, Columbia College, and Northwestern University. Flyers were also posted in stores in West Rogers Park, particularly on Devon Avenue in Chicago, a neighborhood filled with restaurants, apparel stores, and cafes representing the South Asian community. Additionally, I posted flyers and sent emails to the movie theaters in the suburbs that showed Indian films such as the Reliance BIG Cinema. I am thankful to the staff of organizations catering to the South Asian communities in Chicagoland, such as South Asian Advocacy, Policy and Research Institute (SAAPRI), Apna Ghar, Inc., and the Indo-American Center. They played a major role in distributing my IRB-approved flyer and emails for participant recruitment. I maintained a list of sites where flyers were posted and the agencies to which the emails were sent to the study to maintain a uniform and consistent documentation of the recruitment process.

The aim was to recruit a sample of 40 participants for the study (20 male and 20 female participants) and conduct a total of four focus group interviews. After the study flyers and emails were distributed, I received a total of 124 inquiries including emails, calls and, voice mails. Out of the 124 inquiries, 73 were females and 51 males. Out of these 59 screened over the phone, 14 reported learning about the study from UIC Events Calendar (also includes UIC website or UIC announcements), 11 from their friends and family members, and 7 through word of mouth from other callers and participants. The remaining ten reported they had come across the study flyer through other university list serves, flyers on campus, or at the movie theater.

After having screened participants for their eligibility and determining their availability for certain predetermined dates on Saturdays especially the weekends, a total of 55 participants (33 females and 22 males) were eligible. From those 55 eligible participants, only 46 responded to follow-up calls (Appendix D for participation confirmation follow-up phone script, version 1, 07/18/16) and voicemails to provide additional details of the study and determine their availability. The others did not respond at all and after leaving two voicemails within 2 weeks, I did not contact them further. Additionally, of the 46 eligible participants who expressed interest and responded to the

first confirmation emails, only 35 participants completed the study. The remaining five participants either withdrew from the study or did not respond to further emails and calls. Also, three participants cancelled last minute and 3 were no-shows on the day of the study.

Eligible and available participants were sent a confirmation email with the details of the study such as date, time, contact number, venue, and directions (See Appendix E for the participation confirmation email script). I requested these participants to confirm their participation via email. The week before the study and then one day before the study, I sent them a reminder about the study via a follow-up call and email. The next section describes the data collection process, and the final count of participants and logistics on the study day.

4.   **Conducting the study**

The study was advertised and promoted for recruitment from August 25, 2013 to February 28, 2014. Due to a few unanticipated hurdles (discussed further in detail), eight smaller focus groups were conducted, comprising 4 to 6 participants. These eight focus groups were conducted from September 28, 2013 to January 2014. A total of 35 research participants (17 females and 18 males) completed the study and contributed to the focus group discussions. Two of the female focus groups and two of the male focus groups were shown the film *Lajja* (202 minutes) and the remaining four focus groups were shown the film *The Dirty Picture* (145 minutes). That way, almost 50 percent of the male and female focus groups were shown one film and the remaining 50 percent screened the second film.

The study was conducted in Room 4011 (conference room with a TV and projector) of the Criminology, Law, and Justice department located in the Behavioral Sciences Building (1007 West Harrison Street, Chicago, IL). This venue was accessible via public transport, paid parking spaces were allotted to participants, and direction signs were posted in the building pointing to the conference room. I also contacted the Learning Environments & Technology Services (LETS) at UIC for help setting up the logistics of the room where the film would be screened and focus group

discussion would be conducted (See Figure 3 for a photo of the conference room that held film
screenings and focus groups).

Figure 3. Photo of the Focus Group Setting (Conference Room)

The participants were informed via phone during the follow-up calls and emails that their
study on Saturday would last for almost 5.5 hours approximately from 10 am to 3 pm. They were
requested to reach the venue by 9:50 am. Directions and parking information for the study venue was
provided in the follow-up emails and confirmations sent to them.

After all participants arrived, I first began with the details of the study using the Focus Group
Interview Guide (Appendix F) and explained about the consent process forms for IRB (See Appendix
G). They first read through the IRB-approved consent form, then they and I signed two copies of it
and I handed them one of the signed copies for their record. The other copies of the signed consent
forms were in a locked file cabinet in my locked office. Next, I explained the brief demographic
questionnaires (Appendix H) and the agenda for the day. While I gave them 10 minutes to fill out the
initial pages of the questionnaire, I inserted the DVD into my laptop and the film was screened onto
the big TV in the conference room. The film screening lasted approximately 3–3.5 hours followed by

a 5-minute break and ended with a 90-minute focus group discussion. The general questions for the focus groups were same for all the eight focus group discussions but specific questions were framed for probing depending on which film was screened to the participants of that group (refer to Appendix I for the focus group questions). The focus group discussion was audio and video recorded using technical equipment from the LETS office at UIC. The study ended with participants completing their demographic questionnaires and receiving compensation for their study (a $10 gift card from Target). For refreshments, coffee and donuts were served during breakfast and pizza and soda were offered to the participants during lunch. The funds I received from the 2013 Provost Award from the Graduate College at the University of Illinois at Chicago were utilized to pay for these data collection expenses such as refreshments, office supplies, and compensation.

5.   Gender-specific focus groups

I conducted gender-specific (specifically single-gender) focus group discussions because the purpose of the study was to study gender differences in how non-immigrant Indian audiences interpreted onscreen images of VAW in Bollywood cinema. Hence, to ensure that participants felt comfortable providing candid responses to the questions asked, a male-identified facilitator was recruited to conduct the male focus groups for the study while I (self-identified as female) conducted the female focus groups. While preparing for the data collection, I contacted a colleague with whom I had worked at an Asian-American community event. He is a licensed social worker and had completed his Ph.D. in Social Work from Loyola University. He completed his IRB training online and we met twice to inform him of the study and brainstorm about what would be the best way to conduct the focus groups. In addition, I also recruited a female-identified co-facilitator/ assistant and a male co-facilitator/assistant to help with the logistics of the study, especially note-taking. They, too, completed IRB training in order to be eligible to assist with the study and we met twice to discuss the study logistics and expectations. Next, I highlight the obstacles I encountered during this phase and implications of using these methods.

6.   **<u>Hurdles in data collection</u>**

Although the initial goal was to conduct four gender-specific focus groups, the study ran into some unpredictable hurdles. Ultimately, the focus group interviews showed to provide rich data. However, it is important to address the challenges I encountered as a lesson for future scholars. First, retaining eligible and available participants from their first inquiry until the day of the study caused further delays in collecting data. For example, the first male focus group scheduled to take place on September 29, 2013 resulted in only one participant showing up. The remaining five participants were contacted four days and one day before the study to remind them and were sent emails. Out of the 5 no-shows for this group, I had personally spoken to three of them the day before, thus confirming their attendance and had left voice messages for the remaining two. Having only one male participant show up that day resulted in canceling the study for that day and sending the participant back with a sincere apology. A similar situation of participant no-show occurred in other focus groups (primarily male) where participants remained absent without notification. Instead of the 6–7 expected participants, four of the 8 focus groups each ended up having only 4 members. The no-shows by participants could be attributed to the inconvenience of spending a whole day on a weekend for a research study and for cold weather conditions during the winter of 2013–2014.

Second, it became more difficult when eligible participants were still interested but unexpectedly unavailable due to international trips to India, visiting family, and other commitments to their studies such as assignments, etc. In order to retain the remaining enthusiastic and eligible participants, I added more dates for the study extending until end of January of 2014, both for male and female focus groups. Accommodating the schedules of these participants and adding more study dates, especially in circumstances of no shows, were beneficial in ensuring there were ample participants for the study. Hence, from a total of 124 inquiries from potential participants, this study ended up having eight focus groups with a total of 35 participants completing the study. Third, due to unforeseen last minute circumstances, the male co-facilitator/assistant was unable to attend three of

the four male focus groups and the female co-facilitator/assistant was unable to attend two of the four female focus groups. The unexpected and unintentional repeated absence of our assistants/note-takers during the study made me rely on the facilitator notes made during the study and video recordings of the focus group studies. Even though having the note-taker or co-facilitator would have been more effective and although this type of support is highly recommended by conventional focus group researchers, I decided not to reschedule or cancel any of the focus group studies to avoid losing any other eligible and interested participants.

The Friday before each focus group took place (scheduled on a Saturday), I would first set up the microphones, digital recorder tripod, and the video camera from the LETS office in the conference room. At the end of the study, I would make two copies of the audio recordings, test it on my laptop to check quality and save it in my locked cabinet. I have noted these technical and logistic challenges to inform other researchers (especially students) conducting similar studies of potential challenges involved when conducting research with focus groups. Nonetheless, the in-depth qualitative data gained from focus group interviews and other secondary research techniques was an enriching learning experience and contributes to the current literature on qualitative research methods. The next chapter includes strategies for how the data including field notes and memos were prepared, organized, and analyzed.

G.   Data Analysis

The data analysis stage included two steps: (1) preparing the data and (2) analyzing the data from focus group discussions. This section first explains the process in which the focus group data and participant demographics were prepared and organized for the analysis phase. Next, the methods in which this qualitative data was coded and analyzed to identify critical themes is reviewed.

1.   Preparing and organizing the data

This section explains the tasks involved in preparing the data including transcription, memoing, and coding tasks. After each of the focus groups was conducted, I summarized notes from

participant observation and focus group interviews for future memos. Next, two IRB-trained social science students transcribed the focus group discussion data. These students were compensated for their time using funds from the Provost Award. Due to unexpected changes in their schedules, they were unable to finish transcribing the focus group transcripts.

I then relied on an external transcription agency, Landmark Inc., to finish transcribing my focus group interview audio recordings. I paid for these transcription services using additional grant funds received from the Association of Doctoral Programs in Criminology and Criminal Justice (ADPCCJ). Since I could submit audio recordings (but not video recordings to ensure confidentiality and anonymity), the transcription agency was unable to identify and assign names to the multiple voices of participants. Occasionally, the agency was also unable to recognize and transcribe Hindi words or sentences used by participants. After Landmark Inc. returned the transcriptions, I listened to the audio recording of each focus group and corrected any errors in the transcripts. Preparing the data and checking the accuracy of these focus group transcripts occurred from March 2014 until January 2015. Additionally, I also summarized handwritten notes made during the study by facilitators and watched video recordings of focus group discussions to validate the findings (Farrar, 2012).

In addition, I created a memo file including any important thoughts, responses, and interpretations that the male facilitator and I had noted from the film screening sessions and focus group discussions. McCormack (2000) contends that these memo files will highlight relevant questions, researchers' feelings and thoughts about the focus group sessions, and themes derived from the analysis. In this study, a total of 20 memos were created, including 16 memos from the eight focus group interviews and four memos based on film analysis and other observations such as memos and notes also included documentation of nonverbal behaviors observed by researchers or from the video-taped sessions (Farrar, 2012). Furthermore, from January until July 2015, for the second time, I reviewed the transcripts of all eight focus group data to clean the data and check for any errors and inaccuracies. In addition to these transcriptions, tables of the participants' primary demographics

were created (See Chapter 4 for additional details on participant demographics). The participant

population profile and their demographics played an important role while coding focus group data

and identifying critical quotes. After transcripts were prepared and the data was organized, I then

analyzed the focus group data using feminist theoretical frameworks and film and cultural

frameworks. The next section provides more details about the data analysis.

2.   **Analyzing focus group data**

Several factors determine the quality of data obtained from the group discussions. These

factors include whether the researcher located an adequate pool of participants, how the sample was

selected, whether appropriate questions were formulated, how qualified the moderators were, and

whether an efficient analysis strategy was employed (Morgan, 1996). Powell and Single (1996) state

that the first stage in data analysis of focus group transcription is to code and classify the raw data. I

first read through the transcripts and identified open codes. Following Johnny Saldana's

recommendations for coding (2012), I used Atlas.TI software to further finalize the list of open

codes. In the second round of focused coding, I further added, edited, and merged the codes and

identified any common themes, responses, dialogues, and patterns. The next step included

recognizing any differences in these themes and patterns. In addition, any interesting stories, debates,

dialogues, and interactions among the participants were also coded (Farrar, 2012).

Then, to facilitate further analysis, I closely examined the coded data from the focus group

transcripts based on the participants' responses and discussion to identify larger themes. The second

stage was the most complex step of the data analysis. I interpreted important themes emerging from

the first and second rounds of coding using three significant frameworks of (a) gender roles and

relations, (b) defining VAW and (c) interpreting VAW (including participants 'justifications). The

themes resulted from the codes and categories analyzed from the data derived from focus group

sessions. A total of 124 codes were finalized and six categories were created. Since this is an

exploratory qualitative study, I will be focusing on the in-depth qualitative narratives for the findings, and not percentage of themes coded or quantify the participants' responses.

H. **Study Findings**

The next three chapters cover findings identified from each of the three primary research questions. The purpose of discussing results and research questions in this format was to provide an in-depth analysis of the emergent themes that developed during the participant discussion for each of the primary research questions. Each of the findings chapters emphasized gender differences in the way participants interpreted these images in popular culture. In the following chapter, key themes drawn from participants' interpretation of gender roles and relations portrayed in popular culture are discussed, particularly Indian cinema. While quoting participants' responses, gender, age, year of arrival in the U.S. and visa status are noted. Note that the participants' age was counted until the year 2013 and their visa status may have changed in the past three years. The next chapter explains the sociocultural and historical background and status of this participant sample and describes focus group dynamics, participant demographics and their film-watching preferences.

IV.   PARTICIPANT PROFILE: THE INDIAN DIASPORA

In this chapter, I examine participants' demographics and provide further information on inter-group dynamics, interactions, relationships and responses among participants. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a social and historical contextual framework for this group of people belonging to the Indian diaspora (Globokar, 2011), in order to better understand and interpret their responses and reactions in the focus group discussions. I provide details about participant demographics and focus group composition by highlighting my observations and reflexive analysis in the data collection phase.

A.   <u>Historical Context and Background</u>

Existing studies on representations of gender have focused either on Indians born, raised and presently living in India or Indians who have become citizens abroad, and have their raised their families abroad. According to Zong and Batalova (2015), very few Indian migrants resided in the United States in the 1820s. But since the 1990s, the Indian population has become the second-largest immigrant group in this nation after Mexican migrants; by 2013, approximately 4.7% of 41.3 million foreign-born population were Indian-born immigrants residing in the United States (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

In order to understand the unique demographic context of Indians who are non-citizens living in the United States, it is critical to briefly explore their historical journey of immigration and the meaning of diaspora. In the 19th century, most Indians who arrived in the United States were farmers lacking skills and education. They had arrived to work in agriculture in California. The implementation of the rigid Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924 stalled Indian immigration and had a lasting effect for decades. For instance, in 1960, out of the 9.7 million foreign-born population at that time, Indian immigrants accounted for less than 0.5 percent (Zong & Batalova, 2015). The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act created abundant opportunities for employment-based immigration. This was further strengthened by legislation which enabled immigration of highly skilled laborers.

This paved the way for an increasing number of students and working professionals from India. Additionally, the Immigration Act of 1990 helped further distinguish the pool of eligible temporary skilled workers and raise the number of slots for permanent work-based visas. Zong and Batalova (2015) further explained the changing demographics of the Indian-born population arriving in the United States beginning in the 1960s,

> In contrast to the initial wave, the majority of post-1965 arrivals from India were young, educated urban dwellers, with strong English language skills. From 1980 to 2013, the Indian immigrant population increased ten-fold, from 206,000 to 2.04 million, roughly doubling every decade (p.3).

Considering this historical context of Indian immigration, it is important to know that between 2002 to 2012, "Indians entered the United States 1.8 million times as temporary workers and 819,000 times on student visas" (Migration Policy Institute, 2014, p.3). The H-1B program has played an instrumental role in enabling India-born immigrants to participate in temporary worker visa programs. For example, 64 percent of the 270,000 H-1B petitions were approved for Indian-born people (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013). Furthermore, a report published by the Migration Policy Institute (2014) stated that the "second-largest group of international students admitted to U.S. colleges and universities" (p.1) are natives of Indian origin. Additionally, during 2002-2012, an average of 90,000 international students of Indian nationality were admitted in graduate programs or pursuing their Optional Practical Training (OPT) program in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2014). Even though Indian immigrants are scattered across the United States, in terms of metropolitan areas, Chicago (120,000) ranks second after New York in terms of the biggest numbers of Indian immigrants (Migration Policy Institute, 2014; Zong & Batlava, 2015). The next section explores the meaning and understanding of the concept 'diaspora', particularly in the context of Indian diaspora.

1. **What does [Indian] diaspora look like?**

Indians in the United States with either non-immigrant visa status or permanent residency also belong to the diaspora population. However, it is critical to take a step back and examine the meaning of diaspora, representations of Indians in the U.S. diaspora, and its implications. According to Butler (2001),

> the word 'diaspora' is defined as the dispersal of a people from its original homeland— Membership in a diaspora now implies potential empowerment based on the ability to mobilize international support and influence in both the homeland and host land (pp.189-190).

Furthermore, scholars studying diaspora have created a list of distinct features of diaspora. On one hand, Safran (1991) defines diaspora as "dispersal to two or more locations, collective mythology of homeland versus alienation from hostland, idealization of return to homeland and ongoing relationship with homeland" (in Butler, 2001, pp.191). On the other hand, Kaur (2015) defines diaspora as "a rendezvous with diversity which may be of cultures, languages, histories, people, places or times (p.68). Those having permanent residency, U.S. citizenship first and second generation immigrants have been a large part of the Indian diaspora in most studies (Athique, 2011; Desai, 2003; Dudrah, 2002).

Indians with F-1 student visa status have not typically been considered part of the diaspora due to the possibility of returning to their home country after completing their program. However, I argue that F-1 students may travel to the U.S. with the intent of returning to India but are equally likely to complete their studies, legally secure a job and settle here. Even though F-1 students from India may not be technically included in diaspora studies, I recommend they be included as a part of the potential diasporic population. A large group of participants in the current study first arrived to the United States to pursue higher education, but are now currently working on H1-B visas or may have secured a Green Card to continue living in the U.S (See Gibbs, 2014). Thus, it is important to keep the historical context and unique background and experiences of these non-traditional participants (i.e. being born and raised in India) to understand their interpretations.

Desai (2003) also asserts that diasporas are by-products of the cultural and political landscapes of homelands, and their larger implications are often overlooked in terms of economic and political significance. Most of the multi-million software and technological companies are now led by South Asian Americans, particularly first generation and second generation Indians. For example, Indian natives such as Satya Nadella became Microsoft's chief executive in 2014, Sundar Pichai became the Chief Executive Officer of Google, Inc., and Vinod Dham is the founder of the Intel Pentium processor (Gibbs, 2014). The Indian diaspora has also produced many Indian Americans in lead political roles in the senate and beyond such as Kamala Harris, the first Indian-American senator in California (who also identifies as African-American), Pramila Jayapal, a member of the US House of Representatives in Washington state, and Raja Krishnamoorthi, first Indian-American congressman in Illinois (Times of India, 2016).

However, despite the growing evidence and visibility of Indian or Indian-American political and business leaders in the U.S., studies on media representation of Indian diaspora suggests otherwise. South Asians, particularly Indians, have been either underrepresented or misrepresented in mass media, both in the U.S. and India (Philip, 2014). Indians have been depicted as engineers or doctors, or 7-11 store owners or cab drivers, and some of these actors have been made to enact a forced fake Indian accent. For example, one of the episodes in Aziz Ansari's TV show *Master of None* (2015) on Netflix, titled "Indians on TV" addresses this issue of Indian actors being forced to fake an Indian accent and stereotyping the culture (Mehta, 2015). Gayatri Spivak, a notable feminist critic and scholar, highlights the problematic nature and orientalist influences on the representation of South Asian women in American films. Spivak (1988) argues that women were already depicted as "repositories of male power and privilege" (p.16). South Asian women were further framed as victimized, repressed, and oppressed by the Indian culture and men, and rescued by a White man (in Philip, 2014).

Furthermore, Philip (2014) states that a majority of the South Asians depicted in the U.S. media have been historically documented to be in "minor, stereotypical roles, sometimes portrayed by non-South Asian actors" (p.3). It is only until the past decade that we are able to see an increase in the visibility of South Asian actors and film-makers in Hollywood cinema and in the U.S. To name a few, Mindy Kaling (*The Mindy Project*), Aziz Ansari (*Master of None*), Nimrat Kaur (*Homeland*), Kal Penn (*Harold and Kumar*, *How I Met Your Mother, Designated Survivor*), M. Knight Shyamalan (directed *The Sixth Sense*, *Unbreakable*, *The Happening* etc.), Priyanka Chopra (*Quantico*), Irrfan Khan (*Life of Pi*, *The Namesake*, *Inferno*), and Aishwarya Rai-Bachchan (*Bride & Prejudice*, *The Pink Panther-2*). Whether the audiences like these celebrities and enjoy their performances or not, it has indeed progressively changed the landscape of representing Indians and the South Asian diasporic community in the media. However, it is important to note that even among these shifts in audience reception and representations of Indians in popular culture, the Indian society's obsession about fair complexion (skin color) and discrimination against dark skin color prevailed. Even though there is little historical research on colorism in India within British imperialism, there is a connection 'between light skin color and norms of feminine beauty' (Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009, p.21).

According to Desai (2003), constructions of diaspora and diasporic relations are often conveyed to media, popular culture, academia and public policies by the post-colonial nation-state. For example, protagonists represented in Bollywood cinema are depicted as owning mansions, having large affluent families, and managing wealthy businesses in either India, US or UK. In the essay, "*Bombay Boys and Girls: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Transnationality in the New Indian Cinema in English*," Desai (2003) challenges some of the dominant representations and profiles of diaspora and 'ideal diasporic relations' constructed through Bollywood cinema:

> In films such as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Dil to Paagal Hai*, *Yaadein*, and *Dil Chahta Hai*, the protagonists of the films are young and extremely wealthy, often of the transnational elite class. Desire is central here to constructions of diaspora. Multiple valences of desire, e.g.

longing, belonging, and cultural and familial filiation are suggested through some connection

to the homeland. Within Bollywood cinema, the deterritorialised nation is frequently sutured

to the homeland nation-state through the gendered and sexualized cultural logic of

transnationality mobilized in the trope of the family. Often in Bollywood cinema, diasporic

desires become framed within the heteronormative romance and become mapped as family

and marriage (usually between the male NRI [Non-Resident Indian] protagonist and the

homeland heroine). In most narratives, the damsel is a pure and traditional virgin unsullied by

Westernization who 'reorients' the male NRI in his homeland and culture, thus reuniting the

wayward capital of the male NRI with the proper object of desire (p.46-47).

This suggests that true diasporic lives and narratives portrayed in Indian cinema may have been

subdued by strong and recurring messages of (a) heteronormative relations within a familial context

and (b) the conflict between the Western (U.S.) versus Indian (nation-state). On the other hand, Philip

(2014) argues that until the late 1990s, characterizations of Indians (or South Asian Americans) in

Indian popular culture consisted of stories set in diasporic communities with obvious negative tones.

These trends have now shifted. Indian and South Asian American actors are now increasingly visible

in leading, prominent and complex roles as protagonists in media, thus more accurately representing

the social, cultural and political citizenship of the Indian diaspora. The 21st century finally witnessed

a series of Bollywood films that further explored the Indian diaspora and struggle between holding on

to Indian culture and values to westernization (in other words, 'othering' the Indianness). Both the

East and the West have been perceived through stereotypes in Bollywood cinema (Viswanath, 2015).

Hence, the above critiques of the constructions and representations of Indian diaspora in Western

media is crucial in understanding the participant backgrounds, interpretations, and its implications for

this group of Indian diaspora. Next, I examine demographics of participants who completed the

study and the focus groups' composition and dynamics.

B.   Participant Demographics

On the day of the study, each participant completed a brief demographic questionnaire (See Appendix H) with questions about gender, age, residence/city of origin in India, highest education, marital status, income level, religious or spiritual affiliation, occupation, employment, visa status and length of stay in the United States. It also included questions such as what was their favorite Bollywood film, actor and actresses. These supplemental questions were included to get a better idea of their likes and dislikes towards Bollywood, and where and how often they watched Bollywood films. Indians immigrate to the U.S. either for education, employment or reuniting with family members (English, 2016). In the next section, I first provide critical information on the participants' visa status (as reported in the brief questionnaire), and simultaneously explain visa eligibility criteria and its significance in the Indian diaspora. The subsequent sections then explore participants' age, highest education level, current employment status, marital status and current income (as of 2013) (Refer to Table III and IV for the male and female participant demographics).

1. <u>**Visa Status and Length of Stay in the U.S.:**</u>

With regards to their current visa status (reported in 2013), nine out of 17 women were on a temporary F-1 student visa, including one working full-time on a 12-month employment authorization training (Optional Practical Training or OPT) approved by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Similarly, a majority of the men in the study (10) reported holding a F-1 student visa, out of which one reported being on OPT. To qualify for a F-1 visa, the individual must be "enrolled full-time in an 'academic' educational program, a language-training program, or a vocational program, if the school they hope to attend is approved by the Student and Exchange Visitors Program, Immigration and Customs Enforcement" (English, 2016, p.14). Additionally, F-1 visa holders also must show proficiency in English, demonstrate funds adequate to pay the tuition and financially support themselves during the program, and show strong intent to return to their homeland, i.e. India.

Two women and five men in the study reported holding a H1-B work visa (as of 2013). The H1-B specialty occupation visa, held for 3 years, can be also given to those individuals who will be coming to the U.S. for employment. For this, the individual must establish a connection with the employer prior to applying for this visa (English, 2016). Those who may have arrived in the U.S. on a student visa are likely to continue to secure employment and work towards applying for the H1-B work visa, and further continue to apply for their green card. Spouses and unmarried children younger than 21 years) can join as dependents to individuals holding either F-1 or H1-B visas.

However, those holding dependent visas are usually not eligible and authorized to work in the U.S. (English, 2016). For instance, in the study, one woman reported holding a H-4 dependent spouse work visa and another reported holding a F-2 dependent spouse student visas. None of the men in the study held a dependent spouse visa in the U.S. These demographics are reflected in Banerjee's findings drawn from her ethnographic study in the greater Chicago region. Banerjee's (2013) study examined migrant female nurses and their male spouses and highlighted the implications and impact of gendering visa policies, immigration protocols and migration on the Indian immigrant families. She notes that "due to employment restrictions for holders of dependent visas, the traditional Indian family structure is disrupted, which serves to limit the ability of Indian migrant families to function successfully in broader American society" (p.21, in English, 2016). Since those holding the H-4 visas may not be authorized to work (except in few cases), it may cause additional barriers for those women who choose to earn an income or contribute to the household expenses. English (2016) further examines "the way that family is institutionalized by U.S. immigration policies 'matches' the traditional needs and relations within Indian immigrant families" (p.21).

Furthermore, two women and one man in the study were permanent residents (i.e. Green card holders). Individuals can secure permanent residency through a family-sponsored or in other words by an immigration sponsor (usually a U.S.-based relative), and secondly through employment (after securing H1-B visa). English (2016) explains that "common uses of family preference immigrant

visas for Indian families include unmarried sons and daughters over the age of twenty-one (F2 visa) and brother and sisters (F4 visa)" (p.16). One woman stated she was on a Tourist visa (B-2) and one man was on an Intracompany Transferee (L-1) visa. Eligible individuals who wish to visit the U.S. solely for tourism or traveling can apply for a temporary B-2 visa as long as they show strong evidence of funding their own trip and intent to return to India. Individuals on a L-1 visa are usually in a management or executive role and are visiting for business with an employer or company based in the U.S.

In context of the length of stay in the U.S., the women reported first arriving in the U.S. as early as 2004 until 2013 (i.e. when the study was conducted), while the men in the study reported arriving as early as 2003 until 2013. This suggests that the participants had been in the U.S. ranging from 1 month to 10 years. The next section explores the participants' ages, marital status and sexual orientation as reported in the brief demographic questionnaires.

2.   Age, Marital Status and Sexual Orientation

Out of a total of 17 female participants, the youngest participant was 20 and the oldest was 56 years old. The 18 male participants ranged from ages 22 to 37 years old. All 17 women identified as heterosexual. One man identified as gay while the other 17 reported being heterosexual. Out of 35 participants, 10 men and 10 women reported as not married. Seven women and five men were married. Among the male participants, one was engaged, one was co-habiting and one was divorced.

3.   Education, Employment and Household Income

In the study, nine women had completed their Bachelor's degree, six had earned their Master's degree, and two graduated from high school (also the youngest in the whole sample, i.e. 20 years and both were permanent residents). One man reported his highest education level as a doctoral degree, 11 had earned a Master's degree, and six had completed their Bachelor's degree. Approximately 34% of the total sample reported having an annual household income over USD 50,000, with four women and eight men. Eight of the 35 participants did not provide a response to

that question. Six had a household income from USD 20,000 to 50,000, while nine participants (five women and four men) shared their household income as less than 20,000. A majority of these participants are likely to be students in the U.S. with restricted budget and limited stipends.

