

**Representation of Women and Identity in Bollywood Films**

BY

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B.A., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Masters of Arts in Communication  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2020

Chicago, Illinois

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Vikram and Benita Shah. Without their love and support, none of this would have been possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been accomplished without the help from my brilliant professors and the administrative staff in the Department of Communication. First and foremost, this thesis would not have been possible if it was not for my chair and advisor: Dr. Diem-My Bui, I am incredibly grateful for your guidance and support on this thesis. Thank you for believing in me and in this idea in order to make it a reality. Your expertise on this topic and in the field has shaped me into becoming a better researcher and writer. Dr. Andrew Rojecki, thank you for being the one who pushed me into going outside of my comfort zone and to tackle on a new area of research I was completely unfamiliar with. Your guidance has taught me that great things come from thinking outside of the box. Dr. Ishani Mukherjee, thank you for inspiring me to write on a topic that was close to my roots and reminding me that there is no place like home. Your guidance has taught me that the struggle during the journey is always worth it in the end.

To my family: Mom, Dad, Needhi and Taarak. This thesis happened because of your love and support the entire way. Mom and Dad, thank you for always pushing me to do my best. The days that were hard, you were always there. You were always there to remind me why this work matters and believed in me from the very beginning. Needhi and Taarak, thank you for believing in me and for reminding me that throughout this process, it is okay to fall down, as long as you get back up again. Thank you for helping me pick up the pieces when I was struggling. I love you.

To Olivia Hernandez, Divya Patel & Aditi Buti: you have witnessed me in this journey since day one and I could not have done it without your support. Thank you for always lending a listening ear.

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## SUMMARY

A study of three different Bollywood films was carried out utilizing a thematic analysis approach to understand the representation of women and their identity in such films throughout a 30-year time period. Such films were explored in order to further understand how gender inequality is present in Bollywood films. This study focused on films beginning from the 1990s decade up until present day.

The following three films were analyzed: *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, and *Dear Zindagi*. Each film primarily focused around a controversial topic throughout that particular time period. Throughout this study, each film presented obstacles towards the female leads and the film explores if and how the female lead gets through that particular obstacle. Each film was watched at least five times. Information about the female lead's wants, desires, and socioeconomic behaviors were coded, analyzed, and then categorized into select themes. After the categorization of themes, the major themes were renamed and defined as prominent themes that were present throughout each film.

The four major themes that were found throughout this study were: Independence, Desire, Traditional Indian Values, and Identity. These four themes illustrated how a woman's identity is shaped in these films. The first three themes help shape a woman's identity, since these patterns are widely discussed throughout each film separately. The final theme of identity, comprises a combination of the three themes, but also the obstacles each female lead is presented throughout the film also shaped her identity as well.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Growing up and watching Bollywood movies my entire life, I have been interested in how gender stereotypes affect a person's identity. As I got older, I started to notice that indecisiveness among individuals started appearing in more recent films. Indecisiveness is defined as, "habitual difficulty making decisions across domains (Germeijs, Verschueren, & Soenens, 2006) and has been associated with hesitating to act (Frost & Shows, 1993)" (Barkely-Levenson & Fox, 2015, pg. 1). Common themes of identity struggle revolve primarily around romantic affairs and self-growth. Hindi films first appeared in the early 1900s and have evolved throughout the decades. Observing those changes in the last three decades, I was influenced to research what cultural changes appear to be most prominent in Hindi films among the last three decades. Observing these changes in over this time period, I focused on how the gender of women and identity representation is presented in Bollywood films through socioeconomic status. I analyzed if changes in gender norms have occurred in Bollywood films throughout the past three decades by looking at women and their representation in films and how the choices a woman makes in a film shapes her identity.