4.   **Religion and Language Proficiency**

In the sample of 35 participants, 31 reported their current religious denomination as Hindu (those who follow Hinduism), 2 reported as Catholic (follows denomination of Christianity), one reported as Atheist and one reported as Spiritual. Three of the self-identified Hindu participants had also self-identified as Agnostic or Atheist. Eight of the 35 participants identified themselves as 'very religious', out of who 5 were men and 3 were men. Thirteen women and seven men were 'somewhat religious' while the remaining identified their religious involvement as 'not at all religious'. These particular demographics emphasize the participants' privilege of belonging to a large majority of India, namely Hindu population or those who follow Hinduism in India (Hackett, 2015). Those who marked themselves as both Hindu and Agnostic may have identified themselves as Hindu for documentation or its their family religious identity but they themselves may be Agnostic.

When asked what languages they knew, all 35 reported being either bilingual or multilingual (with 33 having more than basic proficiency in Hindi language). Asking this question was important as it could affect the understanding and interpretation of Bollywood films and the ability to participate in the focus group discussions. Also, all participants knew English well enough to participate in the focus group discussions and read the demographic questionnaire and make notes, so this did not pose a problem. First, participants were asked during the initial screening call if they were proficient in speaking English. Secondly, a study by Wang (2003) on international graduate students at U.S. Universities indicated that English has been used as a second language in India, therefore their understanding of the English language means that these students encounter fewer problems and barriers in their academics.

Reflecting on these participant demographics and their backgrounds, it would not be wrong to consider the privileged background of these participants (e.g., access to travel abroad and study, finances to pursue higher education, visit their families in India, ability to speak English, or the ability to secure full-time employment). It is also important to consider that the participants' interpretations may have post-modern influences as they struggle and negotiate cultural values between their homeland and the new land. Hence, I argue that it is important to explore the identities of Indian diasporas and communities from a lens of intersectionality, as this group of Indian participants' bicultural identities may explain their differences in interpretations and their participation and reactions to the images in Bollywood cinema.

In summary, the unique context of this participant sample's experiences and interpretations in the current study contributes to an understanding of the cultural distance and conflict between their country of residence (U.S.) and country of origin (India) (Chand & Tung, 2014). The next section draws participants' responses to the questions about their film-viewing habits, access to Bollywood films, reasons of liking and disliking Hindi films from demographic questionnaires and focus group interviews.

TABLE III: Female Participant Demographics

EDUC-   Highest Education Completed
                                    B= Bachelors, Ma= Masters, D= Doctoral, H S- High School
MARIT ST-   Marital Status
                                    M= Married, NM= Never Married, E= Engaged, CH= Cohabiting, Di= Divorced
Field/ Subject-   What do they study or which field do they work in?
Current Visa-   F-1: Student Visa, F-2: Spouse dependent on Student Visa Holder
                                    H1-B: Work Visa, H-4: Spouse dependent on Work Visa Holder
                                    B-2: Tourist Visa, Green C= Permanent Residency (not citizens yet)

Pseudonym	Origin in India	Age	H.Ed	Marit. St	Current Occup	Edu Prog/ Job Title	1st arrival in U.S.	CURR VISA	EARL'R VISA
VEENA	No response	56	B	M	Unemployed	Homemaker	2013	B-2 Tourist	
SHAILA	Hyderabad	23	Ma	NM	FT Student	M.S- Chem Engineering	2011	F-1 OPT	F-1 Student
KALI	Mumbai	22	B	NM	FT Student	M.S.- MIS	2013	F-1 Student	
KAJAL	Madhya Pradesh	22	B	NM	FT Student	M.S.- MIS	2013	F-1 Student	
PIYA	Chennai	22	B	NM	FT Student	M.S.- MIS	2013	F-1 Student	
SONIA	Mumbai	21	B	NM	FT Student	M.S.- MIS	2013	F-1 Student	
ELORA	Mumbai	20	H S	NM	FT Student	Math/ CS	2012	Green Card	
SEJAL	Mathura UP	30	Ma	M	FT Student/ PT wk	PhD- Epidemiol/ Research Asst	2007	F-1 Student	F-1 --> H-4--> F-1
KIRAN	Karnataka	26	B	M	Unemployed		2012	H-4 Dep	
KETAKI	Gujarat	24	B	M	Unemployed		2013	F-2 Dep	
SAPNA	Baroda	31	Ma	NM	FT work	Physical Therapist	2004	H-1 B work	F-1
SAVI	Bangalore	28	B	M	FT work	Senior Q/A Analyst	2009	H-1 B work	H-4
HEMA	Mumbai	20	H S	NM	Unemployed		2012	Green Card	
SHOMA	No response	31	Ma	M	Unemployed		2011	B-2 Tourist	
DIVYA	Mumbai	26	Ma	M	FT Student	Pharmac Biotechnol	2009	F-1 Student	
PALLAVI	Hyderabad	22	B	NM	FT Student	M.S. Electr Eng	2013	F-1 Student	
EKTAA	Mumbai	30	Ma	NM	FT Student	Bioinformatics	2007	F-1 Student	

Table IV: Male Participant Demographics

EDUC-	Highest Education Completed
	B= Bachelors, Ma= Masters, D= Doctoral, H.S- High School
MARIT ST-	Marital Status
	M= Married, NM= Never Married, E= Engaged, CH= Cohabiting, Di= Divorced
Field/ Subject-	What do they study or which field do they work in?
Current Visa-	F-1: Student Visa, F-2: Spouse dependent on Student Visa Holder
	H1-B: Work Visa, H-4: Spouse dependent on Work Visa Holder
	B-2: Tourist Visa, Green C= Permanent Residency (not citizens yet)

Pseudonym	Origin in India	Age	H.Ed	Marit. St	Current Occup	Edu Prog/ Job Title	1st arrival in U.S.	CURR VISA	EARL'R VISA
CHIRAG	Ambala-Haryana	26	B	NM	FT Student	Pharmac Biotech	2009	F-1 Student	
UCHIT	Mumbai	24	Ma	NM	FT Student	M.S.- MIS	2013	F-1 Student	
RAHUL	Baroda	27	Ma	M	FT Student	Pharm /Medic Chem	2008	F-1 Student	
YUVRAJ	Mumbai	28	Ma	M	FT Student/ PT work	Pharmacy/ Res Asst.	2007	F-1 Student	
GIRISH	Chennai	37	Ma	D/S	FT work	Sr. Business Analyst	2003	H1-B work	F-1 Student
SID	Mumbai	35	Ma	NM	FT Student	Biological Sciences	2003	F-1 Student	
MIHIR	Bangalore	34	Ma	M	FT work	Consultant	2003	Green Card	H1-B
ADIL	Not mentioned	22	B	NM	FT Student	M.S.- MIS	2013	F-1 Student	
AARAV	Mumbai	24	Ma	NM	FT work	Busin. Syst. Analyst	2011	F-1 Student OPT	F-1 Student
ARYAN	Chennai	31	B	Eng	FT work	Project Manager	2010	L-1 work	
SACHIN	Bangalore	32	Ma	M	FT work	Sr. Project Manager	2003	H1-B work	F-1 Student
PARAS	Pune	22	Ma	NM	FT Student	Mech Engin	2013	F-1 Student	
JAI	Bangalore	23	B	NM	FT Student	Mech Engin	2013	F-1 Student	
ANIL	Baroda	26	B	NM	FT Student	M.S.- MIS/ Softw Dev	2012	F-1 Student	
VINAY	Mumbai	31	Ma	NM	FT work	Tax Manager	2005	H1-B work	F-1 Student
SUNIL	Kerala/ Tamil N	31	D	Cohab	FT work	Software Eng.	2005	H1-B work	F-1 Student
RAJESH	Hyderabad	31	Ma	M	FT work	Sr. Consultant	2005	H1-B work	F-1 Student
ARPIT	Chennai	22	B	NM	FT Student		2007	F-1 Student	

C. **The Indian Diaspora and Their Film-going Preferences**

To closely investigate this group of Indian diaspora's access to Bollywood cinema in the U.S., they were asked during the focus group discussions if they went to theaters to see Bollywood films or, if not, how they viewed the films. A majority of the participants, who identified themselves as students who had recently arrived in the U.S., did not have transportation to go to the theaters in the suburbs. They explained that they were able to watch online through steaming links on websites, or rent a DVD from the local Indian stores. In summary, most participants reported resorting to accessing Hindi films based on their convenience and availability of spouse or friends to accompany them.

Film watching for those Indians living in their homeland and this group of Indian diasporic audiences may have similar yet distinct parallel experiences. Athique (2011) summarizes film-watching may serve as the following: "(a) a predominant choice of entertainment, (b) source of gratification for many, (c) act of pleasure, and (d) an act of political loyalty or cultural solidarity" (p.14). To demonstrate audience reception and purpose of watching films, next, I will highlight examples of participants' interpretations and experiences. For instance, 24-year old Aarav (F1 OPT student, arrived in 2011) explains how Bollywood cinema is shaped by audience reception and profitability:

> I think, two aspects to it [Bollywood cinema]. Uh, one is a business aspect of it. We see, uh, we also have need to cater which public are we showing the Indian movies, I mean. So the South Indian [non-Bollywood] movies are catering to a certain signed public, and as well as the Bollywood movies, most of them [audiences] still being educated—uh, not that educated. Still, whether it's a Salman Khan [Bollywood actor] movie or a Rajinikanth [South Indian film actor] movie though, it doesn't make sense because technically it takes them [the audience] out of the frame of mind where they are in, and eventually moviemaking is a

moneymaking business. So that works...What—in what way you can portray something larger than life or better than something else, make it all a happy ending. People want to forget their sorrows and all, and they come in the theater for those three hours, just enjoy and go it away

Aarav's explanation of the capitalist nature of the Bollywood film industry to attract its audiences for escapism or having a fun time with significant others indicates a very significant cultural practice for Indian diasporic audiences. According to Dudrah (2002), "the social act of cinema going has been theorized as a cultural practice that includes and constructs a narrative about audiences themselves through the blurring of the boundaries between the imaginary and the real" (p.20). Additionally, Dudrah (2002) describes watching films at the cinema theater being unique for translating and interpreting cultural representations through its film genres, stars and celebrities, the proximity and connection between the audiences, day-to-day lived encounters and the story narrated on the big screen. The men in the study shared their experiences and observations of watching Bollywood films in cinema theaters. For example, 23- year old Jai (male, F1 Student, arrived in 2013) provided his perspective.

I think that's how I see, um, Bollywood with respect to Indian cinema. Yeah, I think as everyone has actually put across that, uh, the thing about Bollywood movies is just like a stress buster for everyone back in India. So whenever you have a movie released, you know, these fe-, families just want to go and just, you know, pop in [a movie] just for the sake of watching it with the family. I mean I've seen a few things [in the movies], which are not even actually believable. But it does happen in Indian movies. And that's how things run...And so the whole point is that, uh, if they actually put any realistic movies outside-- they're very, very well appreciated but I don't think they become a commercial hit, like... And well yeah the only thing that actually sells is the songs, which makes the movies very popular. The better the songs are, the longer the movie runs or at least people go to the theater just for that.

Jai particularly talks about the cultural practice of going to the theaters in India to watch Bollywood films as a family and community ritual. Even though he believes that the content and stories of these films can be unrealistic, Jai underlines how the songs and dance sequences are what brings the audiences to these films and makes them popular. But what do these songs and dance sequences in Bollywood film mean for the diasporic audiences in the U.S.? Sumita Chakravarty (1993) in her book *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947–1987,* describes that even three decades ago, Bollywood film songs and music were popular and widely discussed among diasporic Indian population in the U.S. Chakravarty (1993) narrates:

> There are countless stories and phenomenological accounts of the Bombay film and film song providing the common ground of social intercourse in Indian diasporic gatherings.… But the self-enclosed romanticism of this gesture of recall, the metonymic substitution of the Hindi film for 'India,' is generally a means of effecting closure, of constructing rigid mental boundaries between past and present, parent culture and adopted culture, belonging and exile, nationality and naturalization. As often as not, 'India' is frozen in time, a past to which one cannot or will not return (in Alessandrini, 2011, p.316).

Both Chakravarty (1993)'s findings and Jai's reactions to watching Bollywood Hindi films, particularly for its music, songs and dances, highlight the Indian diaspora's underlying common struggle to balance their kinship and identities between their homeland and adopted culture. Dudrah (2002) states that in Britain, the urban South Asian residents' journey of going to watch Bollywood cinema "involves a number of sites ranging from the home to the cinema venue and most often will include pre- and post-cinematic screening activities that can include meeting up with friends and/or kith and kin for a drink or meal" (p.27). These urban social interactions are reflected in the participants' experiences about going to the cinema theaters to watch Bollywood films with their spouses, families or friends. The majority of the participants in the study also reported liking and enjoying Bollywood films if they are light in nature, well-edited, shorter in duration, do not have too

much of melodrama, and are mostly comedy-based genres. In the next section, I explore my insights and observations and analyze the group dynamics within focus groups and between the participants and facilitators.

D.   <u>**In-Group Dynamics**</u>

Group dynamics and within-group relationships play a critical role in shaping interactions and discussions among participants and between facilitators and participants (Hollander, 2004). According to Hollander (2004),

> The social contexts of focus groups—that is, the relationships among the participants and between the participants and the facilitator, as well as the larger social structures within which the discussion takes place—affect the data that are generated in ways that have not yet been widely acknowledged by focus group researchers (p. 604).

In this section, I first address dynamics and inter-group relationships between participants. Although the initial plan was to recruit participants who were strangers in each focus group, it came to my attention that in at least 4 of the 8 focus group interviews, at least 2 participants knew each other previously. Although this was unplanned, in an exploratory study, Hollander (2004) recommended including groups with different types of relationships (i.e. friends, acquaintances, co-workers, classmates etc.). Based on memos from the third male focus group, it was also observed that participants who did not know each other ended up exchanging their visiting or business cards after the focus group ended as they were leaving the conference room.

Secondly, it is also important to highlight the interactions between the facilitators and participants in each group. Wang (2003) explains that cultural practices for maintaining personal relationships and friendships may vary across countries. For example, international students may struggle to understand boundaries, especially role expectancies between them and authoritative figures. For example, although the male facilitator did not know any of the participants in his groups, I heard a few participants asking the facilitator his occupation and other basic personal questions

before and after the study. As the principal investigator, after explaining the study and obtaining signed IRB consent forms for the male focus group discussions, I excused myself. I only returned after the focus group discussion and audio and video recordings had ended. I was cautious about navigating my role in the study.

I also faced a challenge as the researcher and facilitator of the female focus groups, as I ended up being a note-taker for two of the four female groups. Additionally, a few of my friends at UIC and Chicago consistently expressed interest in participating in the study and approached me several times when I started data collection. As much as I prioritized recruiting eligible participants who I did not know or were friends, I ethically followed the IRB-approved recruitment phone and email script and screened my friends and acquaintances for their eligibility. To ensure unbiased responses in the study and avoid ethical dilemmas or conflict of interest, I recruited only those friends who knew nothing about my dissertation research. Four who completed the study were aware of my overall general interests in conducting social injustice and gender violence research but based on my interactions and past communication, they had no information about this study. As a researcher studying at the same campus and living in the same city, with common shared personal and professional networks, it was hard not to run into this hurdle. These unanticipated struggles in collecting data as a focus group researcher will be an important topic in qualitative methods.

Further, in one of the women's focus group discussions, generational gaps and age differences in their experiences being a woman in India emerged in the interactions. For example, 23-year old Shaila (F-1 student visa, arrived in 2011) mentioned to the 56-year old Veena (tourist visa, arrived in 2013): "You have seen more life than us so may see it differently so maybe you've seen more hardships." Even though all the focus group discussions seem composed and participants respectful, a few underlying tensions were noted among the discussions between participants in the same focus group. On one hand, women in the study debated about risk factors and help-seeking behavior by abused women. While the men debated, and discussed on topics such as the implications of women

portrayed in dance sequences, and their observations about changes in gender roles in the U.S. versus India. Even though the participants who have been in the U.S. for the longest time did not overwhelmingly demonstrate or boast their understanding of the U.S. culture, it was possible that participants, particularly Indian students who had arrived most recently were still getting adjusted to adapt in the new culture (Wang, 2003). The next section briefly summarizes my observations drawn from my memos regarding patterns and occurrences during the focus group discussions.

E.   Reflexive Analysis

Critics of focus groups argue that participants might be withholding their underlying true beliefs and attitudes, thus not accurately representing themselves (Hollander, 2004). For instance, to increase their social desirability and pressure to conform within a group, participants in focus group interviews often provide responses or information that they believe "either will fulfill the perceived expectations of the facilitator or other participants" (Hollander, 2004, pp. 610). In this process, the individuality of each participant is likely diminished by the expectation of being socially desirable and favorable. Based on all facilitators' notes, memos and video-recordings associated with this study, it was my assessment that participants did not appear to overtly provide 'desirable' or 'favorable' responses. However, it was possible that participants were informed by other participants (friends, colleagues, classmates etc.) about the name of the Bollywood film screened, and the types of questions asked during the focus group discussion, thus the intent to provide desirable responses.

While listening to the focus group audio recordings and reading the transcripts, what struck me most was how a few participants expressed how participating in this study made them think more deeply or differently about the representation in films and VAW in India. Although a debriefing for participants' feedback on the study was not planned, they provided their reactions during and after the study. 28-year old Yuvraj (F-1 student visa, arrived in 2007) explained how he had never looked at films within the framework of social issues:

In this study—we're taking notes, but when you're in a movie theater, you're going there to unwind. So - so messages are - are [viewed] differently in that way. I don't think if I would have seen this movie in a theater, I would have picked up on some of these subtle aspects [from the film] that I picked up right now because right now, I know I'm in a study for the woman's effect on Bollywood, and I'm taking all these notes [laughter]. Oh, what's the character? What did they depict? And I'm trying—so I'm much more attentive right now to these subtle nuances and as we have discussions, it opens up [our observations]. But these were very subtle things.

Participants from the first female focus group thanked me after the study was done for "conducting this study and noted the importance of addressing this topic." A structured 5-minute debriefing with the focus group participants would have been helpful to better understand their reactions to the study.

It has been demonstrated that participants "with higher status in a focus group are likely to talk more and assume more dominant leadership roles in the group" (Hollander, 2004, p. 616). In this study, higher status within the group could be associated with age, employment or/and education level, length of stay in the United States, work experiences, comfort and familiarity speaking English, geographical origin or city in India and so on. The more privileged participants in the study may have been the ones who moved to the U.S. on temporary student or dependent spouse visas but are in a more stable, established status of work visa or permanent residency. It would have been more insightful if two additional questions about their family status and upbringing in India were added to the questionnaire: First, about identifying what was their family's socioeconomic status growing up (i.e. what social class did you grow up in India? Lower class, middle class, upper middle class, upper elite class); and Second was identifying their caste in India. The hierarchical and patriarchal caste system has been and still plays a crucial role in creating the privileged sects of Indian society (Dey & Orton, 2015). Asking these two questions in the study would have helped explore the participants' economic, social and class status within the context of Indian diaspora.

In each group, there were usually one or two participants who dominated the focus groups, led discussions, or asked other participants questions. Even though the facilitators were prepared to include everyone's voices within the focus group, it was difficult to completely overlook those participants who dominated the conversations. Seeing a Bollywood film together followed by a constructive focus group discussion did encourage these participants to speak out, critique and discuss gender roles and violence. Reflexive analysis can be very beneficial for future researchers conducting focus group interviews within a long span of time.

By focusing on participant demographics, film-going preferences and further on their interactions between participants, I am hoping this participant sample of Indian diaspora will contribute to placing them "within minority, diasporic, third, accented, and/or transnational cinemas and suggest that they provide alternative frameworks and theorizations of race, migration, globalization, [culture] and modernity" (Desai, 2008, p.21). I next discuss the analysis starting with participant interpretations and responses about on-screen and off-screen images of gender roles and relations.

V.   DOING GENDER: REEL LIFE VS. REAL LIFE

This chapter will provide an in-depth perspective of how participants in this study perceived and made meaning of gender roles and relations depicted in Bollywood Hindi films. Findings in this chapter highlights Indian participants' interpretations about gender and what it signifies within the larger framework of evolving South Asian diasporic identities. First, I begin with providing an overview of the major themes that emerged during the focus group interview analysis. Next, the chapter focuses on participants' key quotes and discussions supporting the themes. It ends with summarizing the findings discussed in the chapter and implications of these results, particularly the gender differences in participants' interpretations of these images.

In order to examine how participants interpreted images of VAW in these films, it was critical to understand how they view broader constructs and larger representations of gender, especially when participants compared India to the U.S. For example, participants addressed how they interpreted gender roles, gender relations, masculinity or femininity and gender equality/ inequality in Bollywood Hindi films. They also discussed how men and women are depicted in films and if these onscreen portrayals reflect their observations and experiences in their daily lives or vice-versa.

A.   <u>Interpreting Gender Roles in Popular Culture</u>

This section describes how participants' interpretations of gender (i.e. roles and relations etc.) portrayed in popular culture or in their day-to-day lives was likely to shape or influence their definitions and understanding of the dynamics of VAW. The narratives that arose during focus groups ranged from how gender roles and relations are depicted in Bollywood cinema to how they are similar or different in other forms of popular culture such as Hollywood cinema. Participants also discussed whether their perceptions of gender roles and relations had changed since moving from India to the United States, thus underlining the possible influence of their unique background and demographics on their responses.

I identified three principal inter-related themes regarding how gender was perceived by participants: (a) how women and their bodies and identities are represented through the male gaze and 'item numbers', (b) gender roles in Bollywood cinema have been one-dimensional and limited in terms of its scope and implications on the audiences, and (c) conflict within Indian culture, namely the traditional/western paradigm of gender roles and gender relations. This conflict between traditional and modern/western Indian ends up creating contradictory messages to the audience about how women should behave, act or react, and live their lives. Other themes that I identified and emerged during the analysis are also discussed. Most particularly, this chapter also highlights the distinctive context of this unique participant group, ranging from their privileges to their struggles balancing between two cultures. The next section explores the connection between these themes and other narratives observed during the focus group interactions.

1. <u>Item numbers and the male gaze</u>

This section first defines the terms "male gaze" and "item numbers" and then examines participants' interpretations of representations of women in cinema. The male gaze can be defined as a phenomenon in which women are regarded as a spectacle for men (Nair, 2015). This can be observed in films where women are only represented in relation to men (as wives, mothers, sisters, lovers) and in narratives featuring men's conflicts, heroism, and desires. Mulvey (1999) argues that "the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" (p.54, in Nair, 2015). Grounded in feminist analyses, this study suggests that the male gaze dictates and influences representation of women mainly as an erotic object for the male spectator or audience in Bollywood films.

What makes Bollywood films unique are the song and dance sequences in most films (Sarkar, 2012). In Bollywood films, 'item numbers' (Refer to Image 4 for a visual still from an item number) are songs and choreographed dance sequences that have become a critical part of

commercial full-length feature films in Bollywood and they exemplify the male gaze regarding how women are represented and viewed. Sarkar (2012) explains "these item numbers seldom have any

Figure 4. This image shows actress Katrina Kaif as an 'item number' in the song 'Chikni Chameli' from the film *Agneepath* (2012) (Screenshot from SonyMusic India VEVO, 2013).

relation to the actual storyline of the film. These songs portray erotic dancing by scantily dressed women in the pubs or disco. Such dancers are known as 'item girls,' who comprise an important part of the industry" (p. 49). Nair (2015) further explains 'item numbers' as a distinct genre of songs, in which showgirls or dancers perform for a predominantly male audience. Even though these musical sequences may not depict visible forms of VAW, the camera focus, the heroine's clothing and the representation of sexual display provides a deeper insight of how this culture supporting VAW is promoted (Nair, 2015). In Bollywood cinema, women are likely to be represented as a spectacle, with choices limited to being either an object of beauty or an object of sex. One of the predominant themes that came up in the focus group participant discussions were the emergence of 'item numbers' in Bollywood cinema and its impact. The next section will first explore men's interpretations and reactions to item numbers followed by the women's interpretations.

a.   <u>Men's interpretations of item numbers</u>

When participants were asked what song or dance sequence constitutes an 'item number', the men provided their definitions and understanding of item numbers. The male participants in the focus group interpreted item numbers as 'vulgar', 'cheap', and 'women depicted as the object of desire'. For example, 24-year old Uchit (first arrived in 2013, F-1 student) expressed:

> I'd like to add to what he [points to Adil] is saying here. Uh, by "item song," I think what he—what he means is—or, true, they—they do have to sell the movie. Uh, they do that, but, uh, as in the word "item song" comes from the term "item." And that means portraying a woman in a very vulgar sense. And, uh, that is what it is. That is—that is why the song sells, and that's why the movie sells. And that is what's sad about the item songs.

This quote reflected that Uchit did not approve of item numbers because the dance sequences depict women in a sexist and negative manner but also ends up selling the film using commodification of women bodies. Additionally, male participants also explained that item numbers are sometimes purposely inserted in the films without any relevant connection to the story to sell the movie to the audiences. For instance, 22-year old Adil, a full-time graduate student, explained

> ...Item songs are just for the public. I understand that's a major part of any Bollywood movie, and, uh, it really sells the movie. So, if—If I talk about the business aspect of the movie, it's—it may be a good thing [business wise], but, uh, it hardly makes a difference to the story

Even though both Uchit and Adil suggest the same about item numbers promoting commercial money-making nature of the film industry, Uchit does not approve of women being depicted in such roles. According to the male participants, the growing visibility of item numbers and popularity of actresses performing in these item dance numbers in Bollywood commercial films can be attributed to the purpose and vision of the film director and producer. Further, these suggestive and eroticized images of women dancing and teasing the male audience on screen are instrumental in selling the movie to the audiences, even before the film previews are released (Nair, 2015; Sarkar, 2012).

The purpose of item numbers is to "encourage the voyeuristic tendencies of men" (Sarkar, 2012, p. 50), thus stressing women's role as a spectacle and the impact of male gaze in Bollywood cinema (Nair, 2015). For instance, 22-year old Adil, another male participant (arrived in 2013, F-1 student visa status) argued, "the item songs, that do not have any relevance to the story or do not have any connection to the story. It is like it is the worst thing that I can see in a movie, and, uh, cheap comedy" (p. 49). An interaction between two men in one focus group study about interpreting the role of item numbers and its impact led to an interesting discussion about the power of women dancing in item numbers. Thirty-five year old Sid (arrived in 2003, F-1 student visa status) provided an alternative way of viewing representations of women in item dance numbers and asked Mihir to reflect:

> Sid: So I think it's just a way of showing that a woman can have the men on her finger tips if she chooses to it…Would you agree with that [asked Mihir]? That item numbers are for that reason; I mean…although we may look at the woman as a sex object but she's still making these 50-100 men dance to her tunes. And I would look at it that way… many people I know have objection to the item number when they say it's just used as a sex object, but we can also see that she can make the men do what she wants and that's power.
>
> Mihir: So you're saying that the item numbers are actually empowering women?
>
> Sid: It's one way of looking at it…that's all I am saying
>
> Mihir: I have not thought of it that way…but yes
>
> Sid: When I see an item number, it's you can take it both ways… you can see it as a woman, made to do things she doesn't want to do but it doesn't really seem like she's made to do that… she's mostly dancing willingly.

This discussion suggests that these men are considering the role of women's agency and autonomy in performing in Bollywood's item dance numbers. Even though these participants discuss item numbers as possibly empowering women, Sid's interpretation may suggest otherwise. Even though

women have been traditionally perceived to have power over women using their sexuality, men find women's sexuality "dangerous". Sid further explained how characters such as 'Silk Smitha' in the film *The Dirty Picture,* used her sexuality to control her romantic interests with three male protagonists in the film, Suryakanth, Ramakanth, and Abraham. The literature reviewed does not indicate that these roles could be empowering or liberating for women. But Sid's unique perspective about item numbers may be better understood with Harvey (2014)'s findings:

> Female desire is threatening to this shared object status, because it challenges the socially imposed boundaries. If a woman has sexual desire and chooses to negotiate access to her body based on that desire, then the woman is no longer complicit in treating her body like a shared object; rather, she acts as a subject, not an object. This new subjectivity is not compatible with cultures in which the female body holds symbolic value (p.79-80).

Since Indian culture is likely to perceive women's desires, candidness, advocacy and opinions as 'inherently dangerous/ and or undesirable' (Harvey, 2014, p.77), Sid's response presents an alternative perspective to viewing women performing in item dance numbers.

Although item numbers are not released as individual pop music videos on Channel V or MTV venues, some Bollywood films get promoted by continuously playing these item dance numbers on the television or in public spaces as a part of a video jukebox. Top Bollywood actresses and new upcoming debutantes are volunteering for performing in item numbers in films are getting paid anything between INR 80 lakhs to 6 crores for just a guest appearance in the film for dancing (Prasad, 2014). It appears that Bollywood actresses may have a choice to agree or refuse an item number in a film, but implications are different when their refusal to play this role comes at the expense of their acting career, or earning extra income. The effects are also different when women are being depicted as a sex object within the story of the film. To summarize, the male participants in the study focus on women feeling empowered using their sexuality to control men [in item numbers]. On the other hand, female participants argued that as long as women have the autonomy and agency

[choice] to act in a dance number, it can be acceptable. Next, the women's interpretations of and reactions to item numbers are discussed.

b. **Women's interpretation of item numbers**

A common narrative that occurred among the female participants focused on the frequency in which women are depicted as item numbers in Bollywood cinema. Female participants more candidly expressed how they personally felt about item numbers (without the focus group facilitator probing or asking). Further, unlike male participants, the female participants argued that as long as women (actresses) had the choice and freedom to decide whether to perform in an item number in their film, women's roles in item numbers were acceptable. For example, a 23- year old female participant, Shaila (first arrived in 2011, F-1 student visa status) narrated:

> So like you said, item songs that are chose—any, if a woman chooses to express her sexual
> freedom and be, uh, free spirited, that's her choice. But the point that I want to make is those
> are the only kind of songs that women are depicted in, and they are the majority and that's the
> only form of representation. I mean, if you look at the song in which, which is popular, in
> which woman is not portrayed as a sexual object, there are like—you can count them on your
> fingers or they're non-existent.

Hence, Shaila's reaction highlights women's agency through their choice to act in these item numbers. Here, the women's choice implies working or not working, especially when women may have a few options. Even though women may have a choice to work in Bollywood films and dance in item numbers, it does not mean she is free. When seen through a gender analysis of neo-liberal concepts of *freedom*, *choice*, and the *individual*, McKenna (2015) argues that

> It is impossible to ignore the way these terms have been key sites of mobilization for second-
> wave feminist politics and continue to occupy contemporary feminist discourse. For example,
> the phrase ''freedom of choice'' has been intrinsic to gains in women's reproductive rights,
> whereas the individualism inherent in the ''personal is political'' has been central to the

concept of connecting individual women's issue to broader oppression through Consciousness-Raising (p.44).

Shaila, the participant, also suggests, however, that there are very few Bollywood films where women are not portrayed as sexual objects, thus indicating a bleak and negative image for women. Some women in the study had a different reaction to item numbers, viewing them uncritically as harmless entertainment, as this 30-year old female participant, Sejal stated:

> So, I personally don't have a problem with item songs. I've never felt embarrassed of watching an item song, probably I feel like dancing. And I've seen a lot of children dancing when those songs come up, and they are not looking at the girl's figure [shape] or girl's clothing. They're just enjoying it (arrived in 2007, F-1 student)

Sejal did not criticize the role of women as item numbers and did not find the representation of women problematic. While Shaila pointed out the lack of strong, leading, complex female protagonists in Bollywood films besides being in item dance numbers, Sejal's perception may have reflected a part of growing up in an Indian culture appealed and influenced by the glamorous and musical nature of Bollywood cinema. According to Jaikumar (2003),

> Narrative has less significance when a film is shot to showcase competing elements, such as the song-and-dance sequences that are marketed prior to a film's release. Whether or not a song has narrative justification, these primarily visual and aural segments have the capacity of reaching a cross-linguistic audience, and directors aiming for box-office success create occasions for them. Formal conventions as well as audience anticipation have been built around such occasions over the years. Predictability, as Rosie Thomas points out, is part of the pleasure offered by Hindi films (p. 26).

Hence, it is possible that Sejal's experiences may be shaped by the visual and audio appeal of Bollywood cinema, thus being entertained by the dance and music without much consideration or thought. Shabana Azmi, a Bollywood veteran actress and outspoken women's rights advocate and

social activist has expressed her reservations and fear about the impact of item songs in cinema. She has played the lead actress in a career of 40 years in India's cinema, hence being one of the most popular and critically acclaimed actresses. A majority of the focus group participants reflected Azmi's sentiment that the top Bollywood actresses should be socially responsible for choosing to perform item numbers in films (Kohli, 2016). Drawing from her personal experiences, one such female participant, 22-year old Sonia (arrived in 2013, F-1 student visa) expressed her concern about the negative messages conveyed to children:

> So when you feed these kind of images into—I have an aunt, and I have my mom's friends, who both are mothers of pre-teen kids. I was talking to them and they are so worried that every time their son opens a paper and every time he switches on a music channel in which Bollywood number is playing, he only sees woman as these sexual objects. And they're only portrayed in these item numbers. They were worried that if this is the only portrayal of women that he's seeing at this age, uh, we wonder what sort of treatment he'll be giving women he meets. Even though we try to incorporate him with respect and, you know, treat women well. The sense of strong image when these kind of images are bombarded into their minds 24/7.

Sonia's observation about parents' apprehension about the effects of item numbers on their children represents one among many concerns expressed by Indian parents (English, 2016; Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002). This concern may be relevant to preventing misogyny and sexism towards women. Studies have also demonstrated the dangerous effects of women's bodies being sexually exploited on-screen in television shows, print magazines, advertisements, pop music videos and films (See Dasgupta, Sinha & Chakravarti, 2012; Flood & Pease, 2009; Kilbourne, 2010, Lawrence & Joyner, 1991; Malamuth & Check, 1985; Newsom, 2011). The underlying fear expressed was about how women being represented and treated onscreen in cinema may lead to youth perceiving and

treating women the same way in their day-to-day lives. Sonia's response and concern echoed 56-year old tourist Veena's perspective about the impact of item numbers. She explained,

> I find it extremely awful that so many top heroines [actresses] are going into item numbers that are really suggestive, almost close to porn, I would say. Because it does have a terrible impression on the people who have nothing else in life to do except just who are just the street folk as we would call them, and they do get carried away by these kind of item numbers. And that they continuously listen to those kind of item numbers, either audio or on the radio, that leaves a very bad pattern for them. I think a lot of the few cases that we've been hearing in the papers, especially considering the rape cases that have been happening in India, I think one reason could be because of these kind of items, suggestive numbers that they have been showing in the movies of late. When such top heroines perform those kind of roles, it kind of gives a kind of permission to people, you know, that, yeah, it's anything is okay. Almost like that. That is my take, of course.

Veena's reaction suggests an underlying connection between women depicted in item numbers and the prevalence of rape cases in India, thus examining it as a risk factor. Comparing item numbers to pornography, she also observes that when women like famous Bollywood actresses are shown in these dance sequences, they make ill-treating women or looking at them as sex objects seem acceptable, normal and glamorized. Another aspect of Veena's reaction highlighted a gendered and different movie-going experience in India, which may be different in U.S. theaters. To further decode Veena's reaction, what stood out was her statement, "...because it [item numbers] does have a terrible impression on the people who have nothing else in life to do except just who are just the street folk as we would call them, and they do get carried away by these kind of item numbers."

Who does Veena mean when she uses the term 'street folks'? This term may refer to either young unemployed men loitering on the streets or gawking at women. She may have also pointed to men from the lower socioeconomic class who occupy the cheap stall section of the theater. To

provide cultural context and a better understanding of movie going in India, it is important to understand that film audiences in the theater are stratified into three or four classes. Audiences are also labeled depending on which part of the theater and kind of ticket they have purchased. For instance, people in 'Gandhi Class' occupy the cheap seats closest to the screen—primarily lower socioeconomic class men get seated here, 'lower stalls' are a bit more expensive and are typically occupied by women and children, and the 'balcony' is the most expensive seated section in the theater, is usually on an upper level, and usually middle and upper class families occupy this section (Srinivas, 2005, p.115). In this instance, the 'street folks who have nothing to do' as Veena suggested may be men in the lower stall audiences in the Indian theater, who are likely to whistle, hoot, or say aloud lewd comments when the female protagonists in the film are depicted in any song or item number or if the male protagonists deliver a romantic or sexually explicit dialogue to the women in the film.

The analysis of both Sonia's and Veena's interpretations of item numbers further underlines the importance of considering how film-makers in Indian cinema perceive their audiences and viewers, and how this perception contributes to the contest between Indian versus Western audiences. For example, Srinivas (2005) describes these film-makers' perspectives:

Filmmakers apply the discourse of modernization to their categorization of audience groups. Thus, they distinguish rural and urban viewers, the educated and uneducated, both of which classifications overlap with categories of 'class' and 'mass'. Different sites are placed on a continuum of modernization. The West, where audiences are perceived to 'have grown' and, therefore, be appreciative of themes that are more sophisticated is contrasted with poorer, uneducated audiences and rural moviegoers in India who are viewed as undiscriminating consumers of spectacle. These audiences are perceived to have difficulty understanding serious themes and films made with advanced techniques. Certain contradictions are built into this image (p.112).

To summarize the above discussion, the underlying gendered, classist and capitalist film-going experiences and target audience research in India are unique to those living in India. The diasporic Indian population, like those in the study, and particularly those who have stayed in the U.S longer, may have a completely different film watching experience than those in India.

The most damaging aspect of women performing in item numbers or women's gender roles in films is that they are being projected or seen through men's perspective (as the audience). Nair (2015) in her essay titled "Female Bodies and the Male Gaze: Laura Mulvey and Hindi Cinema," argues that the majority of the narratives and stories in Bollywood cinema revolve around men. Women are often portrayed as unable to (1) live independently without being validated by male partners or fathers, (2) engage in decision-making, or (3) challenge authority.

Like many female participants in this study, the Bollywood veteran actress, outspoken women's rights advocate and social activist Shabana Azmi provided her critique of the item numbers in Bollywood cinema. In an interview hosted by the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Indian Foundation (AIF) on gender roles and women's empowerment in India, Azmi explained:

> Item numbers, in most cases, have nothing to do with the film…The way that they are shot, with focus on particular parts of a woman's body are downright extreme-- I don't have a problem with celebration of sensuality, however these objectify the woman to the extent of commodification. What troubles me the most is that we let our little girls dance to these songs at weddings etc.- imitating the same obscene dance moves. This leads to the sexualization of children (Kohli, 2016).

Hence, these limitations of gender roles trivialize women's role, turning them into beauty objects or props positioned only in relation to the men in the films. The restricted scope of roles for women in media and popular culture in India, particularly women's commodification suggests that patriarchal Indian society views women as insignificant citizens, and trivializes their participation, contributions and status in the society.

Indian films also tend to reflect men and "their conflicts, their dreams, their aspirations, their tragedies, their revenge, their desires and their heroism" (Sharma, 2015, p. 52). Sharma (2015) further suggests that patriarchal norms reinforce the male gaze in the society, which then results to constructing and shaping the women's identity "through the man's eyes" (p. 108). These recurring themes of representations of women through the male gaze and approval can be attributed to male authoritative hegemony. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the idealized form of masculinity at a given place and time. It is the socially dominant gender construction that subordinates femininities as well as other forms of masculinity, and reflects and shapes men's social relationships with women and other men; it represents power and authority" (Courtenay, 2000, p.1388). Bollywood cinema or generally Indian forms of popular culture have shied away from challenging patterns of hegemonic masculinity deeply embedded in the patriarchal society or male privilege (Harvey, 2014). Savi, 28-year old woman (on a H1-B work visa) argued that Bollywood cinema was not going to change soon in terms of representing women in these degrading and negative roles:

> I still don't think Bollywood has reached that point. Or, it will take a very long time for them to reach that point because the mass expects women to be objectified. That's what they want. It's a reflection of what people want. So, so long as the people really want women to be sex objects— people they can fantasize about, they will never be represented correctly. So, I don't think, because of that, they're not represented.

Savi's interpretation about the demand-supply dynamic of creating sexually explicit film content and story of women's desires and body based on audience reception conflicts with the experiences of being a woman in the Hindu culture. A study by Harvey (2014) indicated that second-generation immigrants found it challenging to discuss their sexual desires publicly and attributed to their upbringing in the Hindu culture. Additionally, participants also believed that having sex should be for procreation. Hence the notion of dating or pre-marital sexual relations, or expressed desire and affection was perceived as a taboo (Harvey, 2014). Savi's response represents the underlying cultural

conflict that Indian women in the diaspora may experience due to the normalization of women depicted as sex objects in popular culture.

Feminist critiques have approached popular culture, particularly the construction of gender and sexuality, differently. Even though the participants in this study did not explicitly own or dismiss being a feminist, gendered differences existed in how they interpreted women as item numbers in the study. These differences are further reflected in Rakow (2009)'s argument:

> Though contemporary feminists have taken a diversity of approaches to popular culture, they have shared two major assumptions. The first is that women have a particular relationship to popular culture that is different from men's. . .The second assumption is that understanding how popular culture functions both for women and for a patriarchal culture is important if women are to gain control over their own identities and change both social mythologies and social relations. . . Feminists are saying that popular culture plays a role in patriarchal society and that theoretical analysis of this role warrants a major position in ongoing discussions (in Storey, 2009, p. 136).

Hence, feminist theorists explain the impact of having gendered experiences and relationships with popular culture. For instance, women must understand the role that pop culture plays in a patriarchal culture, and move from this understanding to prioritizing a critique of the gendered nature of pop culture—as people experience it and are represented by it. This could be used to explain the men and women's interpretations and reactions to item numbers in Bollywood cinema. To summarize, these representations of women as item numbers in Bollywood cinema are likely to result in negative gender stereotypes and characters that are one-dimensional. Additional implications on the Indian diaspora also include trivializing the value of women, thus leading audiences to view them as either domestic homemakers or sex objects. The next section focuses on this second interrelated dominant theme found in the focus group discussions.

2. **Stereotypes and one-dimensional characters**

Although the first section of the chapter briefly addresses the theme of stereotypes and one-dimensional characters, this section presents an in-depth discussion of how participants believe gender roles in Bollywood cinema are stereotyped and one-dimensional. In the films screened during the study, *Lajja* and *The Dirty Picture*, all the main female protagonists, i.e. Vaidehi, Maithili, Janaki, Ram Dulaari (from the film *Lajja*) and Silk Smitha/Reshma (from the film *The Dirty Picture*) were depicted as rebellious and bravely facing their struggles, discrimination and violence. In *Lajja*, none of these female protagonists' male partners are shown as supportive or offer them safe space and protection against violence except the village savior aka Robin Hood Bulwa (Ajay Devgan) and the low-life thief with a good heart, Raju (Anil Kapoor). Among these women, the characters Ram Dulaari does not survive her brutal rape after fighting against the village henchman and Silk Smitha/Reshma ends her life on her lonely journey to stardom.

The participants found Madhuri Dixit's character, Jaanki in *Lajja* to be defying the traditional social and gender norms. For instance, 20-year old Elora expressed her disappointment with the way Jaanki and her lover Manish's story ended in *Lajja*. She explains,

> I think one of the relationships that, um, I was, you can say kind of disappointed in in the movie was, um, Manish, and Jaanki. Honestly when their relationship came up, it actually showed me some hope in the movie. Because I thought that, you know Jaanki being so bold that she drinks alcohol, that she—I think she smokes, and then she is pregnant out of wedlock, and she has—like she's the one who's, you can say—because he's, like she spends on him. So I thought it was one of those examples where it was showing how powerful the woman is, too. And I thought it was—it looked like a more equally balanced relationship. I was really disappointed when I realized that Manish was also one of those other guys who did not trust her, who did not believe in her, who, again, thought of her as a woman who should prove her truthfulness.

Elora's describing Jaanki as powerful in Lajja, may have resulted from Jaanki defying and challenging the patriarchal societal expectations, moral policing of sexual desires, and cultural norms that glamorize the image of an ideal Indian woman. Jaanki depicted the opposite of how the Indian society, especially men wanted and expected Indian woman to behave and live. For example, what struck the most for Elora was Jaanki's desire to support her [male] partner through her earnings, and not being apologetic about being pregnant out of wedlock. Although Jaanki's character emerged as a favorite female protagonist particularly among the women, films like *Lajja* also conveyed that women who are rebels like Jaanki are often shown paying a huge price for challenging these deeply embedded patriarchal and sexist norms. Jaanki is accused of infidelity, and is assaulted and beaten up by the public. Following the violent assault, she becomes institutionalized and loses her unborn child. 23-year old Sravya uses Jaanki as an example of experiencing mental abuse:

> Mental abuse comes in when Jaanaki makes her own choice and, you know, chooses to sleep with the man before marriage, and she is almost beaten to death and her baby is lost in the process. It depicts that if you make your own choices, you'll be abused, you'll be, you know, almost stoned to death.

These quotes imply that as often as women may be depicted as rebels in some Bollywood cinema, they are also shown to experience violence because of their rebellion. Jaanki being physically and mentally abused and assaulted was used as an example of what may happen to women who rebel, defy or challenge patriarchal rigid gender roles and culturally appropriate relations. Jasbir Jain (2015) in her essay, "Body as a Text: Women Transgressors and Hindi Cinema" addresses the way Bollywood films are inclined to glorify women for their 'sacrifices and traditional heroism' (p. 121). According to Jain (2015), victimhood is often portrayed through oppression and violence, thus projecting patriarchal and misogynist values. These projections often end up glorifying these women's sacrifices and heroism but through their victimhood. For instance, Jain (2015) further states,

Victimhood becomes a part of a survival struggle, or embodies the concept of an 'ideal

womanhood', the *pavitrata*, or is placed within a domestic power struggle between the

mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. Such portrayals attempt to construct Indian femininity

along conventional patterns. Rebel women are often portrayed through ridicule and comedy

(p. 121).

In this case, rebellious or unconventional women were portrayed as victims of abuse. This

victimization can be attributed to from women being punished for being a rebel. The actress Rekha's

character of Ram Dulaari in *Lajja* also fits under the label of stereotypical victim. Although she is

abandoned by her husband, Ram Dulaari is praised by her mother-in-law for not absconding her

duties like her son (Ram Dulaai's husband) did. She is also shown to be familiar with English,

teaches other women in the village to speak and sign in English and help them achieve self-

sufficiency through a small business. Although Ram Dulaari is depicted from a lower caste section of

the hierarchy, she has sent her son to the city to complete his education and secure employment.

However, at the end, due to her rebellious nature of supporting other abused and assaulted women

(by the exploitative landlord) and a romantic relationship between her son and the privileged

daughter of the landlord, Ram Dulaari is gang-raped and burnt alive by the henchmen and landlord.

In summary, Ram Dulaari in *Lajja*, initially shown to be strong and resilient, becomes a stereotypical

victim at the end of the film. Through Ram Dulaari and Jaanki in *Lajja* pose threats to the patriarchial

classist, and caste order in the village, Ram Dulaari must die and Jaanki must be assaulted and

institutionalized (Pamecha, 2002).

This theme is supported by 30-year old Sejal's interpretation of how Indian women have been

depicted in *Lajja*,

Like, um, there was a story of Ram Dulaari where she says that her husband left off and she

was left to take care of the entire family. So, I think that was also the crux of the matter. That

a lot of Indian women still have to abide by their duties, whereas, the husband may chose not

to do it. And her mother-in-law puts it very well, "Have you ever seen a lady run away leaving her husband and her children?"

However, 20-year Elora quickly points out that this film was released almost 15 years ago and hence these representations are outdated. She highlighted that women's roles have progressed and shifted drastically in films released in the past few years. Furthermore, the men in the study believed that these and other female protagonists in Bollywood films were also shown as one-dimensional. For example, a male participant, 26-year old Anil (arrived in 2012, F-1 student visa) expressed his anger about these one-dimensional gender roles in Bollywood cinema both for men and women:

> It takes through all of these tableaus and says, look, everywhere, there's an issue with how women are treated. And in every—in sort of each ‑ each place, you get these women who ‑ who are sort of black and white in nature, and it's very hard to find a grey area for them. And it's very hard to find a gray ‑ a grey area for men. There are men who have weaknesses, but really aren't horny bastards who are out to get every woman they can see. That's not the case. That's not all men. So if—women don't fall into two categories of, you know, a woman of no character and a woman of character. There are only two that can be, and it's an absolute. So that troubles me when I ‑ when I see those two—so sort of those two roles happening.

The phrase 'gray area' by Anil refers to those men and women who fall in the middle of the spectrum between good and bad moral characters. Anil reported that men and women are not shown with complex personalities or goals or occupations. Women may be represented having a character or not having one (i.e. morally loose) while men are shown as vindictive and sexual predators or men who are protective and vigilantes. In short, there are stereotyped representations of men in Bollywood cinema as well which may not reflect the nuances about Indian men in real lives.

Most of the focus group participants in this study strongly believe that most male characters in Bollywood cinema are shown to have a common purpose of protecting women from male predators

and antagonists. For example, Bulwa (Ajay Devgan) and Raju (Anil Kapoor)'s characters in *Lajja*
were respectively depicted as saving the honor of Maithili (Mahima Chadhury), one of the female
protagonists, and protecting Vaidehi and Ram Dulaari from being attacked or assaulted.

The women in the study believed that women's roles were limited to either item numbers or
as victims that needed to be saved by men. They interpreted 'women's need to be protected' as
women wanting their male partner to save the day and validate them. For example, 30-year old Ektaa
provides an example to clarify women's need of protectors,

It's like earning the bread and butter. Like a lot of girls would say okay uh, I want the guy to
go—outside [work and earn]. Even women are not very open to the idea of guys sitting at
home, or a house husband, or you know? Even women are not open to that—forget what men
think about women. So I think just because of this underlying men protecting women
ideology—I don't think there's [gender equality] balance probably would be achieved.

Ektaa's reaction is echoed by the disappointment expressed by other female participants about the
ending of *Lajja*. The film depicts Raghu apologizing to Vaidehi for abusing her [and attempting to
get her killed to get custody of her unborn child] and she instantly forgives him and they are shown
happily married and raising funds for women's empowerment. They also show heart-broken,
unattached Maithili, who called off her own wedding due to incessant dowry demands and abuse
being in a romantic relationship with Raju, the low-level thief and low wage laborer. Both these
stories emphasize women's needs and societal expectations of women being protected, or validated
by men. Additionally, these stories reinforce the practice of dowry, further glorifying abusive
relationships, and minimizing social change through fast forgiveness and raising funds (dowry). It
also contributes to promoting myths about the cycle of violence and domestic abuse for Vaidehi and
Raghu, in their role as immigrant, diasporic and privileged Indians in the U.S.

The participants believed female characters, particularly in *Lajja* and *The Dirty Picture*, were
depicted as being helpless, scared, and as needing protection from the villains or goons. Additionally,

they believed that women in Bollywood cinema are shown as seeking the attention of their prospective male partners and unable to live without being validated by men. These participants' responses also take us back to the concept of male gaze and hegemonic masculinity in Bollywood films. For example, 30-year old Ektaa, a female participant (arrived in 2007, F-1 student visa) also stated that it is impossible to have a complete gender balance on these screen:

> I don't think there would be a time where there will be like this balance—solely because of this extremely romantic view that men are stronger than women. And women need to be protected. It's a—there is a sexual aspect of it, and there is the beauty aspect of it. That is this item number, but it's always like women are delicate. Women are beautiful, woman is fragile, and she needs to be protected. And men are the ones who can bash people, jump from Jeeps, um, throw their clothes [undress] without people commenting on it. Even in public and people will be like 'how hot do you want to look at the six-packs?' I think just because of this one underlying factor of you know, men being stronger than women—physically—not like mentally.

Ektaa calling this representation of men being depicted as stronger than women in Bollywood films 'romantic' highlights the obvious message about heteronormative romantic relationships. The romantic aspect implies men represented as stronger have one common goal in the film: saving and protecting women from other men. Additionally, participants highlighted how notions of femininity and masculinity have been strongly entrenched into these gender roles and relations in Bollywood cinema, thus ending the possibility of gender equality and balance in terms of representations. It's not just the way women and their bodies, identities and their desires are represented in cinema that is important, equal significance should be also placed on the way men are depicted in Bollywood films. Participants were dissatisfied with the way men were represented in these and other Bollywood films. For instance, 56-year old Veena (arrived in 2013, B-2 tourist visa) described men in the film *Lajja* as

'indecisive'. Drawn from her own personal experiences and interactions with her grown-up children, Veena explained,

> I think men also should be a little more decisive in making the changes in society that are for the good. And I think nowadays men are not like that at all. They are a lot more decisive. They think [about] things and are asking the parents to please give them—and listen to their thoughts and ideas also. And maybe it's their responsibility rather to explain to parents who have age-old beliefs and explain to them that this is now what is happening in the world, and the gender equality should start from them maybe, you know.

Hence, Veena's suggestion of younger generation making an effort to explain to their own parents about gender equality and condemning abuse implies bridging the generational gaps between them. English (2016)'s study focuses on highlighting how Indian parents are highly concerned about their children, whether it is about continuing the legacy of their family and cultural values, or whether raising their child in India and the U.S. or the implications of their parenting practices on intergenerational relationships. From Veena's perspective, being educated about gender equality or condemning abuse should be another discussion for Indian parents and children in both countries.

Simultaneously, it is critical to examine the unique experiences of women in diasporic communities differently, which may help explain the participants' responses about representations of women in popular culture. Kaur (2015) describes these gendered experiences of migration and how that may interplay with the interpretations of Indian diasporic participants:

> Viewing differentiation on an ethnic level, the authors stress the fact of difference, particularly how men and women experience migration differently: [G]ender is a central organizing principle of migrant life. Diasporic women often find themselves to be a member of multiple cultures at the same time. Women are not only members of their ethnic group; they are also new members of the main culture of the host country. While playing both the

roles, they negotiate gender positions within each sub-group. The expectation of behavior

from self and other fluctuates, creating a difficult balancing act for diasporic women (p.72).

All the participants' responses (both men and women) about the stereotypes and one-dimensional

portrayals of women in Bollywood films may suggest how gendered experiences in a diasporic

community may have influenced their interpretations of the onscreen female protagonists in popular

culture. The struggle of shuffling between identities, family values and cultures, and communities

may further shape Indian diasporic women's experiences in the U.S.

Even though Indian men may have different experiences and context within the diaspora, the

male participants also agreed that men in such Bollywood films are again placed in extreme

categories of bad versus good characters. Yuvraj, a 28-year old full-time graduate student described

male protagonists in *Lajja* as,

> I think that the movie [*Lajja*] is based on woman issues and showing certain very extremely
>
> bad or negative men characters who are almost supremely oppressive, or on the other end,
>
> men who are supremely protective, who would give up their lives just to treat every mother as
>
> a woman, but majority of the population lies in the middle, who want to socialize, want to
>
> think of women as friends, who probably at different ages have certain sexual desires, and
>
> who want to give respect, want to get respect, but I guess it gets mixed in this kind of an
>
> extreme sensationalization.

Another participant from Yuvraj's group further highlighted the irony in how the character Bulwa

was depicted in *Lajja*. Even though Bulwa is represented as this village outcast, rebel and savior in

his village against the atrocities of the landlord, his one specific dialogue to Vaidehi in one scene

reflects the way Indian women may be perceived and viewed by some Indian men. In the scene,

Bulwa saves Vaidehi from being attacked and abducted by the goons hired by her husband, Raghu.

The second half of the movie shows Vaidehi helplessly and relentlessly running away from an

abusive Raghu. When Bulwa attempts to kill Raghu (to save Vaidhei), Vaidehi falls at Bulwa's feet

pleading with him not to kill her husband and to let him go. Bulwa responds to Vaidehi with

frustration and tells Raghu, "Be happy you didn't get married to a foreigner [western woman] and that

you got married to an Indian woman because God knows what a foreigner would have done to you?"

These participant quotes and film dialogues underline the representation of masculinity and male

protagonists in Bollywood films.

Jackson Katz is an internationally prominent and leading educator, anti-sexist activist, film-

maker and scholar on gender violence in the United States. Katz (1999) explains that many scholars

(Kilbourne, 1979) have studied representations of women, their bodies and sexuality in different

forms of popular culture in the United States. But only until recently have feminist scholars,

advocates and researchers have begun to scrutinized images of men and constructions of masculinity

in popular culture and mass media. However, Mrinalini Sinha (1999), a historian, provides her insight

about the impact of British imperialism and colonial perceptions on gender on Indian attitudes and

norms:

> The emergence of masculinity as a category of historical analysis, however, occupies a
>
> somewhat paradoxical position in the gendered mode of analyses that have gained currency in
>
> the contemporary historiography of colonial India. The scholarship on gender in colonial
>
> India has by and large been about women. Both social histories of gender relations in colonial
>
> India and discursive analyses of the gendered constructions of colonialism and nationalism
>
> have tended to focus on women. Yet this scholarship as a whole – notwithstanding the variety
>
> of its theoretical and methodological orientations – has also contributed to giving the history
>
> of masculinity in colonial India a certain visibility (p. 446).

Hence, Sinha (1999) implies that misogynist and controlling policies implementing rigid expectations

and policing of women by men were heavily influenced by the British rule and their notions of

masculinity. Some of these post-colonial influences on India in terms of gender norms and oppression

were often reflected in cinema during the 1950s. The Indian film industry used to have another genre

of Hindi and Bengali films (among other regional cinema) that were called 'parallel cinema' or 'art films'. These genre of Hindi films particularly focused on social issues such as casteism, gender violence or oppression, social class and control and women empowerment (Jain & Rai, 2015).

In the book *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian Cinema* (2nd ed.), Jain and Rai (2015) point to the progress being made in Bollywood films about developing stronger, multi-dimensional, progressive gender roles, particularly in the past decade. As much as the existing literature and participants' narratives end up highlighting the negative implications of images of Bollywood cinema, they recommend film critics to observe and value the progress being made in Bollywood cinema. For example, in the biopic film, *Mary Kom* (2014) starring Priyanka Chopra (*Quantico*) and *Page 3* (released in 2005), it is important to recognize and acknowledge the way in which men are being portrayed in a progressive manner. These films reflect an example of men being depicted as "compassionate and understanding" (p.12). But Bollywood films must be careful not to misinterpret the meaning of feminist, liberal and progressive men in these stories. In films addressing women's issues such as VAW or women's empowerment, 'supportive' and 'progressive' male protagonists may act as the dominant male agency validating women's concerns and experiences, and sometimes as saviors protecting them. For example, whether it's in the film *Lajja* (in 2001), the purpose of the male characters Raju and Bulwa was to protect Vaidehi, Maithili or Ram Dulaari in the film from any violence or injustice. These depictions of sensitive, supportive, feminist and liberal men in Bollywood films need to be created without taking the spotlight from the female protagonist or trivializing her story, struggles and journey. According to Jain and Rai (2015), these progressive and positive role models reflected through the men depicted in these films open a new broader conversation about feminism and what it means for film audiences through representations in popular culture. The next section brings us to the third theme of binary Indian societies and how this conflict of 'us' versus 'them' plays a role in constructing these gender roles and relations in Bollywood cinema.