In early Indian cinema, each decade had a different focus towards their audience, mostly relating to that certain period of time. During the golden age of Indian cinema, the 1950s and 1960s focused on the Indian nation "achieving self-sufficiency through modernization" (Sharpe, 2005, p.60). Transitioning into the 1970s and 1980s, many Bollywood films depicted the "angry young man," who focused on overcoming social injustice and political corruption in India. Sharpe (2005) claims in the mid-1990s, that films took a different turn and started focusing on youth culture and cosmopolitan lifestyles. Films in the 1990s decade explored the concept of wealth in Indian families. However, they still maintained traditional Indian values. By featuring

films with wealthy families, the films were able to display “extravagant lifestyles of the elite classes and cross the threshold of their luxurious homes, whether Western-style mansions or traditional *havelis*” (Sharpe, 2005, pg. 61) Although each decade was focused on a different theme, there have been common themes that are presented in Hindi films. The themes in Hindi films strongly revolve around the concept of the nation (Virdi, 2003). The concept of the nation is meant to be explored in films by creating tropes, characters, and narratives which further turn into constructive plots with an ending that solves through the conflicts in the film (Virdi, 2003). Since the 1990s era was primarily focused on family relationships and new lifestyles, the narratives in these films were able to connect with audience viewers, since familial conflicts and resolutions are an important trope in Hindi films. The trope of family in Hindi films creates a “genesis narrative” (Virdi, 2003). With family narratives in Hindi cinema, the relationships can vary from positive relationships among all family members to a “separation and loss” storyline. These storylines have become popular as it allows for conflicts such as gender inequality and patriarchal authority to be addressed. Gender inequality and patriarchal authority have caused tensions about how femininity and masculinity are represented in Indian films (Virdi, 2003). The purpose of this thesis is to observe and analyze if the feminine identity in India has evolved over time.

The importance of looking at these narratives that present gender inequality and patriarchal authority need to be looked at since the woman figure in Indian history has not been as privileged as men (Virdi, 2003). Although women are not as privileged as men, they are still represented in an idealized format when it comes to obeying the men in their lives, such as forsaking their own individual identity in order to maintain a positive relationship with the men in their lives. While men have gained patriarchal authority through social hierarchies, women



have struggled with forming their own identity. (Haq, 2013). Women have faced challenges in forming their own identity due to the battle of upholding traditional norms or adapting to Western influences about gender equality. Intersectionality theory, which will further be discussed below, discusses how inequality is presented in gender, race, class, age and religion. Intersectionality theory highlights the discrimination women face and how each woman handles discrimination. Utilizing intersectionality as my primary theory to look at gender representation in Bollywood films, I reference scholars such as Patricia Collins and her ideas of intersectionality that allow for deeper analysis as to how gender representation is presented in Bollywood films.

The concepts of gender and identity are those that have been studied for quite some time. Scholars have found that gender representation in the media appears to quite common. Looking into Bollywood films, there have been several themes in films that are correspondent to the time period in which the audience was living in. Throughout this thesis, I look into how the gender of women is represented and how identity is developed in Bollywood films. By utilizing a thematic analysis, I selected three films throughout a span of three decades and note if any differences have emerged socioeconomically or culturally in regards to representations of women and identity among character growth.

With this goal in my mind for my thesis, I further observed the themes of gender inequality, gender representation of women, socioeconomic status, and identity representation and how it is featured in Bollywood films. This thesis will primarily contribute to studies that have focused on gender representation and inequality in India and in Hindi media. Gender scholars who have focused on intersectionality have discussed the treatment of women based on their religion, class, and socio-economic status. With Indian attitudes towards women being

presented as a subordinate figure (Haq, 2013), there has not been much room for growth, as women were taught to do what they were told by the men in their lives, rather than make their own life choices. Although women are attempting to fight back on gender equality, they continue to struggle with their identity formation. The conditions of men and women differ in India (Purkayastha et al., 2003) and this is a problematic issue that needs to be further explored since there is an unequal power balance between men and women in Indian culture. This transitions into looking into Hindi films since the films tend to reflect daily experiences in individuals' lives (Virdi, 2003). Since Hindi films present their narratives relevant to the time period the film was created in, there is a search for how the woman gender is represented in these time periods as well as how identity is shaped. With this question in mind, this thesis will further explore how India's recent cultural and socioeconomic changes influence gender representation of women in the Bollywood Industry on screen. By looking at the cultural and socioeconomic changes in the film, this thesis will also further explore how gender representation, power structure, and social class differences intersect and shape a woman's identity in the film.