3. **Traditional versus Western influence**

In this section, I examine the third predominant theme that emerged during the participants'
discussions during the focus groups. Unlike the male participants, the female participants observed
women depicted in Bollywood cinema as falling under two categories: the ideal Indian traditional
woman and the modern, independent Western (mostly negative) woman. According to the
participants, traditional Indian women are often shown as socially approved or validated while
modern, independent, career-minded Indian women (implied western or modern) are often shown
with underlying negative characteristics. For example, a discussion that took place between three
female participants, 20-year old Hema, 26-year old Divya and 22-year old Piya addressing 26-year
old Anil's statement about the traditional versus western conflict depicted through gender roles in
Bollywood cinema. Hema, Divya and Piya used the movie, *Cocktail* (2012), starring the actresses
Deepika Padukone and Diana Penty and actor Saif Ali Khan as an example. Here is an excerpt from
their discussion:

Hema: I think women in Bollywood movies, they are often shown as being helpless.
             That's a picture I get. Um, if a woman is not shown to be helpless, um, she
             does not need to live up to anybody's expectations, then she's shown to be too
             modern, too independent, maybe too far gone for Indian culture.

Divya: There's no middle ground.

Piya: Like there's Veronica in—what movie was it?

Chorus: *Cocktail*? (in Chorus- Cocktail)

Hema: *Cocktail*, that's exactly right. So because she is too independent, she chooses to
             wear what she wants, and she chooses to live however she wants.

Piya: She has one-night stands.

Hema: She is shown to be, like, too independent. She's not the good—Yeah, she's
             not the good home girl.

Divya: And what's even more sad is that she changes herself and wears *salwars* [Indian tunic and pants] and makes *rotis* [Indian bread] at the end in order to get the man that she likes, because he seems to like the other girl who does all those things

Hema: I guess… the idea is too engrained in the Indian head that the women have to live up to expectations. To be the expectation of your peers, be the expectation of opposite gender, or the expectation of your elders

I was able to identify some prominent meanings from their interpretations. First, having an impromptu discussion about this film highlighted a common bond and context that these women shared, thus pointing to the popularity and impact of Bollywood cinema. When Divya couldn't recall the name of a certain Bollywood film but remembered the actress Deepika Padukone and her character's name Veronica, Hema and Piya immediately came to her rescue and offered up the name of the film. Secondly, 20-year old Hema (arrived in 2012, Green card status) highlighted the underlying message about the binary conflict addressed in this film through the binary characters, Veronica (modern/independent/western/goes clubbing/one-night stands/drinks alcohol/ wears western clothes=bad, also a western name) and Mira (traditional/domesticated/wears Indian attire /prays/makes rotis /respects elders, traditional Indian name). Hence, this conversation about the binary Indian conflict brings us back to this third theme, traditional versus Western influence. In *Cocktail*, in one scene, Gautham's (the male protagonist) traditional and over-protective mother, played by Dimple Kapadia, tells Gautham's friend, Veronica (Deepika Padukone), "You are a nice girl but if you wear better [traditional] and more [Indian] clothes, it would look great". This results in Veronica changing herself and trying Indian clothes to flatter her prospective love interest, Gautham and his mother. Another scene shows Gautham's uncle, Randhir Malhotra (Boman Irani) using non-verbal gestures to tell Veronica to sit daintily with her legs together in front of Gautham's mother. All these examples and discussion about the movie reinforce subliminal messages to Indian women (both

in and outside India) about modernity/traditional divide, and police their behavior, actions and identities. The film primarily revolves around the goal of getting a husband for Veronica, who is 'not Indian' enough for his approval. This story line of *Cocktail* not only glorifies patriarchy but also centralizes men's power to influence and police women's behavior and choices. It is noteworthy that both the protagonists in the film *Cocktail* and the participant sample represents educated and employed groups of Indians living abroad, thus reflecting only a selective population.

Unfortunately, these contradictory messages conveyed through gender roles and gender relations in extremely popular urban-youth based films like *Cocktail*, have negative effects on women in India. It appeared that it didn't matter which country the Indian woman was living—the message was clear: they were expected to bear the burden of preserving their Indian culture and value system. This western/traditional divide may result in additional rigid patriarchal societal expectations of women in India, moral policing of women's lives, victim-blaming and other misogynist and sexist attitudes towards women. During the same discussion, 22-year old Piya (arrived in 2013, F-1 student visa) explains that it's not just individual Indians who are responsible for creating this hostile environment for women. She emphasizes that these norms of gender inequality and patriarchy are so deeply ingrained in our Indian mindset that we, as a collectivist society are to be blamed for condoning VAW. Scholars have noted that the overwhelmingly dominant themes of 'othering' the western in a vast majority of the films have been responsible in creating the 'villain' (the enemy) or the anti-Indian hero (even though these characters are primarily played by Indians themselves) in the stories.

The majority of Bollywood films in the 1990s depicted 'foreign', 'western' Indians as antagonists or villains in films (Dudrah, 2002). These anti-Indian characters were shown as spoiled by the Western societies, thus lacking moral and traditional Indian cultural values, thus once again, fostering the traditional/modern binaries in the diaspora. Athique (2011) highlights that this trend of overseas Indians serving as the bad and corrupt protagonist drastically shifted with the release of an

incredibly successful Bollywood film called *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayanege* (1995) directed by Aditya Chopra. As Athique (2011) put it, "*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayanege* (1995) marked the transition of the persona of the Non-Resident Indian [NRI], from villain to hero" (p.5). How and why this shift may have taken place within Bollywood cinema? The next section explains how sociocultural context and history may have influenced these representations of gender and violence.

a. **Real vs. reel life: Constructions of gender and violence**

The question that should be asked is how are representations of gender and violence constructed in both real and reel life in India? Are these representations a product of imperialism which may reinforce patriarchy or can they be attributed to prevalence of sexism in the cultural environment? First, scholars like Mohanty (1988), Chatterjee (1989), and Sinha (1999) attribute the representations of women and gender violence to the sociocultural and historical context of India, i.e. the British rule and its impact on India and its policies on women. Bollywood films produced during colonial or post-colonial India, especially using diaspora and immigrant sentiments, are often used to invoke patriotism, honor and loyalty (Rajan, 2006). Therwath (2010) argues that the emergence of Hindu nationalism in the 1990s may have resulted in "the liberalization of the Indian economy and the renewed affection of the Indian middle class for cinema halls, previously deserted in favor of home entertainment, generated more production and more revenue" (p. 2).

Further, Athique (2011) provides another perspective of how Bollywood film culture became westernized and was still accepted as a part of Indianness. According to Athique (2011),

In the first place, it has to be said that Indian popular films are not especially convincing as transmitters of an Indian-ness deployed in the form of a timeless ethnic text. The Bollywood refashioning of Indian film culture is not without its referents to indigeneity at many levels, but it also enacts an overtly 'Westernized' model of cultural consumption, building upon the strong Euro-American influences already at play in the Indian cinema. The influence of MTV on the contemporary song-and-dance sequence for example, has been quite obvious.

Contemporary 'Bollywood' films provide audiences in India with a diet of free romance and consumer affluence, which continue to be associated substantially in India with Western culture (p.11).

The blending of Bollywood Indian culture with westernized MTV culture in diasporic communities has resulted in the emergence of Bollywood Indian songs and music being played at restaurants, wedding ceremonies, and the creation of Bollywood dance classes, adopting the yoga and chai culture, henna tattoo and so on. Even though the diaspora may be far away in physical distance from India, the sociocultural and political landscape has played a crucial role in shaping Bollywood films and vice-versa.

A majority of the participants self-identifying as Hindu in the questionnaire distributed to the focus groups calls attention to the role of religious and political identities and movements such as Hinduism. Attention to religious and political identities may help explain the participants' interpretations and representations of 'the ideal Indian men and women' in both reel and real life. This rise of the Hindu movement and emphasis on patriotism, morality and being 'an Ideal Indian citizen' may have led to the binary divide of traditional versus western society, especially affecting gender roles and relations in India. These narratives demonstrate how the rise of Hindu nationalism through the political parties also reinforced traditional notions of masculinity, resulting in building the image of ideal and patriotic Indian men. As much as this study focused on exploring portrayals of women, I am also interested in examining how the imagery of the Indian masculinity has evolved and influenced audiences. The historical background of how the image of the ideal Indian patriotic male was constructed through politics and nationalism and how this influenced films is reviewed in the next section. Desai (2003) highlights:

Within Bollywood cinema, the deterritorialised nation is frequently sutured to the homeland nation-state through the gendered and sexualized cultural logic of transnationality mobilized in the trope of the family. Often in Bollywood cinema, diasporic desires become framed

within the heteronormative romance and become mapped as family and marriage (usually

between the male NRI protagonist and the homeland heroine). In most narratives, the damsel

is a pure and traditional virgin unsullied by Westernization who 'reorients' the male NRI in

his homeland and culture, thus reuniting the wayward capital of the male NRI with the proper

object of desire (p.47)

Hence, Bollywood cinema shaped by gendered political and nationalist agendas in India may enable

the Indian diasporic communities to perform Indianness, hence fostering ideals of heteronormativity

and hegemonic masculinity. Identifying as Hindu, Catholic, Agnostic or Atheist Indian may or may

not have consciously shaped the participants' interpretations, but further probing and examining their

views about nationalism and patriotism would have provided more information. However, this

requires separate consideration.

b. **Nationalism and patriotism in film**

According to Gita Viswanath (2015), a particular genre of Bollywood films focuses on

nationalism and patriotism. For example, the film *Pardes* (1997) or *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*

(2001) are among the many films that have been popular among local and NRI citizens living abroad.

To reiterate, polarizing political agendas in India may have a pivotal role in conditioning Bollywood

culture and diasporas to ground in Hindu values and culture. Athique (2011) provided an example:

For the BJP-led government of [Atal Bihari] Vajpayee [a former Prime Minister of India],

Bollywood was figured as a transmitter of timeless Hindu values (or *Hindutva*), whilst for the

presently governing Congress Party of Manmohan Singh, the contemporary Indian film is a

modern avatar of India's rich syncretic culture. In a speech on the 26th September, 2007,

[former] Prime Minister Singh noted that: No other institution has been as successful in

achieving the emotional integration of this vast and diverse land of ours as our film industry

has been. It is not official Hindi, or Government Hindi, that unites the length and breadth of

this country but in fact popular spoken Hindi, as popularized by our Hindi cinema...This

unique mix of conversational Hindi from across the country, popularized by the film industry,

has become the thread that weaves us all together as Indians (p.8).

These cultural affirmations are factors that may have overwhelmingly shaped trends, patterns, stories, themes and representations in Bollywood cinema. According to Vishwanath (2015), two dominant genres were observed in Hindi cinema during the nineties. One was the action film, which included an enemy representing terrorism and national violence. In these films, it was the primary responsibility of the patriotic Indian male to tackle and kill these enemies (most of these films suggested that the enemy was from Pakistan).

The second genre was comprised of films in which the enemy was reflected through a cultural invasion. In these films, female protagonists were tasked with resisting a (Western) cultural invasion (Vishwanath, 2015, p. 42). The rise and role of Hindutva in India has resulted in this concept of cultural nationalism aka definition of Indian culture. In the essay "Saffronizing the Silver Screen," Vishwanath (2015) explains how the definition of 'ideal' Indian culture originated,

Reeling under an economic crisis, the nation opened its doors to market forces from the West. This led to disproportionate fears of cultural invasion. The fears and anxieties began to be expressed in the sphere of cultural production. The film industry, itself insecure with the advent and growing popularity of satellite television, responded wholeheartedly to the nativist definitions of 'Indian' culture offered by proponents of Hindutva (p.41).

Drawn from the feminist analyses discussed above, I argue that the combination of post-colonial influences and the rise and popularity of the Hindutva movement further worsened the traditional/western divide especially for the Indian women. Based on the findings of this study, it appears that this binary labeling of traditional vs. western is more likely to affect women in India than women living away from India, and influence the choices they make. In the following section (comparing Hollywood with Bollywood), the participants in this study discuss how their position and privilege as (non)-immigrants who are living away from their home country may have changed their

perceptions towards how they interpret gender. However, before we review that, let me briefly provide you with my research experiences analyzing and writing this chapter.

While writing this section on the conflict between traditional and western influences in India, I was consciously and consistently aware of my position as a privileged Indian woman residing in the United States for the past 12 years (as of 2016) to pursue my graduate studies. During my visits to India every 1-1.5 years, I am often perceived as a western woman or can be misconstrued as a western feminist by family, friends and acquaintances. Since then, I have been careful with the way I report the findings of this study in my writings, campus and conference presentations. As much as I have tried to avoid 'stereotyping', 'glamorizing' or 'framing' women of India and the problem of gender violence and its representation as a 'third world woman' who wants to be saved or protected; the participants' interpretations imply otherwise. My concerns as an Indian researcher living abroad are reflected in the work by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who writes about how the colonial discourse shapes and influences feminist scholarship. Mohanty is an internationally acclaimed South Asian postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist and is currently teaching at Syracuse University, New York. Mohanty (1984) explains,

> The homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an 'average third world woman.' This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually con-strained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I [the author] suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions (p.337).

The experiences and identity of the third world woman compared to the Western Indian woman has been the site of negotiation, dispute and discussion in the diaspora community. Desai (2003) argues:

discourses on diaspora, gender, and sexuality that most strongly configure modernity and the

nation for these classes in the films. Specifically, examining the gendered and sexualized

logics of transnationality in these films indicates that sexuality is most often the site marking

and negotiating these class interests (p.48).

Hence, these feminist critiques about the underlying gendered experiences and sexualized nature of

being foreign in the diaspora communities particularly places Indian women negotiating with their

identities, shared gendered public spaces, sense of belonging to the homeland, and other challenging

aspects of migration. The participants in the study also compared their observations and

interpretations of how gender roles were depicted in Indian popular culture versus American popular

culture (mostly Hollywood). In the following sections, I discuss other relevant themes that emerged

during the data analysis.

B.   Comparing Hollywood to Bollywood

In this section, I have discussed how participants compared representations of gender roles

and relations in popular culture between Hollywood films in the United States and Bollywood cinema

in India. The participants' narratives also highlighted their unique contextual background of living

away from their home country. I first present the participants' responses to representations of gender

roles in Indian popular culture versus American popular culture. For example, 30-year old Ektaa

(arrived in 2011, F-1 student visa) compares gender roles in films between India and the United

States

In the U.S. [United States], it's not like they don't show them much as oppressed or anything

of that sort. It's more—I think it's more, in the US, I find more like sexual objects compared

to Indian movies. Comparatively it's more on those lines, but in India it's a mix. It's more

like—she's more like a beauty object rather than a sexual object. Like people—it's more

about what she's dressing, and things like that.

The participants also provided examples of movies and television series or leading protagonists in Hollywood to support their observations. For example, 30-year old Elora referenced the U.S. television series *Sex and the City*:

> For example, the series *Sex in the City*-- though it is a fun series, but [I] actually find it very women-centric—because it's very realistic portrayal of women in the city. Like the four characters and are actually kind of females [women] I have met personally, in real life, who talk about the same stuff. Anything. It may be the idea of going to a bar and picking up men. Or the idea of uh, being a single woman in your workplace, the kind of issues that you face…Like a lot of the things for the urban woman, surrounds around the fact that she's single. And how other people look at it.

Participants like Elora who self-reported being single in their survey expressed how they related to such TV series in the U.S. So, what does Elora's interpretation about the protagonists in *Sex and the City* mean for the larger Indian diasporic group of women? Even though it may not be the same kind of privileges the women in the study share with the women in the series, *Sex and the City*, the Indian women in diaspora may have more freedom, independence, choice to date and work, and a great group of girlfriends in a new country etc. The wide range of choices and freedom to dine, travel, date, shop and meet friends is what urban women look like for Elora. There may be exceptions where some Indian women in the diaspora may not have the freedom to choose how they live or marry or meet their friends. At this point, probing participants about their views or decisions on marriage, friends, socialization in India in the demographic questionnaire would have provided more insights into how Indian women from the diaspora like Elora and others identify with and relate to the onscreen American women in popular culture.

On the other hand, 31-year old Vinay, a full-time professional, explains that the character of Silk Smitha in *The Dirty Picture* reminded him of Pamela Anderson's character in *Baywatch*. He explains that:

I think it [*The Dirty Picture*] was more about, um, this one particular actress who portrayed sex so out there in the movies, which is a very big taboo by the way in Indian film industry. Um, you know, it compares into the Hollywood, um, and she was bold about it and she didn't feel bad about it. And she did it with all of her whole heart because she enjoyed it and she was good at it. And that's how she was portrayed and that's how probably she was in her real life. Uh, whoever this actress was. So, so I think the message was why, um, you know make a big deal out of the whole sex. It's, everybody does sex, I mean there's nothing wrong with it. And she's just portraying that in the movies.

The references made to *Sex and the City* and Pamela Anderson in *Baywatch* demonstrates participants' access to these television series in U.S. popular culture, and that these characters, shows and films have been influential for this group of Indian participants. In addition, participant interpretations of representations of women and off-screen gender roles and relations in the U.S. may be true based on their experiences. However, women in the U.S. also are represented in similarly misogynist and sexist ways, and are often used as props in a majority of the Hollywood films and advertising in the U.S.

The female participants saw women represented in the U.S. being depicted as beauty objects and less oppressed in Indian films. Studies by Jeane Kilbourne (1979) and organizations like The Representation Project and The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media[14] suggest that women in the U.S. are represented as lesser than men in popular culture, and if they are represented, women are more likely to be objectified, and depicted in a demeaning misogynist and sexist manner. For example, studies by SeeJane.org indicated women are shown in sexy attire almost four times more than men, and almost twice as likely to be depicted with a thin waistline. In general, women are portrayed and socially expected to have unrealistic figures and body shapes than men, often resulting in eating disorders and health complications among young girls (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in

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[14] http://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/

Media, 2012). Next, I review how the male participants compare their interpretations of gender roles in India and the United States.

Male participants in this study believed that they have seen women as leading protagonists or depicting strong positive characters in American films more frequently than in Indian cinema. They believe India still needs to work towards being progressive, when compared to Hollywood or other forms of pop culture in the United States. In the feminist essay, "Muslim Women's Identity: On the Margins of the Nation," Supriya Agarwal (2015) explains that women in Bollywood cinema are not frequently represented and if they are, they are depicted in a secondary position. They often have no voice. For example, 24-year old Aarav, a male participant points out,

> Indian society is a male chauvinist society. The central character in a movie, to have a lady in a central character [leading protagonist], no, it won't happen for a long time. But when you compare it with American movies, they are completely different. You hardly see, even, India. I remember of having Julia Roberts and *Erin Brockovich*—that was one of the movie which comes into mind, which having the woman in a central character. There are other movies, but still—it is still a male-dominated industry. If you've seen that we had Indira Gandhi as a Prime Minister. Yet, in 200 years, we don't have a female President yet. When the topic comes of Hillary Clinton to be the next President, still people say, "A woman can't run the country." Whereas, India already had a Prime Minister who ran—she had to the guts to go on with two wars, at that time. So, India, there's a lot of disparity in everything.

Aarav's response emphasized the role of women in politics and how often women are challenged for taking leadership roles. Once again, his example of the film *Erin Brockovich* as a women-centered film underlines this participants' access and exposure to popular and critically-acclaimed Hollywood films. It is interesting to note that all the participants in the study agreed that women and men were more accurately and positively represented in Western films aka Hollywood cinema as opposed to

Bollywood Hindi films. A female participant, 23-year old Shaila (arrived in 2011, F-1 student visa) compared the gender roles and relations across these two forms of popular culture,

> I feel in American culture and, um, English movies, there is no clear, uh, demarcation between typically how men and woman are portrayed. They're almost portrayed as equal— individuals with equal opportunities, but woman, um, in this culture [Indian culture] are more victims more of their own, you know, expectations and they're doing with expectations on career, grooming, and a certain image in the society that they have to live up to. And, I mean, I think there's sort of like a situation where there's over expectation and over pressure on the way an independent woman is expected to live up to.

According to Shaila, women in India are likely to be victimized due to their own cultural expectations on themselves, or the larger societal expectations imposed on them. These findings raise a very important question: What does it mean to be a woman and immigrant in South Asian culture who is constantly negotiating their own identity, leading to shifts in their views about gender? As Kaur (2015) puts it, "how well these women immigrants are constantly 'prepared', through exposure to narratives of popular culture, to negotiate identity within complex and shifting perspectives created by changes in both, geographies and economics" (p.76). In her essay *'Blurring Borders/ Blurring Bodies: Diaspora and Womanhood'*, Kaur (2015) describes the protagonists created by women writers in recent fiction:

> Characters in recent fiction by women writers often question their position within society, challenging the traditional roles assigned to them and (re)constructing their identities. The migrant women's experience depicts the process of assimilation and alienation, not only from the transnational perspective, but also from the perspective of gender. The protagonists set out on a journey of self-discovery and their struggle is no longer against a patriarchal male figure but against the societal norms and patriarchal structures that hinder their progress. The issues

that occupy these writers are no longer feminist or chauvinistic, but the socio-political issues

of everyday life (p.85).

The above participants' interpretations address how as Indian immigrants, they may or may not be

aware of the gender inequality and gender violence occurring in the United States. One way of

understanding these participants' responses comparing Hollywood versus Bollywood may depend on

their unique sociocultural context and background as an Indian within the U.S. diaspora. Participants

were also asked during the focus groups if living away from their home country had changed the way

they looked at gender roles in the United States. The next section describes this theme in detail using

participants' personal narratives.

1.   Has living away from India changed perceptions?

In this paragraph, I will provide a brief insight into the role of these participants' unique status

as an immigrant in the United States. The responses by participants ranged from the freedom and

choice of decisions they can make here in the United States to differences in gender roles observed

that was different from India. For instance, 34-year old male participant, Mihir (arrived in 2003,

Green card visa) described his personal experience about the impact of moving to the U.S.,

> The one role that I've actually change for myself after I came to the U.S. was… that sort of
>
> the primary caretaker for the children… so this concept of a stay at home dad while the
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> mother is out working… uh dad taking care of the kids. That still at least in my family…it's
>
> still a little alien. Um and I'm sure my dad would be appalled if you know had kids and I'm
>
> fine with staying at home and taking care of them for a few months… while my wife goes out
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> and gets settled into a new career that would still be difficult for him to kind of um. He would
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> accept it, he would find it difficult…its not something he would be used to, but everything
>
> else…you know we all come from metro cities and I think people there are fairly progressive
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> so nothing dramatically different but I think that one role… I thought was… uh still you know
>
> something that you have you know quite common that isn't quite common in India.

It is important to consider the perceptions of one of the newest arrivals in the U.S. especially about the U.S. A tourist, 56-year old Veena (female, arrived in 2013) spoke about her observations and experiences traveling within the U.S.:

> I really think something that people who are coming down from India here, even as students, I think they are able to get down there, uh, you know—they're able to understand the culture here much more easily than maybe people who are a little more mature. They do find it a little difficult to adjust to the new environment here, and, uh, I think even some young students do feel a little difficulty here, because they do miss their hometown, I feel. But, yes, they have to finish whatever it is here, because everything else is—America, of course, is the best, I think. You know, they have a lot of opportunities at the school, a lot of freedom.

The central message from Veena's quote is about education in the U.S. being the best and students having many opportunities and freedom, thus pointing out her perceptions as a temporary tourist. Veena's status as a tourist visiting the U.S. excludes her from those participants who may be first generation or second generation immigrant parents. Hence, her interpretations and experiences may be different than those Indian immigrant parents who express concern of the effects of socialization by U.S. social institutions, particularly schools and university settings. Since India is a collectivist society, parents in both India and among the diaspora may be instrumental in shaping their children's choices such as education, career or marriage. According to Poulson (2009), a collectivist approach exists in South Asian immigrant families towards their child's education choices, thus perceiving their children's success and educational achievements as a symbol of success and stability for their whole family (in English, 2016).

In a study, English (2016) summarizes why Indian parent immigrants settled or living in the U.S. may likely experience additional tension between their children and vice-versa:

> Indian immigrant families come from a culture where parent child relationships are traditionally hierarchical. The child is to respect and obey the generations above them,

including parents and grandparents. In the U.S., however, children generally have greater independence and are encouraged to make more of their own decisions. Overall, U.S. social institutions act as agents of socialization for Indian immigrant children. Once Indian immigrants enter the U.S. their lifestyle is influenced by the cultures of home that persist as well as the new norms of the host culture (p.52).

However, Poulson (2009)'s argument on the collectivist parental perceptions and approaches to their children in South Asian societies may echo Veena's perception towards her daughter's educational experience in the U.S. Additionally, English's (2016) findings from her Indian interview subjects may further validate Veena's experiences as a parent who finds the educational experience in the U.S. to be more superior than India. One of the primary motivating factors for English's (2016) subjects to move to the U.S. from India was for educational purposes. Hence, these findings about what the U.S. offers to immigrant parents versus non-immigrant parents briefly highlights the possible intergenerational differences between immigrant and non-immigrant Indian parents in this country. According to Jain (2014), "a common theme in terms of cultural difference that was noticed was the focus on family and the difference in parenting styles between India and the U.S." (p.41).

Additionally, participants spoke about their experience living in Mumbai and how that may have influenced their perceptions living away from India. For instance, 24-year old Aarav, a full-time professional, also echoes Vinay's reflections on growing up in the city of Mumbai:

I think I would add to this, I think, Bombay [currently known as Mumbai] plays a lot of importance in playing respect to people—uh, women. You see women there, in all aspects of life, doing a lot of things. You have women drivers for the trains. You have a women's special train. That's the only train in the world which is the woman's, ladies special, which goes in—You have a lot of areas where they are—they are freely evident—they can freely go anywhere, at any time of the night. There's no fear to leave the house after 8:00 or come early morning, home after work. There are a lot of call centers in Bombay. They come home, like

any time of the night, the shifts end in the night. So, I think Bombay really creates the respect

[and safe space] for women.

Vinay's experience of living in the city of Mumbai addresses women's safety with the use of

women's trains, night shift work schedules and living independently. According to Vinay, the city of

Mumbai creates safer and respectful spaces for women in India. Hence, these quotes suggest that

living away from home may have not changed a few participants' perceptions about gender roles and

relations. This has been attributed to growing up in a bigger liberal city. Additionally, Mihir's

personal experience about how his perception of gender roles changed after he moved here to the

U.S. struck a chord with my own experience as an immigrant from India. I too have seen many of my

male peers and family members living in the U.S. or other countries, embracing more visible forms of

gender equality. Indian men living outside India, for example, might take on equal household and

child-rearing duties, or they might be responsible for the majority of the cooking , and may even be

the primary homemaker.

Although the female participants did not directly address this question in three of the focus

groups, the male participants provided varied responses about this question. One specific male

participant clearly expressed his positionality and privilege in his response, while acknowledging his

ignorance and lack of information. For example, 31-year old Vinay (arrived in 2005, H1-B visa) said,

It's difficult to say because I was born and brought up in an urban lifestyle, the big city,

Bombay. When you come, I've come to States and I've again stayed in Chicago all my life. I

haven't, like, I went to school over here. I got a job over here and I've, I've lived here. I'm

living here. So it's like in a transition from one big city to another big city. I guess if I'd been

a different opinion or a different, um, mindset if I, if I would have probably come from a

smaller town in India coming to a big city in the United States or vice versa. Coming from a

big city in India to a smaller town in United States that would have definitely changed my

mindset, my way of thinking. Because I'm guessing in a smaller town in India it's still a little

bit more conservative. Women probably aren't, not that independent and free as much as men would be. And that's what I think and maybe I could be wrong because I've not lived in a smaller town in India (31 years, first visited in 2005, H1-B work visa).

Vinay and Aarav's responses demonstrate the impact of growing up in a big metro city in India on their upbringing, and how that may have further influenced their perceptions and interpretations about the status of women in India. According to Desai (2003), the emergence of the global and cosmopolitan class originating in the economic and cultural hub of India, i.e. the city of Mumbai. Although this transnational social class may be similar to the diasporic middle class Indians, it is still distinctive. Drawn from Rachel Dwyer's insightful findings from her study, Desai (2003) explains the participants' perceptions and interpretations about growing up in middle class families in metropolitan urban cities:

> Rachel Dwyer's [2000] study of romance in India investigates the rise of this elite transnational class and the new middle class. She links together these classes and contrasts them to the older bourgeois who are the dominant class of the moment, simultaneously un-naming themselves and their privilege. Dwyer describes the new middle class with its own structures of feelings and ideologies as distinct from the previous colonial and postcolonial dominant bourgeoisie. In addition to fluency in and frequent use of English, consumption of material leisure goods and services (including food, fashion, travel, and high priced commodities associated with the West) defines this new middle class as well as the cosmopolitan transnational class. Moreover, these groups share cultural capital and forward cultural and social values that challenge those of the national bourgeoisie (p.47).