The main purpose of this thesis is to understand the concepts of gender inequality, gender representation of women, and identity development in Bollywood films. The main goal of this thesis is to look at films within the '90s decade until present day to note any changes that appear regarding representation of women and identity development. This thesis primarily focuses on the differences in gender roles and identity formation for women throughout the past three decades. How each individual character is represented in the film is important to look at, as it allows the researcher to discover what themes are presented in the film when comparing the feminine identity throughout a different time period. Primarily starting from films within the 1990s decade will allow me to analyze Bollywood films that initially started to focus on

cosmopolitan lifestyles. Throughout the decades in the Bollywood industry, the themes that were reflected in films primarily focus on “the love of the nation” (Virdi, 2003). Since the ‘90s decade has started to shift towards a new concept of cosmopolitan lifestyles and youth culture, I chose to start with this era, since this is the decade in which the themes start to revolve a new concept of living, with individuals having more freedom in the choices they make.

In order to analyze how gender inequality, gender representation of women, and identity development take place in Bollywood films, I conducted a thematic analysis in which I discovered the themes that revolved around these issues in the selected films. A thematic analysis will allow for a better understanding as to how gender representation of women and identity formation is presented in these films. This thesis aims to look at the differences in gender representation of women and identity development through socioeconomic status in Bollywood films by applying a thematic analysis to explore hidden themes that are displayed after the post-liberalization era in India which occurred at the turn of the century.

## II. Literature Review

### A. Identity

One of the major components my thesis focuses on is how the choices a character makes, can shape their identity in the film. The common definition of identity can be noted as, “*Who somebody is* in terms of trait, which might be anything from, for instance, a physical feature of the body, a belief, a genealogy, or a cultural preference” (During, 2005, pg. 145). The concept of identity can be complex. It is neither singular nor plural. Furthermore, Simon During claims that an individual can have multiple identities, rather than just one, “Gender, race, or ethnicity, and class are the identities, most of all, by which we are placed socially...and the relative weight of identities change across time and space” (During, 2005, p.146). During further explains that identities are not determined internally, however, they are determined “socially, from the outside” (pg.145). An identity can constitute the framework of one’s individual life, so distinguishing a given identity versus an inherited identity is important. Given identities are those that we are born into such as gender, race, or ethnicity; whereas inherited are identities that we choose to associate ourselves with such as cultural, material, or ideological choices (During, 2005). Identity politics is a concept to be further explored throughout this thesis as well. With identity politics, During asserts that identity politics began in the early sixties, in which “groups with specific cultural and social identities increasingly made political claims on the basis of those identities --- in particular, African Americans on behalf of their racially defined communities and feminists on behalf of women (Omi and Winant, 1986, 75)” (During, 2005, pg. 147). During defines identity politics as the following:

“Politics engaged on behalf of those with particular identities (usually historically empowered ones) rather than politics organized on the basis of particular social policies or philosophies” (During, 2005, pg. 147).

Identity politics play a role in the Western culture where they engage white, heterosexual men to be those in power with a strong identity. Taylor (1994) also claims that identity politics are meant to establish recognition and respect. How one's identity is perceived can be an indicator as to how they are viewed, "Identity is conceived not as a fixed marker but in terms of the processes or performances by which identities are formed" (During, 2005, pg. 150). Since one's identity is always changing through external factors, one cannot have a fixed identity. Since there are multiple identities that can shape an individual, I am primarily interested in focusing on gender identity, how identity is presented and how a character's identity can change in Bollywood films.

#### B. **Gender Identity**

Focusing on gender and how it is represented in Hindi films, is a major aspect to look into for my thesis, as well as how one's *gender identity* is presented in the film. By looking at how gender is initially represented in films, I observed the themes and patterns that are present in the film and determine if there are differences in themes throughout the years. Gender representation in the media is initially, asking what gender is, and it is a topic that needs to be explored. Gender identity is defined as how individuals understand themselves by associating themselves to "culturally feminine and masculine meanings that are attached to men and women and they think and act according to these gendered aspects of their lives" (Wood & Eagly, 2015, pg. 1). Although an individual can choose to define themselves based on how they associate with any given gender, gender can still be an ambiguous term. Each culture has its own definition of what gender means. Gender can be portrayed through society's values and their ways of living a lifestyle. While each cultural belief has different representations of gender, Wood (2011) argues that gender is learned.