Hence, Dwyer's (2000) study findings brings us to another site of constant discussion about comparing the cultures in India and the U.S., particularly its significance to the diaspora community. Like Vinay's reflections, it is important to highlight 56-year old Veena's perspectives about the U.S. as she was here on a tourist visa:

I'd like to compare the Indian culture with the Western culture first. So, earlier, both were male-dominated. I would say India is still male-dominated, whereas, over here, it's not so much right now. But, back in the day, it was a male-dominated society, in—in the Western culture, as well. And people over here have progressed faster than what we have. And that is because of education and, which is why, today, women in America, or women in—I—I don't know about other countries, but at least women in America, I say, um, would be treated equally as—as their male counterparts.

I argue that these participants' perceptions of gender equality and preference of the U.S. culture over their own Indian culture can be attributed to the post-colonial influence on our upbringing and a possible inherent sense of privilege and need to blend in a new culture and explore a new country. Desai (2003) and Dwyer's (2000) studies have been useful in understanding the role and impact of the new, emerging and evolving middle class Indian diaspora. Desai (2003) argues that this new group of middle class diasporic Indians use their transnational, cosmopolitan and elite privileges to challenge and defy the strong post-colonial capitalist and classist groups. According to Dudrah (2002),

The social condition of diaspora can be considered as taking up the interplay of migrant people, their successive settled generations, and their ideas in terms of a triadic relationship. This relationship can be thought of as working between the place of origin, place of settlement, and a diasporic consciousness that shifts among the two and incorporates possibilities for new subjectivity formation (p.20).

These discussions constitute an understanding of what it means to be an Indian migrant (irrespective of the visa status and length of stay in the U.S.) in the diaspora, and how these sociocultural, historical and economic forces between the nation-state and place of residence may affect participants' experiences about gender and interpretations of Bollywood cinema. The next section

examines whether participants' responses and interpretations about VAW may have shifted due to changes in Bollywood cinema.

2.   <u>**Is Bollywood becoming progressive?**</u>

While both the male and female focus group participants agreed that gender roles and relations have become more progressive over the past decade, they all felt Bollywood still has a long way to go in promoting positive images of women and men. For example, participants from the *Lajja* screening group pointed out that the images and stories about women depicted in this film released in 2001 have positively changed in the current films. However, 31-year old Sapna, a female participant (arrived in 2004, H1-B visa) challenged the extremely restricted roles that Bollywood films offer:

> That's kind of the first thing that comes to my mind. Again, if you look at the women-centric movies, or the fact that now the Indian actresses are so proud that they can openly do item numbers, and be celebrated for them. The reason why I think that's a problem is because why isn't a woman ever shown as an astronaut? You know? Like why-why is it we think that this moving from women uh, openly seeking or women being oppressed, or women being the sari clad woman who will bring her husband chai after he comes from home from office.

Scholars and study participants have not only been concerned with the limited representations of women in Bollywood cinema, but also being minimized to being glamorized dolls. They don't have much onscreen talking time or dialogues or rarely have they played the lead protagonist in these films. Mulvey (1999) argues that "the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" (as cited in Nair, 2015, p. 54). As mentioned earlier, all the participants agreed that the trends and patterns have changed positively in the past decade in terms of how women are depicted in Bollywood films. But many believed that they still have a long way to go to promote a culture of gender equality. For example, 34-year old Mihir (male, arrived in 2003, H1-B visa) identifies progressive roles for women in Bollywood cinema but also finds it as regressive in some aspects.

Mihir believes that globalization has been instrumental in how women are depicted in Bollywood cinema. Even though some areas may still be regressive in terms of representations, globalization played a role in promoting progressive images of women in Bollywood cinema. In Mihir's words, "what globalization did was to make acceptable the concept of a powerful working women who is independent and you see that being portrayed in Bollywood films in these days. But 30 years ago would have been unusual but today its norm and nobody blinks an eyelid" (p. 34). However, Mihir also argues that during the same 30 years, the increase of item numbers serving as titillating number for the male spectators also "made sex more acceptable on the Indian screen" (p. 43). Thus, Mihir's response implies that the images of women in Bollywood cinema overall have been moving towards a progressive and liberating era. I argue that the participants' interpretations of what is progressive and liberating for women may be gendered, and will be different for the men and women in this Indian diasporic community (Athique, 2011; Desai, 2003; Dudrah, 2002).

It appears that feminist scholars agree with the study participants' observations about Bollywood industry making gradual but positive progress in the past five years in terms of writing, producing and directing films. Bollywood films like *Fashion* (2008), *Kahaani* (2012), *Queen* (2014), *Mary Kom* (2014), *Mardani* (2014), and *Piku* (2015) have leading female protagonists, supportive male characters, women-oriented and feminist themed films. Further, these film-makers actually address oppression, rights, inequality and violence seriously without glamorizing it (Jain & Rai, 2015). As a feminist scholar, I do agree with the progress being made in Bollywood cinema in terms of gender roles and gender relations. For example, in the films, *Salaam Namaste* (2005), *Queen* (2014), and *Shuddh Desi Romance* (2013), non-conventional gender relations were depicted between male and female characters (for example, platonic, cohabiting or live-in relationships etc.). The objective of depicting these non-conventional and liberating relations and gender roles should be to challenge the patriarchal frameworks, hegemonic masculinity and moral policing of women's roles

and lives. In the last section, I will provide a summary of the findings in this chapter drawn from the themes identified during the data analysis, and also discuss the implications of these results.

C.   **Discussion**

This section summarizes the findings of this chapter. According to Jackson Katz (1999), cultural theorists have argued that the images we see in popular culture have a far more long-term impact on our minds as consumers. Katz (1999) points out that "we're not just consumers of these images; we don't simply make our way through the thousands of images we see daily and pick and choose what we like and don't like. These images have a profound impact on who we are, and on our tastes, attitudes, and the kinds of choices we make" (p. 17). However, I argue that the male participants' interpretations of women being positioned as an item number for a male audience in the film may be influenced by the global, transnational contexts and diasporic positionality of this film culture. Drawn from Desai, Dudrah and Rai (2005)'s essay, *Bollywood Audiences Editorial*:

> ...The global, indeed transnationalizing contexts of this film culture need to be understood as local negotiations of historically shifting relations of image production and consumption. Both social and psychic contestations are the very stuff of how audiences constitute their own relationship to changing film narratives, dance, and music; audio-visual technologies and theatre spaces; shifting aesthetic codes and values; and social norms in the moment of their dissolution and reconstitution. Active audiences are constantly renegotiating the terms of their pleasure (p.79).

Hence, Rakow (2009's) implication that it is important to consider gendered differences in viewing and relating to popular culture, especially in a patriarchal framework. Sarkar (2009) further suggests to explore the concept of hybridity (proposed by Gillespie, 1995), when it comes to this group of Indian diaspora in understanding cinema and its treatment of women to make these films successful. According to Gillespie (1995), there are three main characteristics of intentional hybridity relevant to the Indian diaspora:

First, dominant cultural forms were only consumed and not redefined or reproduced. Second, the members of these diasporas lived far away from home and remained unaffected by the fundamentalist politics of their homeland. Third, television and video were instrumental in determining the space of Indian diaspora. Thus, Bollywood cinema was crucial in bringing the homeland abroad resulting in the creation of cultural solidarity amongst varied linguistic groups of the Indian diaspora (in Sarkar, 2009, p.51).

Although the current study does not attempt to establish a cause-effect relationship between messages reinforced by Bollywood cinema and impact on Indian diaspora, there seems to be an underlying implication that representations of gender roles and relations in Bollywood cinema are highly likely to inform, educate, and influence the mind of audiences in terms of their perceptions and attitudes towards VAW. The themes discussed in this chapter appear to support feminist critiques and existing empirical and content analysis studies on gender in Bollywood cinema. For example, the literature reviewed sheds light on the limited, stereotypical gender roles in Hindi films and the struggle between the traditional expectations versus the modern/western influences.

What was unexpected were viewpoints uncovered of the depiction of item numbers in Bollywood films especially in terms of the item numbers being progressive within this diasporic Indian community. Participants found Hollywood films to be more progressive in addressing social issues and casting more women as lead protagonists in films. With Bollywood film directors plagiarizing the stories and plots of original Hollywood movies, I believe some Indian viewers find the making of and quality of Hollywood film superior, elegant and well-made. These interpretations pose nuances in terms of the modernist, transnational and post-colonial influence of the texts in Bollywood films for the Indian diaspora, hence leading to gendered differences among participants.

On the contrary, the topic on portrayal of women in Hollywood cinema has been under the microscope by many scholars and organizations like The Representation Project. In a study conducted by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2015), a sample of 200 films (including

top grossing, non-animated films released in 2014 and 2015) were analyzed. Only 17% of the top

grossing films had a female lead in 2015. The gender gap was even wider even with a leading male

protagonist, especially when they compared 34.5% male characters to 12.9% of female characters

(Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2015). In summary, when participants compare the films

that Hollywood has made compared to Bollywood, they found the former to be more progressive

with the times.

The participants primarily described Hollywood films as progressive, but they still expressed

a sense of identity and belonging to Bollywood cinema in India. This perspective sheds light on the

culturally and economically distinctive background of this Indian diasporic community in the U.S.

Athique (2011) describes the impact of the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) community, another name for

the Indian diaspora and migrant communities:

> In India, the NRI, like the Indian film industry, has made a marked transition in recent years
>
> from being configured as an errant native seduced by the wealth and glamour of the West, at
>
> the expense of Indian values, to being an icon of the desirable cosmopolitan Indian citizen
>
> straddling the globe. The NRI brings capital, cosmopolitanism and consumerism to India in
>
> exchange for cultural nurturing and validation (p.6).

The overwhelmingly visible narratives shed light on how Bollywood cinema has become such an

indispensable part of the elite, urban and middle class Indian diaspora. However, it is critical to

underline the importance of studying gender differences in interpreting representations of gender

roles and relations in Bollywood films. How does this contribute to the larger and broader constructs

of VAW in India, and the ramifications on the Indian diaspora? The next chapter draws attention to

how participants in the study identified types of VAW in Bollywood films, provided their definitions

and interpretations of risk and protective factors, costs and consequences, and views on help-seeking

by abused women.

VI.   IDENTIFYING AND DEFINING VAW

In this chapter, I address the second research question asked in this study: How do Indian film audiences define, interpret and justify the prevalence of VAW depicted in Bollywood films? Gender roles and relations have played an instrumental role in understanding VAW (Bhanot & Sen, 2007). I first underline the critical themes that were identified from focus group interviews on VAW. Second, I explore these themes in detail with examples of key quotes by participants and current literature. Third, I highlight other relevant themes and narratives from the focus group data. Last, I summarize the findings and present its implications. Like the previous chapter, I also emphasize the way the participants' definitions, interpretations and understanding of VAW in Bollywood cinema provides a contextual and critical perspective to this unique Indian diasporic participant sample.

A.   <u>Introduction</u>

During the focus group interviews, participants were asked their definitions of VAW, although the question was framed to them differently. Both the focus group facilitators (including me) either showed a moving scene (on the TV screen) or narrated a scene (if technological issues came up) from the film shown that day. The question was framed without intending to probe words of violence or any related terms and asked them what they saw. For example, in the movie *Lajja* (2001)*,* one of the earlier opening scenes shows an upper-class, wealthy married couple standing on the terrace of a high-rise building (implying their home) with the backdrop of the Empire State Building in New York city (U.S.). The female protagonist Vaidehi (played by Manisha Koirala) is shown refusing her husband Raghu's (played by Jackie Shroff) sexual advances while he forces her to be intimate. The camera focus then moves from the couple and zooms into the high-rise buildings and the NYC skyline. This backdrop is then accompanied by her background cries for help and the sound of Raghu slapping Vaidehi.

Drawn from participants' interpretations of the films, the common themes identified from this research question can be summarized as: (a) participants' definition of VAW as lack of choices and

consent, (b) participants recognizing psychological and verbal abuse (e.g. controlling behavior) as VAW and perceived fear of sexual violence, (c) their knowledge of consequences of VAW resulting in mental health issues and trauma, (d) their understanding and observations of rural versus urban India ranging from the types of violence women face, to their perception of safety and freedom for women, (e) interpreting risk factors of VAW such as implications of images of women in item numbers and lack of resources and social support for women (both in reel and real life); and (f) interpreting help-seeking behavior by women affected by domestic violence. These themes are discussed next and have been categorized under the following sub-sections: (1) definitions and typology, (2) nature and prevalence, (3) consequences, (4) risk and protective factors and (5) justifying abuse or help-seeking.

The next few sections highlight how participants in this study interpreted how they define or identify a form of VAW. They also used examples from other Bollywood films as points of reference during this discussion. Additionally, I also argue that their film interpretations of VAW were likely to be reflected in their own definitions, knowledge and awareness about VAW prevalent in India and the U.S. diaspora. First, I will address how participants defined and identified VAW in Bollywood cinema accompanied by their real-life knowledge, observations and attitudes.

B.   <u>Definitions and Typology</u>

For this research question, I studied how participants made sense of a form of VAW in both their real and reel lives. Reel life interpretations included their reactions and definitions about Bollywood films and their characters. Scholars and world-wide human rights organizations have proposed a wide range of comprehensive, multicultural and inclusive definitions of VAW (INCLEN, 1999; Mathur, 2004). The World Health Organization defines intimate partner violence as behavior that triggers physical, psychological and sexual harm. It also expands to psychological abuse and controlling behavior (Modi et al, 2013, p. 253). Unlike the male participants, female participants gave specific definitions of the type of VAW they identified in the movies. The most common phrases to

define VAW used by women in the study included the words 'voice', 'choice' and 'consent.' In other words, VAW was defined as women lacking the voice to express, lack of choices and sexual coercion without consent.

It was notable that one specific group of female participants provided specific definitions of VAW based on the film scenes during the focus groups. For example, one of the youngest female participants, 20-year old Elora (arrived in 2012, Green card status) interpreted Vaidehi's (Manisha Koirala) scene with her husband Raghu (Jackie Shroff) in the film *Lajja* as:

> Because she's being forced out of her personal choices. She's being forced to do something that he wants, that she's refusing to. It's forced. It just shows that her choices don't matter, and that's what makes me show that she's not being treated as a person that's a human being. It's like she's being treated below him, because she, like, kind of like a slave. Like whatever he asks for, she is supposed to give him. So she has no feelings, she has no choices, she has no wants, she has no command over her own life. So there is force on her, and that's what makes it—violent.

Elora's interpretation of VAW included women's lack of choices, being controlled and being forced to do something without any consideration for her desires and consent. Women in Indian diaspora may experience less abuse due to the absence of in-laws and extended relatives in the U.S. In addition, stricter laws and the judicial system in the U.S. may be more responsive to abused women. But this does not mean that diasporic Indian women might not encounter other barriers and risk factors that may make them vulnerable and at risk of abuse (Chaudhuri, Morash, & Yingling, 2014). In addition, in cases of domestic abuse, women may be deprived of their agency to balance their roles within their families and Indian cultural contexts, but could still be expected to fulfill their marriage commitments. Next, I review participants' responses and interpretations of other forms of VAW depicted in Bollywood films.

Other forms of VAW were identified such as stalking, eve-teasing (also known as street harassment), honor killings, female infanticide and domestic violence. In addition, another female participant, 22-year old Piya (arrived in 2013, F-1 visa student) provided her interpretation of eve-teasing in India:

> Suppose I'm walking alone in a road and a boy is walking alone. A boy is totally free. Like no one is commenting on anything. He wears shorts. He-he doesn't wear a shirt. No problem. A girl is walking. Like she-she has got some integrity. She knows what to wear. It's not like that she is like—she knows what to wear-- in what place. If she's wearing a mini-skirt, suddenly ten other guys will just start staring at her. And start saying silly things…Actually, very bad abusive things. And that is—but my question is why should a girl—experience this? If the guy does not experience this, why should she? Like this is one thing that happens. They just come and touch the girl and just go like that they are on a vehicle. The girl is walking; they just—brush up and they go.

Piya's definition of street harassment in India points to the unpleasant conditions in which women are unable to travel, commute or occupy public spaces in their own cities. According to Piya, unlike boys or men, girls and women are more likely to be targeted, attacked or harassed due to the way they dress, thus highlighting the prevalence of rape culture. Additionally, she suggests that girls are also likely to be blamed for their victimization, thus indicating how rape myths and victim-blaming are fostered (Erez & Bhat, 2010; Flood & Pease, 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006).

Similarly, 30-year old Sejal also defined VAW as abuse and 'being hit and controlled by someone, to punish you by silencing your voice.' The women in the study attempted to define VAW by focusing on the types, trends and patterns and providing examples from the films. For example, 23-year old Shaila (arrived in 2011, F-1 student visa) suggested, "I think most of—I mean, even in the most educated household, I think violence is almost silent, where a woman is almost denied her privileges and, you know, her choices are not respected. She is talked down to…" (p. 28). In this

quote, what struck me the most were the phrases: 'most educated households' and 'violence is almost silent.' This suggests that Shaila believes violence may occur not only among uneducated family members but also among the most educated men and women. Shaila labeling violence as silent highlights the nature of interpersonal and domestic violence both in India and the diaspora living in the U.S. (Gill, 2004). Her observations about VAW, particularly domestic violence echoes the findings of many South Asian scholars of gender violence.

Bhattacharya and Bhattacharya (2014), explain that the problem of domestic violence is often dealt with as a private family affair taking place within the four walls of the household with no place for intervention. The cultural stigmatization of intervening in a domestic dispute or abusive situation discourages women from reporting the violence and seeking help. Women who live in the U.S. on a temporary or even more permanent visa, like the participants in the study, may experience additional hurdles in seeking help. For example, they may not be authorized to seek employment, not have a support system to lean on for moral support or they might lack trust in confiding their intimate abusive experiences or the absence of an income that leaves them dependent on their spouse (Chaudhuri, Morash & Yingling, 2014). Another participant, 31-year old Sapna (female, arrived in 2004, H1-B visa) addresses that VAW depicted in Bollywood films centers not only on physical violence, but scenes portraying women being publicly humiliated or verbally abused. Contrary to Shaila's interpretation, Sapna believed that educated households are more aware and informed about VAW than uneducated households:

> But educated, intelligent people have realized that that's like a total social faux pas to do stuff [VAW] like this. So on the surface, I think things have progressed and changed. I think movies have also reflected that change [that VAW is wrong], that now they are portraying women in more sophisticated roles where they are—they have more independence, they have the choice to wear the type of clothes they want, go where they want, stay out late at night.

Sapna's interpretation suggests that women are increasingly depicted in stronger, independent and sophisticated roles and the more educated part of Indian society understands that VAW is wrong. Sapna's argument contradicts Shaila's earlier reaction about linking violence and education levels. While Sapna suggested that educated families have come to realize that VAW is wrong, Shaila indicates that violence and abuse can happen in any household, despite educational status and other demographics. Potter (1999) makes an important point about defining violence: when violence is being viewed as a concept, identifying and pointing to violence is much simpler than defining. According to Potter (1999), "violence is a violation of a character's physical or emotional well-being. It includes two key elements—intentionality and harm—at least one of which must be present" (in Amoakohene, 2004; p. 2373).

The participants of this study also interpreted examples of VAW from the films. For instance, 28-year old Savi (arrived in 2009, H1-B visa) suggested that the characters Janaki (Madhuri Dixit) and Purshottam (Tinu Anand) in the film *Lajja* portrayed an example of an abusive relationship:

> So, I think one of the uh, most um, prominent forms of non-direct violence would be the relationship between um, Janaki and Purshottam [in *Lajja*]…the fact that he's—he tries to coax her into getting into a physical relationship with him. Uh, hoping that she would because he held her hand, and brought her up, and set her up in—the drama, uh company that he runs. So it felt sort of like expecting her to return the favor. Uh, against her will. And trying to blackmail her…And going about ruining her relationship because she said no. That, to me, is a very non-direct form of violence. And it's the example of it. So it's good to have a movie like this that just blatantly puts it out on the table…this is what's going on.

Savi's definition of VAW not only includes physical violence, but also other forms of verbal and psychological abuse prevalent in India such as controlling behaviors, harassment, emotional blackmail, and coercive sexual behavior without her consent. Abraham (1999) suggests that these definitions of VAW also shed light on the constructs of masculinity and femininity in South Asian

cultures. In a study conducted on sexual abuse of South Asian immigrant women, Abraham (1999) argued:

> Masculinity in mainstream South Asian cultures is defined to a large degree in terms of men's power, virility and ability to control women's morality and sexuality. If an important component of femininity is sexual purity, a defining feature of masculinity is sexual virility. South Asian men are socialized to believe sexual virility is an indicator of masculinity and that male sexual needs are natural. South Asian men are socialized to have expectations of their sexual needs and assumptions of female accessibility that justifying forcing sexual access, especially within the context of marriage (p.598).

According to Savi, the film *Lajja* does a great role in purposely portraying issues like VAW to inform audiences of these social problems. While female participants provided specific definitions of a specific type of VAW using images from these films, the male participants' interpretations of VAW were different. While all the women acknowledged VAW as lack of choice and consent, physical abuse, mental torture and emotional abuse, there were mixed responses among the men. Most male participants identified physical abuse and battering as serious forms of VAW. Two other men's definitions focused more on emotional and psychological abuse having far more consequences than physical abuse. The recurring theme among the definitions of VAW highlighted the lack of consent in heteronormative relationships within Indian culture. The next section explores the gender differences in how participants defined, identified and interpreted VAW.

The men continued to demonstrate their perception and understanding of the concept of violence. For example, according to 28-year old Yuvraj (arrived in 2011, F-1 student visa), *The Dirty Picture* and other films depict different manifestations of physical violence. Yuvraj asserted that VAW goes beyond physical abuse, thus acknowledging other forms of violence such as psychological and verbal abuse. Another male participant, 31- year old Aryan whose focus group also watched *The Dirty Picture* reflected Yuvraj's interpretation of the VAW depicted in Bollywood

films. Aryan (31 yrs., arrived in 2010, L-1 work visa) provides his interpretation of the concept of 'violence'

> I-I would also use the word harassment, um, because I think violence, uh, typically in our heads, seems [laughter] to be like a physical or verbally abusing—somebody. But there are— there a lot of subtle clues in the movie where, uh, it-it-it, uh—it-it construes or constitutes, or contributes to violence. So, uh, uh, that's how I see it, at least. Um, so if—there are a lot of scenes that do depict violence in the movie.

While Aryan acknowledged public perceptions of harassment, physical or verbal abuse as types of violence, he also highlighted other non-direct forms of violence portrayed in the film. Women who are psychologically, verbally or emotionally abused, sexually coerced by their spouses, and financially deprived, and seeking help may not have the safe space to report their victimization. Once again, the cycle of violence gets further complicated for immigrant women in the U.S. (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Chaudhuri, Morash & Yingling, 2014; Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2003).

In order to prompt discussion about VAW and receive feedback from the focus groups about specific scenes from the films, both the focus group facilitators either showed a moving scene (on the TV screen) or narrated a scene (if technological issues came up) from the film shown that day. We then asked: What did you see in this scene or what do you make of this scene? For example, we narrated a scene from the film *The Dirty Picture*, where the lead female protagonist, Reshma aka Silk (Vidya Balan) is shown to be watching a movie in the theater by herself. While she is watching the movie, an older man seated next to her ogles at her and starts rubbing her right thigh. A shocked and startled Reshma /Silk looks at him and he offers her money to sleep with him. She slaps the old man and leaves the theater in a hurry. While Aryan identified this scene as a form of violence being perpetrated, Rajesh (male, 31 yrs., first arrived in 2005, H1-B visa) disagreed. Rajesh clarified that violence should be defined based only on its frequency and intensity:

> To me, violence is more, uh, deep. Violence is, you know, is what violence stands for:
> physically attacking somebody or mentally harassing somebody. I don't think, at least from
> what I've seen, that it wasn't mental harassment. If somebody would have stopped that and
> persistently did something, then okay, I would categorize that. But um, one pass at somebody,
> no. I mean, he's-he's just trying his luck out.

Therefore, these participants' definitions highlight how film audiences are likely to define violence based on the extent, prevalence, visibility and frequency of the violence. What is missing among these definitions is the prevalence of sexual abuse by controlling women's reproductive rights, marital rape, and, exercising power and control through psychological intimidation and fear. Even though the women in the study defined coercion and force by Raghu against Vaidehi in *Lajja*; nobody identified it as a form of marital rape. Other narratives on the frequency, nature and prevalence of VAW by female participants focused on help-seeking behavior, consequences of these forms of violence on the women and identifying risk factors that trigger VAW. Next, I will explore the nature and prevalence of VAW using focus group participants' film interpretations of VAW and their real-life knowledge and perceptions.

C.   Nature and Prevalence

In this section, the participants in the study describe their interpretations and knowledge of the trends and prevalence of VAW in India. Scholars of gender violence have asserted that women experience one or multiple forms of VAW once or in their lifetime such as physical, psychological or emotional, mental abuse, controlling or coercive behaviors, financial abuse by their perpetrator(s) (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya, 2014; INCLEN, 1999). For example, 31-year old Rajesh (male, first arrived in 2005, H1-B work visa) explained how he identifies violence:

> Casual passes [making a pass/comment on someone], insults during a day, quite honestly, I
> think we all face it and it be-be wrong to say that that is violence, in my mind. So, to me, it's
> something, you know—surely, I mean, if somebody's yelling at me, yeah, that's-that's not

proper. Doing it once is okay. Doing it periodically for 30 days, that-that—at that point, you know, it's-it's more—to—so, to me, it's something on those lines. Behavioral patterns do matter, but it's the frequency and the intensity that defines them.

This response demonstrates that Rajesh perceives violence as something unpleasant (in the form of verbal insults or negative comments) occurring frequently and often. What was also prominent in the Rajesh's interpretation was the 'sociable or normative acceptability of violence' echoed in Go et al. (2003, p.403). The study by Go et al. (2003) indicated that domestic violence was perceived as "neither fully acceptable nor socially prohibited" (p.403). In addition, intensity, justification and frequency were three primary factors defining social acceptability of violence among their participants. In other words, any violence that goes beyond this social and normative limits of acceptability becomes objectionable. These findings shed some light on how the male focus group participants interpreted violence (in VAW) in this study. The findings by Go et al. (2003) are reflected in the way participants of the current study defined or identified violence both in cinema representations and in their real lives: intensity, justification and frequency.

For example, Vinay (male, 31 yrs., first arrived in 2005, H1-B visa) hesitatingly identified only physical assault as violence:

In my mind violence is something always considered with physical assault. Uh, whether it's um, I, I don't consider mental trauma as violence. Mental trauma is something you, you know, it's a shock to your mind. It's just a shock to your own dignity, to your self-respect, to your own ethical conduct. I don't think violence in this case it was violence, but that's how I think and that's how I see violence and that's how I see these things…maybe somebody else might see it differently.

Thus, some participants like Vinay did not interpret the scene in the film *The Dirty Picture* where a stranger makes unwanted sexual advances towards Silk Smitha as VAW because the character was groped rather than physically attacked, however, others did believe that they were witnessing a form

of violence. For example, Although Vinay expressed that his response is based from his personal observation and knowledge about violence and cannot be generalized to others, this definition neglected to include mental trauma, thus undermining the effects of trauma on abused women. A number of scholars have defined VAW as including verbal abuse, mental torture, controlling and coercive behavior and discussed its damaging effects on abused women (INCLEN, 1999; Mahanta, 1993). Another participant in the same focus group discussion, 31-year old Sunil (male, arrived in 2005, H1-B visa) provided a counter-argument to Vinay's definition of VAW by identifying a loophole,

> Like given an ordinary woman in the situation, she would walk away from that situation with a sense of trauma. Um, it didn't require, like, actual physical activity to have that. Um, so in that sense, you know, if, if a woman walks away from the situation feeling that she's been violated even though it might be something like a grab on the thigh or something like that. She…she did walk away from that situation not feeling comfortable about, about it. Um, the fact that it, uh, it didn't go to, um, you know, more extensive, uh, grabbing or things like that, didn't change the fact that she walked away with trauma. Uh, and in that sense I would say that, uh, you have to classify this as violence. Um, because this was not something that is, um, that a woman would feel happy about and therefore I, I would say that.

These prominent narratives between male participants on defining and interpreting VAW was based on their perceptions, attitudes or observations in their daily lives. For example, Sunil used the phrases 'she's been violated', 'not feeling comfortable', 'walked away with trauma' and 'not something a woman would feel happy about' in his interpretation of VAW. Scholars such as Bhat and Ullman (2013), Coomaraswamy (2002), and Tjaden and Thoennes (2006) have argued that highly overt and brutal forms of VAW such as physical assault and sexual violence are taken more seriously than non-direct and subtle forms such as financial abuse, mental torture and other controlling aggressive behavior. Further, Sunil's insightful observations about the nature of abuse does not reflect the

findings on how men in South Asian cultures may foster toxic masculinity and a sense of male entitlement (Abraham, 1999).

Additionally, studies on risk research suggest gender differences in the way men and women perceive risk (Gustafson, 1989). A study by May, Rader and Goodrum (2009) demonstrates gendered differences in predicting perceived threats of victimization. The image of powerlessness plays a role in affecting some men's threat of victimization. In other words, "those males who feel least powerful are more fearful, have higher levels of perceived risk, and are more likely to engage in avoidance and defensive behaviors" (p. 17). I am not sure if participants like Rajesh and Vinay belong to this group of men who are concerned with being powerless--the answer to this question needs further probing. For most women in the study who are living away from their homeland, families and support systems, the perceived risk and fear about VAW may change or become more nuanced in a new country (Gill, 2004). The purpose of this discussion is to identify other frameworks that may explain why these male participants identified VAW, particularly violence based on the frequency and intensity. In the next section, I closely examine the responses by female participants. These are discussed in the next section.

D.   **Costs and Consequences**

In this section, I examine the definitions and interpretations of VAW through participants' narratives on the consequences of violence on women. Bollywood films may depict forms of VAW as part of a particular narrative in order to address this social problem, leading to some awareness among Indian audiences. But what do the films say about the effects of VAW on women? Studies indicate that women affected by VAW experience negative and detrimental short and long-term physical and mental health effects (Bajpai, 2006; Bhat & Ullman, 2013, Chowdhary & Patel, 2008; Kumar, Jeyaseelan, Suraj, & Ahuja, 2005). In this study, two participants particularly highlighted the negative effects of male violence against women. The women in the study highlighted that mental and verbal abuse against women may result in depression and suicidal ideation.

Based on my personal experiences of disclosing an unwanted experience to someone, there was an inherent expectation that the women in the study would be more knowledgeable and understanding of the aftermath of VAW and the impact of trauma and victimization. Even though the women understood the nature of VAW and its consequences, the men provided a stronger understanding of the negative effects of violence and abuse on women. For instance, 31-year old Sunil (male, arrived in 2005, H1-B visa) surprised me with his knowledge about the consequences of domestic violence on women. According to Sunil,

> I mean, um, it's, it's hard to define because you, violence physical or not ultimately, um, gives you pretty much the same end result where you have s-, you know, trauma and stress. Um, like yes the violence might be temporary, the scars might heal, but that's never gonna go away mentally, you know? Is, is domestic abuse in the sense that if, um, if you're a woman in a domestic situation and you get yelled at by your husband every single day who abuses you. Um, and possibly just by verbal means…does that reduce the amount of trauma compared to, um, physical violence? I don't know it probably not. But, but the fact remains that at the end result is, um, physical or not you do suffer a certain amount of mental stress and trauma. And, um, I guess that's what you need to take away from, from that in my opinion.

Sunil's interpretation of the trauma faced by women in abusive relationship aligns with the research findings on VAW (Bajpai, 2006; Bhat & Ullman, 2014). Women facing violent acts against them in their homes are likely to experience chronic to fatal health-related consequences, as well as psychological and emotional damage from the trauma (Kimuna, Djamba, Ciciurkaite & Cherukuri, 2012). Although a majority of the women experiencing some form of VAW may deal with these negative consequences, Indian immigrant women in the diaspora may experience additional trauma and damaging health effects. For example, their struggle with bicultural identities, pressures of maintaining the family and making the marriage work, patriarchal norms of gender roles, and policing of sexuality and reproductive choices (Gill, 2004; Mahapatra & Dinitto, 2013). The next

question that emerged in these participant discussions concerned the factors resulting in VAW and elements preventing this violence. The next section addresses the risk and protective factors of VAW identified and interpreted through focus group participants' perspectives.

E.   <u>Risk and Protective Factors</u>

In this section, I discuss how participants shared their knowledge about the risk factors that result in VAW as they reacted to the Bollywood films. They also provided recommendations of what can be done to prevent VAW in India. What are the factors that lead to this environment condoning VAW in India and how are they depicted in these Bollywood films? For example, 23-year old Shaila (female, arrived in 2011, H1-B work visa) addresses the 'normalization' of religion, tradition and Indian culture as potential risk factors of VAW:

> The second scene [from *Lajja*] was when Jaanki asked Ram [Manish] to—guy to jump into the fire with her. It was questioning scriptures and questioning the old culture, which we accept as, you know, it has been there for a couple of generations. It's going to be there forever. That's sort of like accepted. And that brings me to the point that culture and tradition is used as a—almost like a weapon…a shield for, um, justifying abuse and neglect against women. So I think that's one of the questions that the movie raised.

The focus group participants also highlighted risk factors for VAW by comparing women in rural villages versus urban cities and their likelihood of being victimized. For example, 28-year old Savi (female, arrived in 2009, H1-B visa) explained that rural women in India were more likely to be affected by physical violence while urban women were more likely to be victims of psychological violence. According to Savi, oppression in India is multi-layered, complex and manifests in multiple forms affecting different levels of the society (p.21). In addition to Shaila and Savi's interpretations, another participant pointed out the differences in which VAW occurs in rural versus urban cities. For example, 21-year old Sonia (female, arrived in 2013, F-1 student visa) highlighted that women in rural villages don't even realize that they are being abused and accept violence as normal. She states,

> Mainly, the women don't even know that they're victims. They accept—in rural areas, they almost accept it as their way of life and the norm. They are supposed to be mistreated. They don't even know that they have rights and they have certain issues where they can stand up and they can talk about their feelings.

Sonia's quote indicates underlying assumptions she may have about rural women in India. Studies indicate that rural women in India are likely at a greater risk of experiencing physical and sexual violence than urban women (Ackerson & Subramanian, 2008; Dalal & Lindqvist, 2012; Kimuna et al, 2012). What is interesting about these discussions is the participants' perceptions of rural women and the violence experienced by them in India. This brings attention to Mohanty (1984)'s analysis on the post-colonial construction of the 'average third world woman', and how the participants' background as urban and privileged diaspora may attribute to these harmful practices and damaging perspectives about women in India. Sonia's interpretations validates Kimuna et al. (2012)'s findings about Indian women not being able to acknowledge their own abuse:

> Prescribed gender roles place a heavy burden on these women. Social norms related to marriage dictate various circumstances in a married woman's life. The patriarchal notions of male superiority and power and their socialization to accept the husband as head of the household seem to condition women to accept violence in their lives and relationships. Furthermore, keeping their marriages intact, despite experiencing violence, may not only be a traditional expectation, but it may also be for practical reasons such as financial support, care for their children, and having no other place to go (p. 30).

Empirical evidence shows that several factors increase the risk of VAW, particularly in India, such as women and men's education and employment status, their residence in urban versus rural neighborhoods, length of marriage, ages, socio-economic status and so on (Bhat & Ullman, 2014). Unlike female participants, the male participants did not address the risk factors in terms of demographics and education/employment level. Men's interpretations in identifying risk or protective

factors about VAW was missing as the discussion never came up nor did the participants speak about any of these factors in their discussions. It is important to note that the questions about risk or protective factors were not overtly asked to the participants, but was addressed or further probed if the participants spoke about it.

Female participants such as Ektaa and Savi also underlined women's role in perpetrating violence against other women, but they also believed that women could serve a stable support system for other women affected by violence or harassment. Thirty-year old Ektaa (arrived in 2007, F-1 student visa) identified these two examples to clarify her point. For example, an example of a woman's role as perpetrator of VAW occurs in the film *Lajja*, when Vaidehi (Manisha Koirala) comes home to her parents in India after leaving her abusive and controlling husband (Raghu) in the United States. Instead of supporting and sympathizing, Vaidehi's father blames her for leaving her husband's house and her mother orders her to return to her in-law's house. In other words, Vaidehi (Manisha Koirala) is told by her own mother that she has no place and identity in her maternal house after her marriage. Vaidhehi (Manisha Koirala) becomes very distressed and leaves her parents' house. Vaidehi's lack of a support system, coupled with victim-blaming and family pressure, frequently occurs in South Asian immigrant communities in the U.S. (Abraham, 1999; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Gill, 2004; Mahapatra & Dinitto, 2013). Indian women are still likely to follow the cultural and traditional expectations of society such as taking care of the family. Chaudhuri, Morash and Yingling (2014) explains the role of the decision for women to marry in Indian culture accompanied by parental pressure and emotional blackmailing as one of the risk factors:

> Women's explanations of how they came to marry often revealed bargains they made
> to cope with patriarchal natal families and patriarchal cultural expectations. Women
> experiencing abuse more often felt pressures to conform to normative expectations
> that women should marry (p.149).

An example of women's role as the much needed support system also occurs in the film *Lajja* when one of the leading female protagonists, Ram Dulaari (Rekha) stops a father from drowning his baby girl and shouts at him and everyone else for even condoning this heinous form of violence (infanticide). Despite the demographic differences between the female protagonists in the film *Lajja*, the theme of support, bonding and sisterhood prevails throughout the story.

According to Ektaa, societal expectations, harassment and lack of support from women towards other women represents a form of oppression and triggers VAW (p. 30). Women are expected to participate in upholding male patriarchy by implementing rigid sexist cultural norms and family traditions, with the result that VAW is also structural. In addition, 28-year old Savi (arrived in 2009, H1-B visa) validated Ektaa's interpretation during the same focus group discussion by sharing her personal life experience of how she was shamed for her clothes:

> It's also [violence by] women on women. I mean how many times have we discussed—I mean I have walked down a road to my house wearing my school uniform, which ended above my knee, and I was being eve-teased [by older women] because I wasn't sticking to your fully-clad—you know, don't show anything more than your hands and your feet sort of a thing.

Savi's personal experience suggests the role of women in promoting rape myths, fostering victim-blaming and inflicting violence on other women. This also brings to attention the invisibility and suppression of women's sexuality and sexual desire in South Asian culture. Harvey (2014) argues that in India, "women's sexual agency is suppressed through social norms about sexual desire, agency, blame, and stigma. Female sexuality is dangerous. As a result, female sexual expression is something that must be controlled and limited" (p.19). The moral policing by older women against girls and younger women revolves around suppressing women's sexualities and decisions with their bodies.

Research on marital and domestic violence in India demonstrates that extended family members such as in-laws may serve as accomplices to husbands in harassing and abusing their wives (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Bhat & Ullman, 2014; Fernandez, 1997). According to the Indian Penal Code under Section 498A, physical and mental violence perpetrated by the husband and in-laws on a woman is treated as an offense and punishable under the act (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004). Although focus group participants did not address the role of mothers-in-law in inflicting VAW, they reported the absence of women bonding or supporting each other in the film *Lajja* and based on their personal observations. However, throughout the film *Lajja*, when the leading female protagonist Vaidehi (Manisha Koirala) meets Janaki (Madhuri Dixit), Maithili (Mahima Choudhary) and Ram Dulari (Rekha)—these women are portrayed as bonding with each other, and empathizing with each other's struggles and experiences with gender violence. These women in *Lajja* were depicted as concerned and fearless bystanders and did their best to support their adopted sisters. This addresses the critical role of older women (as the mother-in-law) in preventing violence against women (as the daughter-in-law), especially in cases of dowry harassment in India. For example, 20-year old Elora (female, arrived in 2012, Green card status) identifies a protective factor to prevent VAW,

> Honestly, I feel if there is a support system, if there are people out there to support. I feel that for every woman who is victimized, she feels there is nowhere to go --there is no support. Especially, like in the movie [Lajja] we see how, like, the parents are not supportive of what the girls do, but what they're doing is fighting for their own rights. So it's like they're being told that your feelings are wrong because you have no one to support your feelings. I think the most important thing for a victim of any, any kind of violence or any kind of trauma is to have someone to be there for them to back them up. And that's something that's missing.

In addition to women supporting each other, participants recommended educating young girls and women as another protective factor to prevent VAW. In India, if girls and women are educated, employed and have access to resources and support systems, then that would reduce the likelihood of

being victims of VAW. Scholars also validate participants' recommendations that women and men with higher education levels in the household are likely to reduce VAW (Dalal & Lindqvist, 2012; Kimuna et al, 2012; Jeyaseelan et al, 2007). The men in the study did not share their interpretations and provide any specific examples of risk factors for VAW, but two participants suggested education as an important factor to empower women and create positive social changes in India.

Having access to a safe, reliable and non-judgmental support system will play a significant role in providing safe spaces and resources to women who are abused, especially those who may be pregnant (in the case of Vaidehi in the film *Lajja*) or have children. While identifying risk and protective factors for VAW, an important narrative emerged among the female and male participants about help-seeking and justifying abuse. Next, I will explore this narrative in detail.

F.   Justifying Abuse and Help-seeking

In this section, I address how participants in the study may have reacted to justifying abuse and help-seeking by victims/survivors of VAW in the films. In the current study, participants reported how abused women depicted in these films perceive their own victimization, justify abuse and seek help. Justifying abuse by women and men in India has been documented not only in marital or domestic violence cases, but also in rape and sexual violence cases manifested in victim-blaming, rape myths, and feelings of guilt and shame in reporting victimization (Erez & Bhat, 2010; Nayak, Byrne, Martin & Abraham, 2003). One participant, 31-year old Sapna (female, arrived in 2004, H1-B visa) described how she saw Vaidehi (Manisha Koirala) being depicted in the film *Lajja*,

> The other thing I felt like was a strong line in the movie, is that Vaidehi always—is blaming herself. [Vaidehi says]: "I'm the one who's jinxed". So this victimized—self-victimization, or seeing yourself of worthy of only that. "Like I don't deserve better" …Is often responsible for people not coming out of those situations, or not being able to get themselves out.

Sapna disapproves how abused women like Vaidehi in *Lajja* are depicted as self-pitying and with a victim mentality. Sapna further adds that abused women in real life may find it difficult to leave their

abusive relationship, seek help, and justify their own abuse due to the messages conveyed through cinema and our Indian culture. Studies on domestic violence show that abused women and violent husbands are likely to justify wife-beating and make excuses for the violence (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Antai, 2011; Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997; Majumdar, 2004). In a study conducted by Jejeebhoy and Cook (1997), data collected from a 1993-1994 survey on women's autonomy in India was analyzed. Drawn from two districts from each of the southern state of Tamil Nadu and northern state of Uttar Pradesh, a total of 1842 rural women aged 15-39 (both Hindu and Muslim) were surveyed and interviewed. According to Jejeebhoy and Cook (1997), the most common causes provided by battered women in the study ranged from 'disobeying to their husbands' orders' to 'quarreling with the mother-in-law or failure to serve a hot meal'; and 'not meeting their husbands' expectations' (p. S10).

On the other hand, one of the dominant themes that emerged during the focus group discussions without any probes or questions was that of help-seeking behavior by abused women in domestic violence cases. For example, when the participant 31-year old Shoma (female, arrived in 2011, B-2 tourist visa) expressed her frustration of why Vaidehi (Manisha Koirala) in the film *Lajja* did not seek help from any agency from her abusive husband, Raghu (Jackie Shroff). In response, Shoma directs her questions to women like Vaidehi, who are privileged, speak English, are living abroad with access to helplines and resources,

> In my mind it's like, though it's [the movie *Lajja*] is 13 years back, still that is America. You have so many helplines today. I'm sure you [Vaidehi] had 911 then, also. Why didn't you [to Vaidehi] call in—why are you taking that oppression from that person out there? Because in America you call- they're not going to see that whether you're Raghu, or whatever you are. You know, they're going to take the same action against you. So why was she taking that oppression? She speaks English—means she got some education. Why was she taking the oppression and did not ask for some help, you know?

By addressing Vaidehi's privileged position in *Lajja*, Shoma questioned why women did not leave their abusive spouses or violent partners. In the film *Lajja*, Vaidehi (Manisha Koirala) is depicted as a young, traditional, simple and educated woman in India who agrees to an arranged marriage hoping to find happiness and companionship with her husband Raghu (Jackie Shroff), a modern wealthy, internationally traveled entrepreneur and NRI (Non-resident Indian) staying abroad. Through her interpretation, I underline the myths and stereotypes that women who are educated, employed, wealthy and immigrants abroad are less likely to be victims of gender violence and are likely to walk away from an abusive partner.

Chaudhuri, Morash and Yingling (2014) use the framework of the 'patriarchal bargain' to explain how women's choices and solutions to leave and break the pattern of abuse when they are in the U.S. is largely influenced by gendered norms and societal expectations (p.144). Vaidehi choosing to stay in the abusive marriage with Raghu may happen more often than we know in South Asian immigrant communities. Further, Chaudhuri, Morash and Yingling (2014) point out that:

> South Asian immigrant women's day-to-day strategies for dealing with abuse as forms of resistance in the context of gender arrangements in their families and cultures. Even if they lack resources and are socially isolated, women's strategies contradict stereotypic images of them as always submissive and passive. Women conform to conservative norms not because of submissiveness, but rather because of a conscious decision to improve and negotiate gender relations (p. 144).

Scholars of gender violence among immigrant communities assert that immigrant women are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence, including wife battering, domestic violence and other forms of abuse (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Krenshaw, 1991; Raj & Silverman, 2003). Chaudhuri, Morash and Yingling (2014) conducted in-depth interviews with 32 South Asian immigrant women with recent histories of spousal abuse (in the last 3 years). There were 27 women from India and 59% of them were sponsored for an immigration visa by their husbands. When asked

about their living situation, 23 (out of 32) reported living separately from their abusive husbands including 14 women living in a domestic violence shelter and 9 living on their own. Additionally, 7 women reported living with their partners who were still abusive and two lived with men who were abusive but had currently stopped abuse. Although there are limited statistics on the incidence and prevalence of gender violence perpetrated against immigrant women, particularly South Asian or Indian women in the United States, this does not mean it does not occur behind closed doors.

After Shoma [participant] questioned Vaidehi's lack of strength in seeking help from her abusive spouse Raghu from the film, Savi (28 yrs., arrived in 2009, H1-B visa) immediately jumped in to present her knowledge about women affected by domestic violence in India. Based on an article on women in urban cities in India, Savi emphasized why educated, financially independent, professionally established women may find it difficult to walk out of a violent relationship and leave an abusive spouse or partner:

> A lot of women, they hold great corporate positions, but they come home to an abusive relationship. Why do they continue to do that? So the reason given [in the article] which I thought made a lot of sense was that um, at the end of the day, although these are women that are very independent, they still grew up in the same society that we came from. And the idea is—and for whatever reason women think this way, that it's—that they see a glimmer of hope in that relationship. Maybe someday it'll change. Maybe he will change at some point. That hope…It's amazing. So from an outside perspective, right, when we have nothing going wrong in our lives, it's easy for us to say, "Why didn't she do that?" then if you're in that same position, okay. A lot of women deal with it that way. They think that maybe if I call it's going to ruin my relationship. And for some women, marriage means as much to them as their career does. So they might not want to screw that up.

Further, Savi also explained that abusive men demonstrate controlling (both physically and psychologically) behaviors, thus having a strong influence on their abused wives or partners. Savi's

rebuttal to Shoma's response reflected the sense of shame, fear of being abandoned or being battered that immigrant Indian women may experience in a new country. The cultural taboo against leaving spouses, and other complex factors that women in domestic violence relationships may encounter before seeking help. There is evidence that immigrant women in the United States experiencing intimate partner violence may face additional challenges during their transition such as adjusting to a new culture, fear for their children's safety, bringing shame on their family, financial struggles due to unemployment or visa status restrictions, language barriers and fear of being deported (Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2006; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Nonetheless, the focus group participants' interpretations remind us of the role and impact of their unique immigrant visa status in the United States in perceiving and understanding gender violence. The next section summarizes the findings of this chapter.

G.   Summary

In this chapter, I described how participants identified and defined one or multiple forms of VAW drawn from images in Bollywood cinema or their day-to-day knowledge and observations. One of the prominent themes was that participants identified and defined VAW only as physical or sexual abuse, leaving emotional or financial abuse against women out of their definitions. I argue that among one of the many reasons the 'Nirbhaya' gang-rape case in Delhi profoundly affected the nation, was the brutal nature of the sexual violence and fatal consequences of the physical battering experienced by the victim. People from all walks of life protesting publicly for women's safety can be also attributed to the horrifying details of her victimization. In such public discourses and social movements, it is easy to often overlook the non-physical or non-sexual forms of abuse against women, thus making it more dangerous for these survivors to report and seek help.

At the same time, the participants' interpretations and discussions about different aspects of VAW in India contributes to a better understanding of VAW from this Indian diaspora's perspective and experiences. The definitions, typologies, risk factors, and consequences of VAW may be the

same for all abused or assaulted women in and outside India. However, what needs to be stressed here is the protective factors for abused and victimized women, especially those living in the diaspora community. As Chaudhuri, Morash and Yingling (2014) point out the factors that have helped immigrant women in South Asian diasporas to break the cycle of abuse:

> Goals of those living apart from abusive husbands include advancing their own careers, getting job training so they were self-sufficient, and moving out of state to "find a better place to live with a decent job and a new life." Women also wanted to resolve any immigration issues they had. It could be argued that women develop a drive for independence and self-sufficiency after they are abused and leave or are thrown out by their husbands (p.155).

The presence of a strong support system, non-judgmental and healing safe space and access to resources, housing, mental and physical health services, the choice to decide are some of the critical factors that may be universal for abused or sexually assaulted women. Next, I briefly highlight the gender differences in film interpretations and summarize the overall findings followed by an outline of other relevant themes.

VII.   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In this study, the key question was: What are the gender differences in how participants interpret gender roles and relations, and most importantly, images of VAW in Bollywood cinema? This chapter first reviews the overall gender differences that emerged in the data analysis, especially in terms of the implications of gendered experiences of migrating to the diaspora. Secondly, I address the recent increase and visibility of progressive and positive Bollywood/Hindi films, with an emphasis on new directions in Bollywood cinema.

A.   <u>Gendered Experiences in Diaspora</u>

Most male participants were concerned about the lack of gender equality in households among couples (heterosexual) such as traditional roles for women in Indian families and they believed it was being shown in Bollywood films. On the other hand, two of the 18 participants found images of women in item numbers as progressive and empowering as they could be interpreted as a sign of women's sexual liberation. While most male participants focused on primarily identifying physical abuse as violence and discussing its consequences, female participants primarily discussed their perception of fear and safety as women. For example, Shoma (female, arrived in 2011, B-2 tourist visa) expressed that women fear being raped and that men know that they have the power of raping women. This supports the evidence that sexual violence is not necessarily about sex, it is about power and control (Johnson, 2016).

Being a part of the Indian diaspora and migrating to a new culture may be significant factor to consider when interpreting patricipants' understanding of VAW in Bollywood cinema and in their day-to-day lives in the U.S. For example, Kaur (2015) argues that:

Women may emerge in the new land facing issues of discrimination and alienation which will restrict the process of incorporation of the self to the host land. The new land can provide two possibilities—either opening new roles that free women from the old world's patriarchal values or create a new patriarchal structure. They not only need to adapt and change but also

need to endure the responsibility of being the preservers of traditions within the diasporic

household. The experiences of both men and women differ as the men engage themselves

with the individualism of American society while the women need to be preservers and act as

reminders to the men of their cultural background (p.86)

I cannot stress enough the critical impact of gender differences of experiences, struggles, negotiations

and cultural expectations within the diasporic household, and how these differences contribute to

perceiving and interpreting gender-based violence.

Both male and female participants agreed on two aspects of representation in terms of gender

roles and onscreen characters. First, participants believed that the presence of strong, positive,

respectful and independent male protagonists in films still has a long way to go. For example, in both

Lajja and *The Dirty Picture*, male characters were either shown as a protector/vigilante/savior or

goon/abuser/predator or incompetent decision-maker/dependent/clingy personalities. The

protector/vigilante/savior type of male characters such as Bulwa in *Lajja* may sound promising and

progressive in comparison to other characters. However, it is problematic to imply that women need

to be protected from men by men. Second, a majority of the participants also pointed out that women

are not only equally responsible for causing VAW, but also in promoting gender inequality,

misogyny, sexism and degrading other women. This is troubling because women in India should

empower each other to prevent and better respond to VAW.

It is also important to note that participants' interpretation of feminism in cinema was much

misunderstood or blurry when they were asked about any differences between women-oriented and

feminist films during focus group discussions. For instance, three out of 18 male participants had

described feminism as 'hating men', thus implying a negative connotation. This further raises a

significant question: What does feminism mean to film audiences when they watch films or educate

themselves about VAW? (Jain & Rai, 2015). On the other hand, female participants found women-

oriented films to be different than feminist films, while their interpretations of feminism included

empowering women, gender equality and reducing gender-violence. This suggests that notions of feminism were misunderstood or there may have been an overall lack of awareness and education of what the feminist movement actually means. For example, 26-year old Anil (first arrived in 2011, F-1 student) actually brought up the concept of the Bechdel test[15] and how Bollywood films, primarily *Lajja*, fail this test in terms of the interactions between protagonists and gender relations. Anil explains:

> There are women—when this movie came out, there are women looking for careers for whom—who are perfectly middle-class women looking for careers who are not defined by whether a man is in love with them or not and wants to get married to them or not or whether they have children or not or whether—all of these things. Or the fact that there are two women that you put together, and the thing that they're not conversing about is a man. I believe there's a term for this. It's called the—something with a B, and I can't remember the name. It's called the Bechdel something test. And whether it really is a feminist movie or not, it's that you have at least two scenes where they are two women who get together and talk about something apart from a man, which doesn't happen here. I'm not saying that it doesn't unless some of the—or a - or a great deal of the issues women face, but I think feminism encompasses things broader than that. Uh, so I mean, it has roles that bother me. Why is it that male and female roles are so completely oriented only around sex, whether sanctioned by marriage or not?

Anil's quote highlights his keen knowledge about gender equality being reinforced through representations of both men and women in popular culture. Hence, gender relations between men and women in Bollywood films are being limited and placed within boxes and labels. As Anil states,

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[15] To examine deeply embedded structural sexism, and stereotypical and limited representations of female actresses in Hollywood films, Alison Bechdel created The Bechdel Test in 1985. The simple test included three criteria: (1) there should be two female characters in the film; (2) these women characters engage in a dialogue; and (3) that the dialogue between these two female characters be about anything other than men (Rutowski, 2017).

Bollywood films usually show women's conversations and lives revolving around men, and that heterosexual relations between men and women are deeply embedded within the context of sexual desires or romantic interests. I further recommend future studies on how the diasporic Indian audiences may interpret feminism in both reel versus real life.

One last critical finding in terms of gender differences is how participants viewed women's safety in terms of their own regional upbringing in India. Two male participants out of 18 and three of 17 female participants strongly recommended their city of origin and upbringing, Mumbai, as the safest city in India in terms of the independence, public safety and loitering avenues and reduced VAW. According to the new social movement, 'Why Loiter?' based on the book of the same name, authors and activists speak about how women attempt to reclaim public spaces in different cities, particularly in Mumbai. Further, those participants who had lived longer in the United States were more likely to have experienced and observed gender roles and relations and interpret cultural differences between India and US. Those who were comparatively new to the US (i.e. less than a year) or younger may have been likely to have their responses and interpretations mostly based on their upbringing and experiences in India.

Further, the experience of this group of Indians migrating from the homeland to the new land, holding a visa in the U.S. within the larger diaspora community needs to be examined by scholars. I draw upon Kaur's (2015) list of questions to highlight the ones relevant to this study and needs to be addressed in the future. According to Kaur (2015),

> Do differences between the sexes produce different perspectives on what constitutes diasporic identity? Does this disparity result in the co-existence of competing diasporic identities or imaginaries that are tied to sexual and gender identity? Does the distance between the home/ land left behind and the new home offer an opportunity to break with the past and with tradition? To what extent can we speak of "gendered" diasporas? How and why do diasporas redefine themselves? In what ways does "diasporic identity" perform a gate-keeping function

that includes but also excludes? How are diasporic identities contested? How do we

"problematize" or critique diaspora? (p.70-71).

Finding answers to the above questions address the complex and evolving nature of the term

diaspora, and how this attributes to and shapes their interpretation of gender and violence against

women in Bollywood cinema. Moreover, Berry (1997) examines the process of acculturation by

asking these important questions:

> What happens to individuals, who have developed in one cultural context, when they attempt
>
> to live in a new cultural context? If culture is such a powerful shaper of behavior-- Do
>
> individuals continue to act in the new setting as they did in the previous one, do they change
>
> their behavioral repertoire to be more appropriate in the new setting, or is there some complex
>
> pattern of continuity and change in how people go about their lives in the new society? (p.6)

These questions can be used to explain how the transnational process for Indian diaspora to migrate

to the U.S. may further be shaped by acculturating and adapting to the new culture, new friends, and

new identities. In the study, representations of gender in Bollywood cinema has an important part in

contributing to the way Indian diaspora may perceive and interpret VAW. Studies of acculturation

explore the phenomena resulting from when groups of individuals belonging to different cultures and

nations encounter other cultures for the first time, leading to possible changes in their original culture

including values, lifestyle, and principles (Berry, 1997). In the current study, this group of Indian

participants who are not US citizens can be perceived as in transition due to their temporary visa

status. According to Berry (1997), different factors have been shown to affect acculturation such as

gender, higher education, cultural differences and personal expectations.