Throughout our childhood, we are shown how we should act, how we should behave, and how we should present ourselves based on societal norms. The meaning of gender can change over time as well as it can also change throughout “an individual’s lifetime” (Kimmel, 2003). Wood (2011) further explores how gender identity can change throughout an individual’s lifetime. The scholar claims that priorities can change throughout the span of life per individual, which gives them a redefined concept of what being a certain gender entails of, “the social context in which we live changes over time, and that affects our personal sense of gender identity” (Wood, 2011, pg. 27). By exploring representation of the woman identity in films, it is important to ask how women are being represented throughout the years. Since India has consistently tried to relate the film to real-life issues, (Virdi, 2003), it is important to look at how the feminine gender identity is changing throughout the decades. Each experience that an individual goes through in the film, will be noted to determine if the experience has shaped their identity. By selecting films from the 1990s to 2016, I explored how representations of women and identity representation is presented throughout each time period in Bollywood films. With this noted, I also looked at how one’s upbringing and economic background shapes their identity in the film.

While exploring how gender is represented in Bollywood films, I also mention the Standpoint Theory to interpret how identity is formed through different economic and social upbringings. The Standpoint Theory focuses on “how membership in groups, such as those designated by gender, race, class and sexual identity, shapes what individuals experience, know, feel, and do, as well as how individuals understand social life as a whole (Collins, 1986; Harding, 1991, 1998; McClish & Bacon, 2002; Wood, 2005)” (Wood, 2011). Through the

Standpoint Theory, each individual has their own lens as to how they see society. Through a critical lens, theorists claim standpoint theory relates to intersectionality (Harding, 2009).

Standpoint theory relates to intersectionality since both theories focus on oppression through gender and class status. A standpoint is achieved by power relations and those who struggle in the power stance are given a ‘standpoint’. Members of certain groups who do not have a power advantage will have a fuller understanding of the concept of power, in which they have a critical awareness of their position compared to others, leading them to earn a “standpoint with less bias” (Wood, 2011, pg. 59). In addition to the standpoint theory, the skills, attitudes, ways of thinking, and understanding of life are likely to be developed by men and women due to their “membership in socially constructed groups” (Wood, 2011, pg. 60). Looking at how Standpoint Theory is utilized, Harding (2009) discusses that standpoint theory is primarily used in studies that focus on “race, class, sexuality, and studies in postcolonial research” (Harding, 2009, pg. 193). Furthermore, standpoint theory looks into the lives of those that are oppressed, rather than those who are privileged. With gender inequality being a type of oppression that women face, standpoint theory is partially utilized to further analyze how the female gender is represented in Bollywood films. This theory was utilized in films by analyzing the character’s upbringing, social-class status, and looks at the power structure of gender in that given time period.

### C. **Gender and Media**

When gender is represented in the media, *gender stereotypes* are taken into consideration. Ellemers (2018) defines a stereotype as “general expectations about members of particular social groups” (Ellemers, 2018, pg. 276). The ‘social groups’ I focused on in this section are women and how they are represented in media. While stereotypes reflect the general expectations of

members of particular social groups, *gender stereotypes* are defined as stereotypes that contribute to gender-specified norms that separate male and female behavior patterns (Golden & Jacoby, 2018). Studying gender stereotypes typically look at how men and women are characterized. By analyzing how gender stereotypes are represented in the media, it will help understand how both genders are portrayed in media and the differences between how they are represented. Although the primary focus on this thesis is focusing on the gender of women, as well as their identity and representation, looking at both genders allows me to analyze the differences between both genders and I apply the intersectionality theory as well as the standpoint theory to critically analyze the power structure between both genders in these Bollywood films.

Initially, women were not as present in the media as they are now. If women were present in media, they are often present to appear in “sexualized or subordinated roles” (R. L. Collins, 2011). Women being sexualized took place in multiple ways. When analyzed in Downs and Smith’s study of best-selling video games (2010), the scholars found that “41% of female characters wore revealing clothing...and many of these women had unrealistic proportioned bodies” (Collins, 2011, pg. 294). Glascock (2001) discusses how physical appearance has more emphasis on females compared to males. By placing a higher emphasis on physical appearance for women compared to men, it can be argued that women have to uphold to this standard of physical beauty, compared to men, who do not have physical appearance emphasized as often as women do. Aside from sexual roles that are presented by women, they are often given stereotypical roles to present in the media.