The participants' responses in this study demonstrate that individuals may be shaped by their

experiences with marginalization, privileges in terms of visa status, economic status, social support

or/ and personal experiences with VAW (both in India and the U.S.). Additionally, participants'

existing biases, prejudices or experiences with mental health issues and their occupations especially

living away from India may also impact their perceptions and interpretations towards VAW (Berry, 1997). Being a part of a diverse workforce, educational setting, or other social group all likely contribute to a heterogeneous group of friends, colleagues and extended family. But the desire to connect to family and friends from India during festivals, celebrations and other cultural events plays a pivotal role in strengthening the non-immigrant connection with India. Next, I examine the recent directions in which Bollywood cinema has headed, with an emphasis on the progressive trends in representations.

B.   New Directions in Bollywood Cinema

The literature reviewed earlier presented examples of more progressive Bollywood films that have been released in the past few years. In comparison to the Bollywood films released up until early 2000s, the newest films boast leading female protagonists. For example, *Mary Kom* (2014) features Priyanka Chopra, Mardaani with Rani Mukherjee in starring roles, *Akira* (released in 2016) features Sonakshi Sinha, and Deepika Padukone stars in *Piku* (released in 2015). Whether these Bollywood actresses get paid the same amount for the film as their male counterparts is an important question to ask.

The recent movie, *Pink* (2016) starring actresses Taapsee Pannu, Kirti Kulhari, Andrea Tariang, and veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan, is a powerful film that addresses the criminal justice system and societal response to women who are sexually assaulted. Female characters in the film experience victim-blaming, guilt and shame, and are further traumatized by their perpetrators. With the lawyer's help, the three young female characters highlight rape myths, sexist rules for women and absence of consent in sexual violence. Directed by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury, the actor Amitabh Bachchan was invited for a special screening of the film *Pink* at the United Nations headquarters in New York to address violence against women in India (Indian Express, 2016). There was also a special screening for the Rajasthan police to train law enforcement officers to be sensitive and

considerate responding to cases of VAW and increase awareness about women's rights (Deccan Chronicle, 2016).

Even the male characters in recent Bollywood films, such as Farhan Akhtar in *Dil Dhadakne Do* (2015), Amitabh Bachchan in *Piku* (2015) and *Pink* (2016), and the actor Darshan Kumar from the film *Mary Kom* (2014) provide promising and positive role models and male allies in preventing and ending VAW. On one side, I see Bollywood Hindi cinema getting more progressive as it produces more and more films with leading female protagonists and/or not having item numbers in the films. While these more progressive films may or may not become hits in the box office collections, they are applauded for the stories and performances. On the other hand, I also see Bollywood films with leading male protagonists as action heroes, vigilantes, etc. beating the box-office collections in India, thus indicating the impact on the population. The release of the film *Dangal* (2016) with critically-acclaimed actor Aamir Khan is a true biographical account of a veteran male wrestler in an Indian village, who trains his daughters to be wresting champions. This film and *Pink,* although well-intentioned and addresses an important topic, needs to be seen from the lens of intersectional feminist theory. In *Pink,* three urban young women fight against their sexual assault perpetrators in the court while dealing with their trauma and victim-blaming. While in *Dangal,* the young daughters compromise their childhood and are trained by their father to be the national and international wresting champions- an unfulfilled dream that he wants them to pursue. Even though *Dangal* is a true story, the horrifying experiences that the protagonists face in the film *Pink* represent the voices of many Indian women who have been sexually harassed, molested, groped and assaulted. *Pink* focuses on the middle class urban working women in a large metropolitan city of New Delhi, India, while *Dangal* represents the lives of young girls and women living in a patriarchal rural village practicing child marriage and gender discrimination. In short, critical factors such as gender, age, social class, economic status, marital or relationship status, geographical residence, education and

employment intersect and collide with the kinds of struggles and barriers faced by the young girls and women in these two and other similar films (See Joshi, 2016).

Both these and other recent Bollywood films have prompted important conversations and dialogues about the powerful message of empowering girls and keeping women safer in India. Unfortunately, I argue that these courageous and potentially feminist messages about women's struggles and concerns may have been only legitimized and accepted by audiences, when they are reinforced and validated by a dominant male agency. In *Pink,* the problem of sexual violence experienced by women are legitimized by the girls' lawyer played by Amitabh Bachchan, and in *Dangal,* the father/ wrestler (Aamir Khan) legitimizes the narrative of empowering girls through sports. In order for Bollywood films to deliver positive messages about preventing violence or empowering girls to wide audiences, I suggest that we may have to redefine what feminism means to different parts of the Indian society, and find ways to discuss the problematic issue of using male agency to validate women's issues with audiences. Nevertheless, the success of empowering films like *Pink* and *Dangal* may be the first of many milestones to create awareness among the film audiences about social issues, and efforts to challenge mainstream commercial narratives by these film-makers cannot be dismissed.

The participants in the study represents a unique group of Indian diaspora, who have grown up in India and are currently living in the U.S. on a temporary or permanent residency visa. As mentioned before, Indian film-makers plan and devise their film content, themes and promotional events based on their target audiences, thus fostering a classist and capitalist film industry. The recent release of a wide variety of Bollywood films attracting different kinds of film audiences makes it difficult to pursue audience reception studies and research. For example, factors such as who is being casted in the film, songs and dance sequences, the music and songs, and the story/ plot (Dudrah, 2002; Mohammad, 2007). The last chapter highlights take-away points followed by implications and recommendations for future work.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Larger themes in the current study generally reflected existing literature on representations of gender, especially women in cinema. However, there were interesting and important gender differences and similarities in how participants interpreted VAW in the two Bollywood films selected as part of the study. The purpose of this study was to examine gender differences in understanding representations of VAW and to explore how gender and demographic differences affected participants' interpretations of gender roles, gender relations, and VAW. Most importantly, this study investigated whether participants' real life knowledge of VAW was reflected in their film interpretations and vice-versa. Although all the 35 participants in the study acknowledged that VAW is wrong, it is important to note how few of them were aware of certain risk factors for VAW, followed by help-seeking behavior and perceptions of risk and violence.

A.   Implications and Recommendations

Although the current study has a small participant sample and is an exploratory qualitative study, it has profound implications. First, the findings of this study are unique in terms of their theoretical and practical contributions to the existing literature in the fields of criminology, gender and women studies, and film and cultural studies. Based in feminist theories and sociological approach to 'read' films, the interpretations, context and experiences of this exclusive participant sample contributes to the existing literature on the complex and cultural linkage between Indian diaspora and Bollywood cinema. Second, future scholars will be able to utilize and adapt focus group methodology for similar research based on lessons learned from this study. Drawn from the study results and my experiences as the researcher, qualitative researchers, especially graduate students can be more aware and prepared about the tedious, nuanced and time-consuming nature of focus groups (particularly gender-specific focus groups among the Indian diaspora).

Third, the participants' interpretations and understanding of gender and gender based violence from this study can be used to develop community-based primary prevention programs through

popular education and outreach, and media organizing about ending gender-violence. With Bollywood cinema being an indispensable part of Indian households, and having powerful effects on influencing film audiences, it is critical that we take advantage of using images and representations in cinema to address risk factors for VAW such as cultural and social gender norms leading to sexual and domestic violence. As mentioned before, the objective of the study is not to discourage the audiences to watch Bollywood films or unrealistically expect film-makers to remove sexist, glorified abuse and misogyny from their films, or even create a sense of social consciousness about the issues.

It is important that we utilize the findings of this study to create and develop a variety of culturally competent or responsive primary prevention programs against VAW (Simbandumwe et al., 2008). For example, methods can include ethnocultural media avenues, community film study workshops such as 'Where is the consent in Bollywood cinema?' catered to school and college students, popular education and community-based education at schools and university-based programs, distributing educational materials at high-traffic locations using Bollywood celebrities to create awareness about victims' rights, access to available resources and support systems (Simbandumwe et al., 2008). Most importantly, it could be effective to use representations in Bollywood cinema as examples to engage and connect with teenagers and youth to teach them about healthy sexuality and healthy gender relationships, the importance of consent and respect, and conflict resolution.

Developing comprehensive, inclusive, accessible and culturally responsive programs could be relevant and important in India and among the diaspora community. Simbandumwe and colleagues (2008) strongly recommend the use of culturally relevant approaches to addressing domestic violence:

There is an emerging literature that emphasizes the importance of developing culturally competent or culturally responsive programmatic responses to domestic violence. Cultural competence requires the acquisition of skills, attitudes and values that will enable

individuals and institutions to respond effectively to the beliefs, interpersonal styles,

attitudes, language, and behavior of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Domestic

violence prevention programs need to be culturally responsive to enhance their effectiveness

in reaching diverse ethnocultural communities (p.902).

Hence, the study of images about VAW in Bollywood cinema can contribute to the creation of

educational trainings for a culturally diverse audience to address the presence of media oppression in

Bollywood films and how that contributes to a hostile environment for women. For immigrant

diaspora communities to receive the most benefit from gender-violence prevention and response

programs, it is essential that we address the sociocultural, historical, and political factors that trigger

VAW, and incorporate accessible and culturally appropriate curriculum using popular culture. As

mentioned before, the goal of popular education is to create a sense of self-awareness and

consciousness while enjoying cinema and other forms of popular culture. Efforts can be made to help

audiences become more aware of the kinds of material and content they view. Using the findings of

the study, educational and training curriculums can include important topics such as perceptions of

gender equality, notions of masculinity and femininity, and how audiences inform or educate

themselves about current social problems such as VAW.

Last but most importantly, this study is the first to examine this group of Indian diaspora in

the United States (those who are not citizens) and explore their interpretations of VAW depicted in

Bollywood cinema. It would be wrong to overlook the impact of the participants' background and

demographics in understanding the social construction of gender and VAW in Bollywood films. The

women's debates and discussions in the study revolved around how Bollywood cinema represented

women in the binary divide of modern/traditional Indian women, thus providing us a glimpse of their

struggles or perceptions about their bicultural identities. According to Kaur (2015),

The pressures and attempts at resistance have brought about considerable changes in the

identity of South Asian diasporic women's lives. The position of women within the

community was repeatedly distorted by conventional images and ethnocentric opinions about women. The new diasporic culture, in comparison with the western values of independence and individuality, was seen as denying women a new identity. As a result, the creative output of diasporic writers, especially women, can be seen as an effort to document their struggle to re-define their identity and shifting roles in the new land in relation to the old (p.74).

Kaur (2015)'s analysis accurately captures the experiences of a large majority of the female participants in my study, especially in terms of being a part of the Indian diaspora. Further, through their interpretations, agreements and discussions about images in Bollywood cinema, the women participants in the study provided important perspectives about how representations of women in popular culture may shape the way women are treated by men and the society and vice-versa. In this study, participants interpreting and reacting to onscreen images in Bollywood films and off-screen observations of gender roles and relations sets the stage for critical conversations addressing larger frameworks of defining, identifying and interpreting VAW in India. In short, gender was used to structure participants' discussions. Tichenor (2005) explains that if gender is used as a structure, works together on three levels: (a) the institutional, (b) the interactional, and (c) the individual. According to Tichenor (2005),

> Gender shapes the ongoing practices of social life at each of these levels. At the institutional level, it exists as the distribution of material advantage and influences organizational practices and ideology. At the interactional level, gender makes men and women behave in ways that are appropriate in their specific social context and at the individual level, gender provides a framework for the construction of meaningful identities for men and women (p.9-10, in Jain, 2014).

Social constructions of gender through gender roles and relations in Bollywood cinema can explain why institutional and systemic practices and beliefs condoning or condemning gender equality are developed and reinforced. The findings of this study also contribute to further understanding the

distinctive cultural perspectives by Indian diasporic communities towards gender and VAW. Studying gender differences among participants' interpretations and reactions to images of VAW in Bollywood films resulted in critiquing gender at the individual level. This project also provides additional groundwork for researchers to investigate gender differences in sharing the diasporic experiences and the construction of meaningful identities through Bollywood cinema (Tichenor, 2005). I hope scholars can further explore this subgroup of the population, i.e. non-U.S. citizens and further study their attitudes and beliefs towards VAW in the diaspora communities. These implications and recommendations will be significant in terms of preventing and responding to VAW among Indian immigrant communities. I also recommend examining perceptions, attitudes and interpretations of VAW by not only the Indian diaspora but South Asian audiences, within a larger community. This chapter concludes by addressing some limitations of this study.

B.   Limitations of the Study

The section above highlights the contributions and implications of the study findings. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. First, this study does not represent the voices of Indian film audiences as a population due to the limited number of participants in the focus groups and the fact that the study was conducted in the US, not in India. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot be held to be representative of public perceptions and interpretations of film viewers from India or even the Indian diaspora (Farrar, 2012). Despite its small sample, however, this small sample size allowed for an in-depth qualitative study.

Second, even though focus groups allowed respondents to converse and interact with each about their media consumption, perceptions, and beliefs, it was difficult to determine the causal factors leading to such behavior or interactions among the participants (Gunter, 2000). Further, Morgan (1996) questions if focus group settings are indeed "natural events" because they appear to be controlled by the moderator in a laboratory setting. In focus group methods, participants are guided to interact and respond based on a predefined set of questions, and engage in conversations

with the moderator whose personality may affect the group responses. In addition, the moderator's influence in leading participants' responses, using a standardized set of questions, and reporting of the data collection and data analysis may also cause problems with its reliability (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). The analysis from the data in this study is likely to be subjective and is, therefore, used for exploratory research.

Third, focus group interviews lack the opportunity to follow up with participants after the study to probe further regarding unclear or ambiguous responses to focus group questions. Since my IRB consent form did not include a question about whether participants consented to be contacted later for future interview and other follow-up study, I was unable to contact participants about certain specific responses. Thus, as the researcher, I interpreted those ambiguous responses to the questions. In other words, the subjective nature of responses by participants and most importantly, the qualitative nature of the study, is nuanced and complex in terms of analyzing and interpreting the data. Fourth, focus group data was collected from September 2013 to January 2014, thus, a certain amount of time has passed from then until now. It is possible that these participants' film interpretations and attitudes towards VAW may have changed. Secondly, participants' interpretations may have also changed if different and recently released Bollywood films were screened for the study, especially the newer and more progressive Bollywood films (e.g., *Pink*, 2006).

To summarize, even though I was well-informed and aware of the nature of planning, recruiting participants, and conducting focus group discussions, the phase of data collection and transcription was a more cumbersome process than expected. Nonetheless, this study marks an important milestone in contributing to examining how images of VAW in cinema are likely to affect audience interpretations, therefore has significant implications for Indian and South Asian diaspora communities.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: **IRB-Approved Flyers for Recruiting Participants (Version 3, 08/13/13)**

WOMEN IN BOLLYWOOD STUDY

Seeking participants for a study to understand film audience perceptions and interpretations of women in Bollywood Hindi films

➢ Are you between ages 18 and 65? ✔

➢ Are you of Indian origin, born and raised in India? ✔

➢ Do you hold a valid non-immigrant or immigrant visa status in the United States? ✔

➢ Do you understand and enjoy watching Bollywood Hindi films? ✔

➢ Are you fluent in understanding Hindi and speaking English? ✔

If you have answered YES to all the questions above, you may be eligible to participate in a paid research study approved by the IRB at UIC. The study includes watching a Bollywood Hindi film, completing a questionnaire and participating in a focus group discussion with other participants. The film screening and focus group discussions will be audio recorded and videotaped for data analysis.

The study will take about 5 ½ hours. Participants will be paid for their participation.

If you are interested in participating or learning more about this research, call (312) 380-9044 or email womeninbollywood@gmail.com

This research is approved by the UIC Institutional Review Board (Protocol # 2013-0621).

STARTS APPROVAL EXPIRES

AUG 28 2013 TO JUL 28 2014

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Women in Bollywood Study
(312) 380- 9044
womeninbollywood@gmail.com

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APPENDIX B: **IRB-approved Recruitment Phone Script (version 2, 07/18/13)**

<u>ELIGIBILITY SCREENING PHONE SCRIPT:</u>

<u>FOR FIRST PARTICIPANT CONTACT VIA PHONE</u>

Participants who contact me in response to advertisements and fliers will express their interest in the study by phone contact. **When participants call or are called, I will use the following script for "response to phone contact."**

<u>**Response to Phone Contact**</u>
"Thank you so much for your interest in the Women in Bollywood study. I'd like to start out by asking a couple of questions to see if you are eligible for this study.
What is your age?
Which country were you born and raised in? Are you of Indian origin?
Do you hold a valid visa in the United States? If so, what visa?
Which year did you arrive in the United States? Or how long have you been here in the United States on this visa status?
How often do you watch Bollywood Hindi films? Would you say "Never", "Rarely", "Occasionally", and "Regularly?"
What is your proficiency in speaking and understanding Hindi? Would you say "Don't know", "Basic", "Fluent", and "Intermediate?"
What is your proficiency in speaking and understanding English? Would you say "Don't know", "Basic", "Fluent", and "Intermediate?"
How comfortable do you feel interacting and discussing your opinions with strangers in a group setting? Would you say "Not at all comfortable", "Slightly comfortable", "Very Comfortable?"

> **If the caller does not answer yes to all the questions, say:** "Okay, unfortunately we are only allowed to recruit <u>those who meet these</u> criteria for the study. I'm sorry, but thank you very much for your interest."

If the caller is eligible, then continue with the remaining script

The study staff will say the following verbatim to callers:
"You are eligible to participate in this study. Please note that your eligibility in this study does not confirm your participation. We will follow up with you only if you have been selected as a participant and to confirm the details of the study. However, if you have not been confirmed as a participant, you will be kept in our waiting list database and we will contact you incase any other participant withdraws. The list of participants who are on the waiting list will be deleted after all the focus groups are conducted and the qualitative data has been obtained.

This study is about how film audiences perceive and interpret representations of women in Bollywood Hindi films. Participation involves watching a Bollywood Hindi feature-film, completing a brief questionnaire and participating in a focus group interview. This study will take you approximately 6 to 7 hours to complete and will be conducted at the UIC campus. We hope to learn about how film audiences make meaning of and interpret portrayals of women depicted in popular culture in India. You might not feel comfortable answering some of the questions during the focus group discussion, but you don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you may discontinue your participation at any time. The film screening and focus group discussions will be

audio and video recorded and this data will be analyzed. However, no data with any identifying information such as your names and contact information will be published or presented. The video taped data of the focus groups will be deleted after a thorough transcription and analysis of the focus group data has been completed. If you choose to complete the questionnaire and participate in the focus group discussion, you will receive a gift card worth $10 and your identity and responses will be kept completely confidential. Light refreshments will also be served during the film screening. Would you still be interested in participating?"

If the caller says "No":
"Thank you for calling and if you change your mind and decide you would like to participate, please feel free to call us back."

If the caller says, "Yes" or indicates that he/she would like more information before deciding:
***** "First, could you tell me your full name so I can make sure we recorded it correctly?"

Verify name and spelling. Then:
May we have your mailing address?

After recording address, request additional information:
"We might also contact you just to confirm your participation and remind you a day before the focus group discussion is being scheduled.
→What is the best phone number to reach you at?
→Could we leave a voice message for you?
→Do you have an email address you'd like to share with us?
→Is there any other way we might be able to get in touch with you (e.g., other phone numbers, pager numbers, email addresses, etc.)?
→We may conduct the movie screening and focus group interview on weekends from 10am-4pm.
→How did you hear about the study?"
We are almost done with our screening and I appreciate your patience:
Which were the two most recent Bollywood films you watched either at home or the theater? When?
Do you prefer to watch have a specific genre of Bollywood films?

After recording information:
"Thank you very much for your interest. We have collected all your information and will let you know if you have been recruited for the study. If you are selected, you will be contacted via phone and email with the details of the study such as date, time and venue in the next few days. Please contact me at the earliest if you have any schedule conflicts with the date and time of the study. Do you have any questions about the study at this time?"

Respond to any questions. Then:
"If you have any (other) questions at any time about the study or once you receive our confirmation call and email, please feel free to call me back at (312) 380-9044 and I will be happy to answer them. Thank you again for your participation. Goodbye."

APPENDIX C: IRB-approved Recruitment Email Script (version 2, 07/18/13)

<u>EMAIL SCRIPT TO PARTICIPANTS FOR FIRST CONTACT</u>

Participants who contact me in response to advertisements and fliers will express their interest in the study by email.

<u>Response to Email Contact</u>

I will respond to emails inquiring about the study as follows:

"Thank you for contacting us about the Women in Bollywood Study. This study is about how film audiences perceive and interpret representations of women in Bollywood Hindi films. Participation involves watching a Bollywood Hindi feature-film, completing a brief questionnaire and participating in a focus group interview. This study will take you approximately 5 ½ hours to complete and will be conducted at the UIC campus. The film screening will be audio recorded and video taped for data transcription and analysis. We hope to learn about how film audiences make meaning of and interpret portrayals of women depicted in popular culture in India. You might not feel comfortable answering some of the questions during the focus group discussion, but you don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you may discontinue your participation at any time. The film screening and focus group discussion will be audio recorded and videotaped only for data analysis and all the data will be encrypted securely kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. You will receive a $10 gift card for your participation. Your identity and responses will be kept completely confidential. If you are interested, please call us at **(312) 380-9044** or respond to this message with your phone number and the best time to reach you. Thank you for your interest in this study!"

APPENDIX D: **IRB-approved Participant Confirmation Follow-Up Phone Script (version 1, 07/18/13)**

After I send the confirmation participation email to the participants, I will use the following script to follow up with the participants via phone.

Phone script

"Hi, this is Meghna calling from the Women in Bollywood study that will be conducted at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I am emailing to inform you that you have been selected as a participant for this study.

To refresh your memory, this study is about how film audiences perceive and interpret representations of women in Bollywood Hindi films. Participation involves watching a Bollywood Hindi feature-film, completing a brief questionnaire and participating in a focus group interview. This study will take you approximately 5 ½ hours to complete and will be conducted at the UIC campus. We hope to learn about how film audiences make meaning of and interpret portrayals of women depicted in popular culture in India. You might not feel comfortable answering some of the questions during the focus group discussion, but you don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you may discontinue your participation at any time. The film screening and focus group discussions will be audio and video recorded and this data will be analyzed. However, no data with any identifying information such as your names and contact information will be published or presented. The videotaped data of the focus groups will be deleted after a thorough transcription and analysis of the focus group data has been completed. If you choose to complete the questionnaire and participate in the focus group discussion, you will receive a gift card worth $10 and your identity and responses will be kept completely confidential. Light refreshments will also be served during the film screening.

I am calling to follow up and make sure you are still interested in participating and to provide you with the details over the phone. Are you still on board to participate in this study?"

If YES, continue with the following script:

Great…I have emailed you the details of your study (date/venue/time) at **(participant's email address).** Would you like to take down the details over the phone too? Do you have a pen and paper

handy to take down the details? You have been invited to a film screening and focus group discussion and here are the details:

DATE:

TIME:

VENUE:

** Parking information/ CTA information

--- We totally understand there could be last minute emergencies and unexpected schedule changes. However, we would strongly encourage you to please call me in advance of any changes, delays or cancellations on your part.

If you have any (other) questions at any time about the study or after you receive this email, please feel free to call me back at (312) 380-9044 and I will be happy to answer them. Thank you again for your participation"

If participant says NOT INTERESTED, continue with the following script:

"Thank you for your interest and if you change your mind and decide you would like to participate, please feel free to call us back to see if we are recruiting more participants"

APPENDIX E: IRB-approved Participant Confirmation Email Script (version 1, 07/18/13)

Participants who are eligible for the study and will be recruited to participate for the film screening and focus group interviews**, I will use the following script for "confirming participation"**

<u>Confirmation via Email</u>

"Thank you so much for your interest in the Women in Bollywood study. I am emailing to inform you that you have been selected as a participant for this study.

To refresh your memory, this study is about how film audiences perceive and interpret representations of women in Bollywood Hindi films. Participation involves watching a Bollywood Hindi feature-film, completing a brief questionnaire and participating in a focus group interview. This study will take you approximately 5 ½ hours to complete and will be conducted at the UIC campus. We hope to learn about how film audiences make meaning of and interpret portrayals of women depicted in popular culture in India. You might not feel comfortable answering some of the questions during the focus group discussion, but you don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and you may discontinue your participation at any time. The film screening and focus group discussions will be audio and video recorded and this data will be analyzed. However, no data with any identifying information such as your names and contact information will be published or presented. The videotaped data of the focus groups will be deleted after a thorough transcription and analysis of the focus group data has been completed. If you choose to complete the questionnaire and participate in the focus group discussion, you will receive a gift card worth $10 and your identity and responses will be kept completely confidential. Light refreshments will also be served during the film screening.

You have been invited to a film screening and focus group discussion and here are the details:
DATE:
TIME:
VENUE: including ** Parking information/ CTA information
--- It is important that you confirm your participation as soon as possible by replying to this email. I will also contact you via phone to follow up about this email if I have not heard back from you.

--- IF you have changed your mind regarding your participation, please contact me as soon as possible.

--- We totally understand there could be last minute emergencies and unexpected schedule changes. However, we would strongly encourage you to please call me in advance of any changes, delays or cancellations on your part.

If you have any (other) questions at any time about the study or after you receive this email, please feel free to call me back at (312) 380-9044 and I will be happy to answer them. Thank you again for your participati

APPENDIX F: **IRB-approved Focus Group Interview Guide (Version 3, 09/05/13)**

<div style="border:1px solid">

WOMEN IN BOLLYWOOD STUDY

Focus Group Interview Guide

Let me introduce myself, I am Meghna Bhat and I am a doctoral student in the Criminology, Law and Justice program at UIC. Thank you so much for being here on a weekend and for your interest in this study. You are here today because you expressed interest and are eligible to participate in this study. The goal of this study is to examine how film audiences make sense of women and violence against them in Bollywood films. Each of you have been handed a brown envelope that contains two copies of the informed consent form, a brief questionnaire and a list of community resources for you. **DO NOT open the envelope until our instructions.** Please do not exchange these forms and envelopes with any other participant.

(Script Varies depending on if the group is comprising of male or female participants)
I (name) will be the facilitator for the focus group today. Assisting me today would be my co-facilitator _____. We are here to answer any questions you may have.

I will first explain the study followed by any questions you may have. The purpose of this research is to understand how Indians interpret and make sense of the representations of women in Bollywood Hindi films made in India. This information will eventually lead to a better understanding of how film audiences from India perceive, define and come to understand violence against women. Your participation will take at least 5 ½ hours **to 6 hours** to complete. Today, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire (about your background, demographics, film viewing habits and a film activity), watch a Bollywood Hindi film, and participate in a focus group.

You may have watched this Bollywood Hindi film before or you may be watching it for the first time. Either way, we request you to stay in the room and watch this film to the best of your ability. The film screening and focus group sessions will be audio recorded and videotaped solely for data transcription and data analysis. However, none of your identifying information or contact information will be used for publication or presentation. Your identity and responses will be kept completely confidential. If you watch the Bollywood Hindi film, complete the questionnaire and participate in the focus group interview, you will receive a $10 TARGET gift card at the end of the study.

After the film is shown, we will have a group discussion, during which you will be asked a few general questions about watching Bollywood films and then questions about the film. There will be **no** questions asked about your personal life and experiences or of those of people you know. If you do not feel comfortable answering questions in the group and prefer writing your responses, kindly do so on the last page of the brief questionnaire and notepad given to you.

In the brown envelope, **you will first find a list of community resources.** During the film, you may be exposed to scenes that may be graphic or violent or may make you uncomfortable. In that case, if you wish to seek help, we are offering you a list of South Asian community resources in Chicago for your reference. We also have a counselor on board so if you are distressed and wish to

</div>

have a safe space or quiet room to informally talk to the counselor, we can make those arrangements after the film or the focus group has been completed.

Please **do not** open the questionnaire till I request you to. Now, let us first refer to the 2 copies of the Informed Consent form.

Please take a few minutes to read the informed consent form enclosed in the brown manila envelope. The informed consent will provide you with details of the study, of what we will be achieving today, of what we would be expecting from your participation and other details (Briefly cover the section titles). Do you have any questions or concerns?

If NO questions, then we request you to please sign both the copies of the informed consent form, followed by my signature. By signing these forms, you have read the details of the study carefully, have had the study explained by the facilitator and have agreed to participate in the study.

(Get all informed consent forms signed by participant and me, hand one copy to the participant and keep one for our records)

Before we start watching the film, please take about 10 minutes to complete the Section I and II ONLY of the brief questionnaire. We request you to **not turn** to Section III until we start watching the Bollywood film and instructions are being given. This brief questionnaire asks you questions on your demographic background, your status in the USA and Section III includes a film watching activity. Once again, I will provide you further instructions on Section III.

Please feel free to not answer any questions that make you uncomfortable and you may withdraw anytime from this group discussion. We will have a ten-minute break in between and after the film before we start the group discussion. Although we prefer you to stay in the room during the full movie screening, we understand if you wish to excuse yourself for a quick restroom break during the film or focus group. We strongly recommend you to stay on the 4th floor during the 5 minute breaks to avoid getting lost in this building. You will also be served lunch (pizza/ soda/ popcorn) while watching the film, so please feel free to grab a bite after I finish explaining the study and while you are finishing the brief questionnaire.

(AFTER 10 MINUTES OF GETTING LUNCH AND FILLING SECTION I & II)

Let us now take a **quick 5-minute break before we start the film and focus group discussion**. We request you to please switch off your cell phones or keep them on mute and refrain from texting or using your cell phone during the film. I also would like you to avoid having any side bar conversations or discussions when we are watching the film. We will have a quick 5-minute intermission during which please feel free to stretch or use the restroom and return to this room as soon as possible.

Kindly go to Section III of the brief questionnaire. This is a film activity so feel free to scribble down any notes or responses to the film activity in the columns or the last page of the questionnaire. For this activity, we would like you to identify one or more film characters you see and write the purpose of the character or what that character represents. There is an example given. You can also write down any themes, scenes or story that made an impact on you. Any

questions? Let's begin watching the Bollywood film.

(AFTER WATCHING THE BOLLYWOOD FILM)

Please return the completed questionnaires (with Section I, II and III) after the focus group has been completed.

- Before we start the group discussion, I am going to explain some ground rules, which we request you to follow.
- Once again, we request you to switch off your cell phones or keep them on mute and avoid using the cell phones during the group discussion.
- Please remember there is no right or wrong answer so we would appreciate your honest responses. Some of us may agree or disagree to a point, so feel free to express it respectfully.
- Everything you say here will be confidential. We request everyone to not identify any person you may know here and share his or her experience with us. We also strongly recommend that whatever is being discussed and all participants' experiences be kept within this room and not shared outside.
- If you would like to answer the question or speak, you can raise your hand and we can take turns talking in the group. **We are audio recording so we would like one person at a time.**
- As much as we would love to continue this discussion longer than our estimated time, we may have to request you to wrap up your discussion and allow others to talk. Please do not take any offense or feel upset at not being able to talk longer.
- We also would appreciate it if you could avoid having side bar conversations or murmuring when someone's speaking in the focus group.
- Feel free to take a quick restroom break during the session if needed. However, we do request to refrain from leaving the room as much as possible.
- This focus group should not last longer than 90 minutes.
- You will be given a blank sheet of paper where you can write down any responses to the questions if you are not comfortable discussing them in the group. Feel free to write any questions or comments.
- After we conclude the focus group discussion, please stay back to take your compensation from us.

(AFTER THE FOCUS GROUP IS COMPLETED)

Once again, thank you so much for your time and participation. Your feedback has been very helpful and valuable. An important reminder: Please make sure you have the list of community resources and one copy of the signed consent form. Return the other copy of the signed consent form and the brief questionnaire (with Sections I, II and III) to the co-facilitator. After we hand over the $10 visa gift card to you, we would request you to sign the voucher form to acknowledge you have been paid. Thank you once again and have a great weekend!

Source: Akers (2006) and http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/cepublications/wrep0128/wrep0128.html

APPENDIX G: **IRB-approved Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form (version 4, 10/21/13)**

<div style="border:1px solid black; text-align:center; padding:20px;">Leave box empty - For office use only</div>

<div style="text-align:center;">

University of Illinois at Chicago
Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research
"Women in Bollywood Study"

</div>

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title:	Meghna R Bhat, Doctoral Candidate
Department and Institution:	Criminology, Law and Justice,
	University of Illinois at Chicago
Address and Contact Information:	
	Behavioral Sciences Building,
	1007 W Harrison Street, MC 141,
	Chicago IL 60607

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about the representation of women depicted in Bollywood Hindi films in India. You have been asked to participate in the research because you were born and raised in India, hold a nonimmigrant or immigrant visa status in the United States, are currently residing in Chicagoland, Illinois, and understand and speak Hindi and English. You have expressed interest in watching Bollywood films and are eligible to participate in this study.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Chicago. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship**. Approximately 40 subjects may be involved in this research at UIC. The maximum number of participants we are requesting to be enrolled is 50.

What is the purpose of this research?
The purpose of this research is to understand how film audiences from India interpret and make meaning of the representations of women in Bollywood Hindi films made in India. This information

will eventually lead to a better understanding of how film audiences from India perceive, define and come to understand violence against women.

What am I being asked to do?

Participating in this study will first involve watching a Bollywood film and completing a brief questionnaire. In addition, after watching the film, you will be asked to answer and discuss some general and specific questions about the film with other participants in a group. There will be at least 6 to 10 gender-specific focus group discussions and each group will have at least 4 to 8 participants. Because we have to show the film to the participants, you will have to come to the UIC campus to participate in this research. We will first explain the research study in detail, answer any questions you may have and give you an informed consent form to read and sign. You will also be given a brief questionnaire asking about your background, visa status and includes a film activity to be completed by you before the film begins and during the film. Most importantly, there is no right or wrong way of answering any questions. The whole study should last approximately 5 ½ hours. Light refreshments will be served during the film screening. The film screening and focus group discussions will be audio recorded and videotaped for data analysis.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

We believe that the risks associated with this research are minimal. The questions asked in the brief questionnaire and focus group discussions will not be personal or sensitive in nature. The purpose of having the demographic and visa status questions in the questionnaire is to study the demographic differences in your interpretations of the film. You will be asked about your beliefs, opinions and interpretations about how violence against women is portrayed in popular culture. It is also possible that the Bollywood film shown may depict a scene of nudity, profanity and/ or violence. However, if you feel uncomfortable or upset, you need not watch that scene or can step out of the room. You also do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable answering.

The film screening and focus group sessions will be audio taped and video recorded mainly to document responses, interaction and the discussion by the participants. It is also to document any non-verbal responses in the focus group. The videotaping would also help to identify the participants' background and demographics incase we have difficulty identifying the voices of participants from the audio recordings.

Although we will do our best to keep your responses completely confidential (see below section on privacy), a risk of this research is a loss of privacy (such as others knowing about your participation) or confidentiality (such as revealing information about you to others).

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but we [researchers] may learn new things that will help others. Your participation will contribute to important knowledge about how film audiences interpret and make sense of the portrayal of violence against women in popular culture. In addition, we may also learn how film audiences come to learn about violence against women. Although this study is not designed to benefit you directly, we have included a referral sheet of relevant South Asian community resources that might be helpful to you.

What other options are there?

You have the option to not participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The people who will know that you are a research subject are members of the research team and other participants on the focus group. Otherwise information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law. Study information, which identifies you may be looked at and/or copied for checking up on the research by the University of Illinois at Chicago Office for the Protection of Research Subjects or the State of Illinois Auditors.

When the results of the research are published, or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

To ensure confidentiality, you have been assigned the initials from your full name (for example, for Jane Doe: JD) and a unique ID number (for example- 123) so that your name will never be directly associated with your brief questionnaire. The only way that your questionnaire responses can be identified is through the confidential ID number and initials that we have assigned to you. Your focus group discussion and questionnaire responses will be kept separately from your personal identifying information, and only the research team and I will have access to your personal identifying information. Your questionnaire responses will be entered into a statistical program but no names or contact information will be entered along with your responses. The actual survey will be destroyed immediately after the data have been entered**,** within approximately one year. The questionnaire responses, focus group transcriptions and personal information will be encrypted and kept separately in a locked office, either in separate storage units or in different computer data files. Only the principal investigator of this study and trained research assistants will have access to your questionnaires and personal information. The focus group discussions will be audio and video taped to ensure accurate and reliable data analysis. Once the focus group data is thoroughly transcribed, the video recordings will be destroyed. The audio recordings will be kept securely locked in the cabinet until the data analysis is completed, after which they will be destroyed.

Although we ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the discussion outside the focus group; please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally disclose your identity as a participant and/ or what you said. Your private identifiable information will be kept confidential by encrypting the files with a password on a portable device and the device will be securely kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. Your private identifiable data will be deleted as soon as possible after it has been collected and analyzed.

What if I become upset or uncomfortable as a result of my participation?

In the event that you become upset or feel uncomfortable as a result of your participation, feel free to contact Meghna Bhat at (312) 380-9044 to discuss your concerns and/or if you would like a referral for counseling. We can provide you a referral sheet of relevant community resources, which might be helpful to you if you wish to discuss issues raised in this study. We will also be having a counselor during the study if you feel distressed, we can arrange to have a safe space or quiet room to talk to the counselor after the film or the focus group has been completed.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

Although you will not be compensated for attending the film screening and completing the questionnaire, you will receive a $10 gift card for completing this study after the focus group discussion.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions that you don't want to answer and still remain in the study, or you may withdraw entirely by discarding the questionnaire and leaving the focus group venue. You have the right to leave the study at any time without penalty. In the event you withdraw anytime before the focus group discussion, you will not be compensated as described above.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Please contact the researchers, Meghna Bhat at (312) 380-9044 or her dissertation committee chair, Dr. Sarah Ullman at (312) 996-6679 or **mbhat2@uic.edu**:
- if you have any questions about this study or your part in it,
- if you become upset as a result of your participation, or
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

What if I am a UIC student or a UIC employee?

You may choose not to participate or to stop your participation in this research at any time. This will not affect your class standing or grades at UIC. The investigator may also end your participation in the research. If this happens, your class standing or grades or employment will not be affected. Your participation in this research is in no way a part of your university duties, and your refusal to participate will not in any way affect your student status with the university, or the benefits, privileges, or opportunities associated with your employment at UIC. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you participate in this research.

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Signature of Subject

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____
Printed Name

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date (must be same as subject's)

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX H: **IRB-approved Participant Brief Demographic Questionnaire (version 3, 09/05/13)**

ID _____

WOMEN IN BOLLYWOOD STUDY

BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE

Please fill out this brief questionnaire to the best of your ability and return your completed questionnaire to the facilitators. There is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions. There are THREE SECTIONS in this questionnaire.

KINDLY FILL OUT SECTIONS I AND II BEFORE WE START WATCHING THE FILM.

YOU WILL BE REQUESTED TO FILL SECTION III DURING THE FILM.

FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE PROVIDED.

DO **NOT** OPEN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE UNTIL FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS HAVE BEEN GIVEN

Thank you

Next Page...

BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE

Section I: DEMOGRAPHICS

1. **City and State where you currently reside**: _____

2. **AGE:** _____

3. **GENDER:** _____

4. **HIGHEST EDUCATION:** (Circle One):

☐   High School

- ☐ Bachelors
- ☐ Associate/ Diploma
- ☐ Masters
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Other Professional degree (MD, DDS, LLB, JD etc.)
- ☐ Other (please specify)   _____

5.   DO YOU IDENTIFY YOURSELF AS:

- ☐ Heterosexual or Straight
- ☐ Gay or Lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____
- ☐ I do not wish to answer this question

6.   MARITAL STATUS (Circle One):

- ☐ Never Married
- ☐ Engaged
- ☐ Cohabiting
- ☐ Civil Union
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced/ Separated
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

7.   What is your CURRENT RELIGION? (Check ALL that apply)

- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ Protestant
- ☐ Other Christian
- ☐ Spiritual (consider yourself spiritual but do not take part in any organized religion)
- ☐ Agnostic (you're not sure whether there is a god or gods)
- ☐ Atheist (you do not believe there is a god or gods)
- ☐ Other (Please specify)_____
- ☐ Other (Please specify) _____

8.   Would you say that you currently are not at all religious, somewhat religious, or very religious? (Check one)

- ☐ Not at all religious
- ☐ Somewhat religious
- ☐ Very religious
- ☐ I do not wish to answer this question

9. **Would you say that you currently are not at all spiritual, somewhat spiritual, or very spiritual? (Check one)**

☐   Not at all spiritual
☐   Somewhat spiritual
☐   Very spiritual
☐   I do not wish to answer this question

10.   **What is your total annual household income before taxes? (Check one)**

☐ $10,000 or less
☐ $10,001-$20,000
☐ $20,001-$30,000
☐ $30,001-$40,000
☐ $40,001-$50,000
☐   Over $50,001

11.   **CURENT OCCUPATION** (Check all that apply):

❑ Full-time Student   If YES, name of program/ major:

_____

❑ Part-time Student   If YES, name of program/ major

_____

❑ Full-time Employed   If YES, job title

_____

❑ Part-time Employed   If YES, job title

_____

❑ Post-doctoral fellow

❑ Unemployed

❑ Other (please specify)   _____

12.   **STATUS IN THE USA**

A.   **Country of Birth:**   _____

B.   **In what year did you FIRST arrive in the United States?**

_____

C.   **When did you last enter the United States?**   _____ (Month, Year)

** If this is your first time in the United States, then please write N/A. This question is for those who have traveled to India and back in the United States

D. **CURRENT Visa Status:** _____

E. Have you changed your visa status after arriving in the United States? (Circle one) **YES   NO**

If YES, what was your prior visa status in the United States? _____

13. **LANGUAGES KNOWN:**

_____

Next Page...

BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE

Section II: FILM VIEWING HABITS

In this section, we would like to learn about your film-viewing habits, likes and dislikes

1. Please name **THREE** Bollywood Hindi films that you watched **in the past six months** either at home on a DVD etc. or in a movie theater?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

2. What are your top **THREE FAVORITE Bollywood Hindi films**?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

3. Which Bollywood Hindi films that you have watched did **you DISLIKE**?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

4. **What genre of films do you like to watch? (circle ALLthat apply)**

☐ Romance
☐ Action
☐ Family Drama

☐   Masala films
☐   Comedy
☐   Blended Genre
☐   Other _____

5.   Who are your top THREE FAVORITE Bollywood Film Stars (both Actors and Actresses)?

A.   _____

B.   _____

C.   _____

Next Page...

SECTION III

PLEASE FILL OUT SECTION III WHEN THE FILM HAS BEGUN

(Blank Page left on purpose)

Next Page...

BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE

Section III: FILM ACTIVITY

In this section, we would like you to identify one or more main onscreen characters in the film and write down the purpose of the main film character(s) OR what a certain onscreen character represents to you? (Feel free to write down any themes adjectives, phrases, examples of certain scenes, songs etc.)

ONSCREEN CHARACTER NAME IN THE FILM	WHAT DO THEY REPRESENT?
For example: "Pooja Chaudhry" (in the film Hum Aapke Hain Kaun) played by Renuka Shahane)	Housewife, Ideal daughter in law, mother, domestic role of a woman etc.

ONSCREEN CHARACTER NAME IN THE FILM	WHAT DO THEY REPRESENT?

FEEL FREE TO WRITE DOWN YOUR FEEDBACK OR ANY OTHER COMMENTS ABOUT THE FILM ON THIS BLANK SHEET. PLEASE ASK FOR MORE BLANK SHEETS OR NOTEPADS.

** PLEASE RETURN THE BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE, YOUR NOTES ON THE SHEET AND FEEDBACK TO THE FACILITATORS ***

APPENDIX I: **IRB-approved Focus Group Questions (version 4, 09/05/13)**

WOMEN IN BOLLYWOOD STUDY

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Before I head to the specific questions about your impressions about this film, let us start with some general questions:

I.   ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS
   Where do you watch Bollywood Hindi films in the USA? (Provide probes)
   Cinema Theater
   Renting/borrowing DVD at Home
   Online Link /Download
   Other (Specify)

1.   We have already introduced ourselves earlier. Let's go around and have every one say once again your name, where are you from in India and name **one of your** what are your favorite Bollywood Films?

2.   In general, what do you like and dislike about Bollywood films?

3.   How do you see the portrayal of men and women and /gender roles in popular culture in the USA or India or any other country?***

4.   How many of your families including your parents currently reside in India?
   To those who say YES, PROBE: Has living away from India made any difference to the way you see men and women and their roles in our daily lives? If yes, how? IF no, why?
   To those who say NO (their immediate family lives in the USA), PROBE: Has your family living or settled in the USA made a difference in how you perceive gender roles in our day-to-day lives? IF yes, how? IF no, why

5.   What professions or occupations do you often see men portrayed in Bollywood Hindi films? What professions or occupations do you often see women portrayed in Bollywood Hindi films?

6.   Have the gender roles, expectations and relations changed over the past decade? If so, how? Do you think this transformation is progressive or regressive?***

7.   Do the roles and occupations in the films represent of what we see in our daily lives? Have the trends and patterns changed?

II.   FIRST IMPRESSIONS

1.   Before we begin with the main questions, let us go around and ask about your first impression of the film. Briefly describe what you think about the film?

2.   What are some of the themes that struck you while watching the film?

PROBE-Which part of the film or characters made an emotional impact on you (positive or negative)?

3.   Do you believe this is a 'woman-oriented film? ***
PROBE - How would you define a 'woman-oriented film'?
PROBE-Is a woman-oriented film the same as a feminist film?
PROBE- What according to you is a 'feminist film'? (WRITE DOWN POINTS ON WHITE BOARD/ FLIP CHARTS)

4.   What message do you think the film is conveying?
PROBE- In the film 'The Dirty Picture', what about sexuality? How is women's sexuality constructed in the film?
PROBE- In the film 'Lajja', what about marriage and romance? How are marital and romantic relations depicted in this film?

III.   VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (EXPLORATION QUESTIONS)
(The questions will be asked depending on what film is being shown)

1.   What do you see here in this scene of the film? **(Show a particular scene still or film scene)**
PROBE- For the movie, "The Dirty Picture"- "the man sitting next to Reshma in the theater touches her thigh without her consent"
PROBE- For the movie, "Lajja"- "where Raghu is coercing Vaidehi to be intimate and kiss him and when she refuses, he slaps her repeatedly and gets angry on her"
PROBE- When you saw this scene- what was your emotional experience? What was your response?

2.   IF the subject(s) mention the word 'violence' or 'violence against women', How did you make this decision? How did you get to that decision?***
PROBE-Why have you identified this scene as a form of VAW? Why do you think it is? How would you define as violence against women?

3.   What are the different forms of violence against women can you identify in this film? Do you believe this violent relationship is justified or okay? Why? ***

4.   What does this scene tell about the relations between the characters? How do you see these interactions?***
PROBE- For the movie, "The Dirty Picture", between Silk and Surya
PROBE- For the movie, "Lajja", between Jaanki and Purshottam

5.   IF Participants mention the words 'victim' or 'perpetrator', then
PROBE: What do you mean by the word 'victim'? What do you mean by the word 'perpetrator' in this context?

6.   What is the purpose of the violence against women in this film? Why do you think this violence took place?***

7.   Give me another example of a form of VAW from the films. Why do you believe this violence occurred? Was that violence justified or right? Explain?

8. How are some of the female characters depicted in this film (roles)? Give us an example from your FILM ACTIVITY sheet. *How do you define "Reshma" OR "Jaanki"?****
    PROBE- *For the movie "The Dirty Picture"- the main protagonist "Reshma/ Silk"*
    PROBE- *For the movie "Lajja"- what about "Jaanki" OR "Lata (Purshottam's wife)?*

9. How are the male characters depicted in this film (roles)? Give us an example.***
    PROBE- *For the movie "The Dirty Picture"- "Ramakant" (Surya's younger brother)*
    PROBE- *For the movie "Lajja"- "Bulwa" or "Raju"*

10. Where do you think we as a society get information about violence in general or against women?
    PROBE-*How much of your knowledge and information about violence against women comes from popular culture, newspapers, TV news channels etc.?*

EXIT QUESTIONS:

11. What are some of the common gender themes you noticed in the film?***

12. Did you see any themes on gender roles, relations and expectations in the film?

13. Are males or females each equally susceptible to violence? Explain. What makes one group more susceptible to violence than the other?

14. What could have been done to prevent VAW in this film (scene)?***

15. Any other feedback or comments?

***   Questions with a maroon font color and highlighted are the most important questions that will guide the discussions and are to be asked by the facilitator. The ideal number of important questions that can be asked in a focus group is 10 and maximum is 12 (check links below for reference) . The remaining questions and probes are optional and will be asked depend on how the group interacts and the flow of the discussion. It also depends on how much time we have to ask those remaining optional questions. The optional questions have been written in order to enable facilitator to ask the questions and facilitate the discussion in an unambiguous way.

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University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
Gender and Women Studies

WORK EXPERIENCES

Training and Technical Assistance Specialist, PreventConnect
California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA),
September 2016- Present
- Assist management through, in-person and phone support, training and technical assistance (TA) to CALCASA and PreventConnect constituents for primary prevention of sexual and domestic violence
- Conduct independent research to provide TA assistance to centers and individuals and work closely with CALCASA staff to respond to technical assistance needs
- Identify appropriate materials and deliver information requested by organizations and individuals
- Identifying resources and materials, and developing articles, materials, blogs and podcasts

Undergraduate Coordinator, Criminology, Law and Justice
University of Illinois at Chicago, *August 2013- May 2016*
- Served as a graduate assistant to the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the academic program to promote our programs to undergraduate students
- Provided a liaison between the program and students pursuing their majors or minors in the Criminology program through informal advising and onsite tours
- Planned, organized and coordinated events such as the Open House and End-Of-The-Year Award celebration events for students and faculty
- Represented the departmental undergraduate program at campus and admission events

Research Assistant, Center for Public Safety and Justice
University of Illinois, *January 2014- December 2014*
- Gathered and assimilated copyright-free images and data to help design curriculums for community policing courses catered to an audience from different backgrounds

- Reviewed, scrutinized and provided feedback to the team about the design, content and timeline for online courses
- Data entry and synthesis of evaluation forms and ratings of workshops and courses

Research Assistant, Criminology, Law, and Justice
University of Illinois at Chicago, *March 2011- May 2013*
- Provided research support and logistics to the Women's Stress and Support Study
- Coordinated with the team in the design and implementation of mail survey instruments such as questionnaires to be sent to participants
- Tracked research participants, and perform any necessary follow up tasks
- Performed data entry and other clerical work as required for project completion and prepared, manipulated, and managed extensive databases

Teaching Instructor*,* **Department of Criminology, Law and Justice**
University of Illinois at Chicago, *January 2011-May 2011*
Introduction to Criminology
- Created and designed syllabus and curriculum for a 200-level undergraduate class of 120 students about the core foundations of criminological theories
- Presented lectures, showed films during class, conducted discussions both in class and on Blackboard forum to engage students in interacting and asking questions
- Administered written tests and discussion sessions, prepared reports and maintained student records to assess and measure the students' progress and to evaluate their learning

Teaching Assistant, Department of Criminology, Law and Justice
University of Illinois at Chicago, *January 2009- December 2010*
Criminology, Violence in Society, Foundations of Law and Justice
- Responsible for performing teaching or teaching-related duties to assist faculty members
- Attended class lectures, led discussion sections, taught some chapters of the undergraduate courses and assigned material in class as needed
- Proctored exams, grades tests, and homework assignments, and recorded grades

Research Assistant, Criminology, Law, and Justice
University of Illinois at Chicago, *January 2009- May 2009*
- Provided research support to Dr Aruna Jha, PI, for a grant funded by the Mental Health America of Illinois (MHAI) to 'examine the risk and protective factors about suicide among Asian-American youth'

- Conducted data analysis of focus groups of Asian-American high school and college students and mental health professionals
- Organized events for the Asian American Suicide Prevention Initiative (AASPI) at UIC including the 'Seeking Light in the Darkness' symposium for suicide survivors

Research Analyst, Institute for Public Safety Partnerships
University of Illinois at Chicago, *January 2008- August 2009*
- Conducted research literature reviews and needs analysis for identifying the best practices in the prevention and intervention models to curb gang-related violence
- Organized and presented findings at gang summits and other advisory board meetings relevant to the study grants

Graduate Research Assistant, Criminology, Law, and Justice
University of Illinois at Chicago, *August 2007- December 2007*
- Worked in a research project aiming to study and analyze the perspectives about the 'Role of Therapeutic Jurisprudence among criminal justice professionals

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PUBLICATIONS

Journal Article
Bhat, M. and Ullman, S. E. (2014). Examining Marital Violence in India: Review and Recommendations for Future Research, in *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, (15) 1: 57-74, DOI: 10.1177/1524838013496331

Book Chapter
Bhat, M. and Wodda, A. (2013). Examining Legal Responses to Sexual Violence: A Comparative Review of Court Systems in India and the United States. In P. Unnithan's *Crime and Justice in India (Ed.)*. SAGE Publications: New Delhi

Encyclopedia Articles
Erez, E., and Bhat, M. (2010). Rape myths and violence against women. In F. Cullen, & P. Wilcox (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of criminological theory* (pp. 772-774). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412959193.n211

Ullman, S.E. and Bhat, M. (2014). Sexual Assault/ Sexual Violence, *Wiley- Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender & Sexuality*

PRESENTATIONS

Academic Conferences
Bhat, M. (2016, November). *Violence Against Women in Bollywood Indian Cinema: Exploring Film Interpretations of Asian Indian Diaspora.* Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA

Bhat, M. (2016, November). *Roundtable: The Graduate Student Role in Event Planning and Community Organizing in Criminology and Criminal Justice,* American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA

Bhat, M. (2014, November). *Violence against women in Bollywood cinema: Exploring Gender among Indians' perceptions in the USA.* Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology, San Francisco, CA

Bhat, M. (2014, February). *Violence against women in Bollywood cinema: Exploring Gender among Indians' perceptions in the USA.* Paper presented at the American Criminal Justice Society Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA

Bhat, M. & Wodda, A. (2013, November). *Examining Legal Responses to Sexual Violence: A Review of Court Systems in India, in "Crime and Justice in India"* at the Author meets Critic panel session at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA

Bhat, M. & Ullman, S.E. (2012, November). *The Characteristics of and Social Reactions to Victims of Spousal Sexual Assault.* Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology, Chicago, IL

Bhat, M. (2012, March). *Examining Gender-based Violence against Hijras in India: The Rise and Struggles against the Third Gender.* Paper presented at the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, New York City, NY

Bhat, M. (2011, November). *Representation of Societal Responses to VAW in Media: Bollywood films under the microscope.* Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology, Washington D.C.

Bhat, M. (2009, November). *A Feminist Critique of the Representation of Women in Films: Bollywood under the Microscope.* Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA

Greenless, A., Bhat, M. and Holt, T. (2009, November). *Examining the Correlates of Cyber crime Victimization Using Lifestyle Routine Activities Theory.* Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA

Bhat, M. (2009, August). *Exploring the Identity of Hijras in India: The Rise and Struggles of the Third Gender.* Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA

Bhat, M. (2008, November). *Cyber stalking- Definitions, Theories and Typologies.* Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Saint Louis MO

Bhat, M. (2007, September). *Cyber stalking.* Paper presented at the Midwestern Criminal Justice Association (MCJA) Annual Conference, Chicago IL

On Campus Presentations
Bhat, M. (2016, April). *Violence against Women in Bollywood (Indian) Cinema.* Presentation at the Feminist Lecture Series at the Women's Resource & Leadership Center, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago IL

Bhat, M. (2015, April). *Examining Representations of Violence against Women in Bollywood (Indian) Cinema*. Paper presented at the Asian American Resource and Cultural Center Lunchbox at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago IL

Bhat, M. (2014, April). *Violence Against Women in Bollywood Cinema: Exploring Gender Differences Among Asian Indians' Perceptions in the USA.* Research presented at the Gender & Women Studies Brownbag Series, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Bhat, M. (2010, April). *Examining Structural Violence against MSM in India: Challenges and Recommendations.* Poster at the Lavender Research Forum, University of Illinois at Chicago

Bhat, M. (2009, April). *Exploring the Identity of Hijras in India: The Rise and Struggles of the Third Gender.* Poster at the Student Research Forum, University of Illinois at Chicago

Guest Lectures
Bhat, M. (2016, February). *Guest Speaker and Discussion Moderator, 'India's Daughter' documentary,* invited by the Amnesty International, University of Illinois at Chicago

Bhat, M. (2010, October). *Examining the Identity of Hijras in India: Structural Violence against the Third Gender*. Paper presented as a Guest Speaker in a graduate class, Race, Class and Gender at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago IL

HONORS & AWARDS **2016 Outstanding Graduate Student Award- Victimology**
Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), March 2016

Student Research Funding Award
Association of Doctoral Programs in Criminology and Criminal Justice

July 2014

Michael D. Maltz Distinguished Graduate Student Award
Department of Criminology, Law, and Justice,
University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2016

Chancellor's Graduate Research Fellowship
Graduate College, University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2016

Chancellor's Student Service Award
Student Leadership Development and Volunteer Services
University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2014

Chancellor's Graduate Research Fellowship
Graduate College, University of Illinois at Chicago, November 2013

Exemplary Service to the Department Award
Department of Criminology, Law and Justice,
University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2016

Provost Award for Graduate Research
Graduate College, University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2013

Service Recognition Award
Graduate Student Council,
University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2013

Chicago Consular Corps Scholarship
Office of International Affairs,
University of Illinois at Chicago, November 2011

Chicago Bar Association Graduate Student Award
Department of Criminology, Law and Justice
University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2011

Outstanding Service to the Department Award
Department of Criminology, Law and Justice
University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2011

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Ad-Hoc Reviewer: *Violence against Women, Feminist Criminology*

Affiliations and Memberships
Member, American Society of Criminology (August 2008- Present)

Invited Participant,
The Midwest Asian American Academic Advisory Council

Asian American Leadership Forum (February 2016)

UNIVERSITY SERVICE   **Advisory Board Member**
Asian American Resource and Cultural Center,
University of Illinois at Chicago, August 2015- May 2016

Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Asian Americans
University of Illinois at Chicago, August 2015- May 2016

Graduate Student Council Representative
University of Illinois at Chicago, August 2008- August 2014

VOLUNTEERING   ***Blog Correspondent,*** *Stop Street Harassment*
September 2015- December 2015

Event Organizer, Hate Crimes Film Screenings/ Film Discussion
University of Illinois at Chicago, June 2015- October 2015

Interviewer Volunteer, Campus Advocacy Network*,*
University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2015

Volunteer, *INCITE! Color of Violence Conference,* March 2015

Shelter Volunteer, *Apna Ghar Inc., Chicago,*
October 2011- October 2012