There are different ways that men and women are presented in the media. Most of the time, men and women are given stereotypical norms to act on when they are present in the



media. When men are presented in a traditional role, it creates the image that they are ideal, whereas women cannot act in the same way (Lauzen et al., 2008). Lauzen et. al (2008) further discusses this repetitive behavior indicates a sense of “false truth” in which these stereotypes are proven to be true among men and women. Lauzen et. al (2008) pulls from Merskin’s study in which Merskin mentions “When multiple programs across the broadcast and cable spectrum repeat these gendered roles, they assume the air of truth and credibility (Merskin, 2006)” (Lauzen et al., 2008, pg. 201). A frequent amount of studies has been done on gender roles and gender portrayals in the media. When analyzing male and female type roles in the media, female characters were more likely to appear in roles that dealt with interpersonal relations, such as family and relationships (Lauzen et al., 2008). Women also lack dominance compared to men on prime-time television (Glascok, 2001). The differences in behaviors among men and women that are presented in the media start to form expectations as to how men and women should behave in reality. Despite the fact that women were given roles that made them appear passive and nurturing, Glascok (2001) noted that gender roles have started to change where equality among men and women are becoming more present in Western prime-time television.

#### D. **Gendered Identity in India**

In a highly patriarchal society, it is difficult for Indian women to assert their own identity since they have been taught to respect the men in their lives. Based on Simon During’s definition of identity, he claims how identity is neither singular or plural, rather identity is constructed from the outside. An identity conflict can occur among women based on their status and place in society. The concept of determining one’s identity is also difficult when it comes to Indian men and women who live abroad. Those living in these diasporic places also struggle with their

identity. When it comes to determining one's identity in Indian society, Indians are conflicted between maintaining family relations as well as adapting to more modern culture.

Traditionally, Indian society views the family as an important aspect of relationships. Indian family relationships are highly respected and valued (Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010). Indian families consider extended family to also take part when it comes to raising their children. With advanced modernization, the lifestyle of family living has changed, however, there is still pressure to uphold traditional values. Sharma (2003) calls this confusion 'transitional identity.' Transitional identity focuses on traditional Indian values, however still allows for the middle-class Indian to have differences in opinion about traditional Indian values. Tuli and Chaudhary differentiate how traditional societies are viewed as dependent cultures, whereas western societies are seen as independent (2010). It is important to note that gendered identity differs among Western societies and Indian society.

Western societies are more complex than surface characterizations. Stuart Hall (1992) discusses how the "West" can be looked like a composite picture in our minds of what "different societies, cultures, peoples, and places are like" (186). Hall argues the West does not have a set definition of how it is represented, rather the West can have several internal differences, such as different nations and culture that represents a nation that is deemed to be in Western aspect. Macpherson's analysis of Western individualism represents how possession is a type of individualism that identifies with Western culture. Macpherson (1962) discusses how possessive individualism is "the ideal self of an owner: the individual surrounded by accumulated property and goods" (During, 1993, pg. 59). Through the concept of gendered identity in Western culture, the meaning of gender coincides with the term *androgyny*. Androgyny comes from, "the Greek word *aner* or *andros*, which means 'man' and the Greek word *gyne*, which means 'woman'. The

term androgyny is loosely defined as qualities that are both feminine and masculine” (Wood & Eagly, 2015). In the West, individuals can have qualities that are considered both masculine and feminine, such as strong and nurturing (Wood, 2011). With the West having qualities that can be identified as both masculine and feminine, it needs to be recognized that not all cultures relate with the term of androgyny.

Through Bandura’s social learning theory, where people are often influenced through the media, gender roles in India are often highly stereotypical and individuals in real life often replicate what is expected of them based on what they see on television. In India, television advertising is more prominent to viewers since television was introduced in a later time period than it was in other countries. The Cultivation theory by George Gerbner (1973) also plays a role as to how individuals view the world. Cultivation theory proposes “that the danger of television lies in the ability to shape not a particular view point about one specific issue, but in its ability to shape people’s moral values and general beliefs about the world” (Mosharafa, 2015). With India having the third-largest television viewing market in the world (Das, 2011), understanding how gender roles are presented can shape how the audience views gender norms. In India, women are portrayed contradictorily: “There has been a growing trend towards portraying women as liberated, yet traditional, as persons who still bear the responsibility of nurturing and caring for others” (Das, 2011, pg. 209). Gender equality in India has not been achieved fairly as it has been in other nations, so how marketers view men and women may be influenced by social norms seen in day to day activities (Das, 2011).

In Indian advertisements, Das (2000) found that appearance for specific product brands was highly stereotypical, such as women would appear in ads for domestic products and personal hygiene (Das, 2011). Women are also presented as subordinates to men in the household (Gupta

& Jain, 1998). The way Indian housewives are presented in television commercials have not developed, rather they are still perceived as subordinate to men (Das & Das, 2009). While advertisements are presenting women as individuals with no individuality by sacrificing everything for their husband in earlier periods of time, not much has changed throughout the years. Most electronic media have women being represented as a subordinate figure as well. Despite the fact that women are now also encouraged to work, they are still responsible for a majority of the household chores, where men are lacking in performing these domestic duties (Jain & Pareek, 2008). In recent advertisements, notably entering the year 2015, advertisements in India have started to change their content trying to enforce gender equality. In an advertisement for laundry detergent, the tag line “Share the load” was utilized in order to indicate that this responsibility is meant for both men and women (Jain & Pareek, 2008). Although this is one step in enforcing gender equality, gender equality in films have yet to have made the same transition, where women are still underrepresented in the media.

Scholars have found that women are still underrepresented in electronic media, as well as being portrayed as the damsel in distress in Hindi films (Jain & Pareek, 2018). With women lacking individuality in Hindi films, women are also shown to be modest and true to their culture. The “perfect Indian wife” is subjected to dressing conservatively and appears in films “dressed in a saree, her hair neatly tied in a chignon, her *sindoor*, and *mangalsutra*, the external emblems of a married woman, always visible” (Kripalani, 2001, pg. 41). Additionally, women are also used to promote songs and intentionally used to promote “item songs” (Jain & Pareek, 2018). By having women promote these item songs, it reiterates the fact that they are being used for their physical appearance more than men are.

Through Bandura's social learning theory, men and women are more likely to imitate the behaviors that are presented to them on television (Das, 2011). With Indian media representing men and women in stereotypical ways, it only makes sense that individuals are thought to believe they must act like this as well. However, when it comes to individuals who do not have the television influence, rather they live in a diasporic community, identity formation is still a conflict because now they are faced with challenges in which another culture can shape their identity as well. After the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, "The United States has witnessed a second period of mass immigration" (Kurien, 2005, pg. 435). By focusing on Hindu Indian Americans, Kurien (2005) claims that their "brown skins" prevent them from being accepted as American (Kurien, 1998, 62). By interviewing students at a college university, Kurien was able to ask those who were a part of a Hindu student organization group how they felt about starting and being a part of this organization. Interacting with two seniors, they mentioned how it is difficult upholding Hindu traditions and values away from home because "Hindu identity is a 'vague' identity" (Kurien, 2005). While trying to encourage other Hindu Indian Americans to be a part of the Hindu student organization, the two seniors claimed that they felt the organization was "rejected" because people were ashamed to come out as Hindus (Kurien, 2005).

E. **Bollywood Industry**

The magic where Hindi films are created and produced happen in India and are categorized into the *Bollywood Industry*. Being the largest film industry and having the most-watched movies in the world (Sunder, 2011), *Bollywood* has definitely made its mark in the entertainment industry. Based in Mumbai, "The Indian film industry is known as Bollywood... which refers to Hindi language films" (Nanda, Pattnaik, & Lu, 2018, pg. 237). Although there is

not a clear defining point as to how the term 'Bollywood' emerged, it has made a significant impact globally. Bollywood has vast meanings from how the term initially originated, but Bollywood can be known as, "The mainstream Indian movie industry based in Mumbai (Dwyer, 2006)" (Matusitz & Payano, 2012, pg. 124). It is to be understood that Bollywood "Comes not from a single source, culture, or society, but from an amalgamation of influences within the Asian continent and beyond" (Cox & Proffitt, 2014, pg. 47). Although the industry focuses on Indian media, the industry attracts the Indian diaspora all over the world (Sunder, 2011). Based in Mumbai (presently known as Bombay), Bollywood first appeared in 1912 (Metaxas, Bouka, and Merkouri, 2016). Several of these films in this time period were silent films or films that also revolved around Hindu mythology (Ranjan, 2019). Bollywood films focused primarily on Hindu mythology in the first few years of industry since it promoted "Indian values in an idealized past" (Ranjan, 2019). The first Indian film that was created in this era in 1913 is *Raja Harishchandra* (King Harishchandra) which primarily focuses on a mythological king from India, and another film that focused on Indian values that were positioned to be "culturally superior to the Western values represented by the British Raj in India" (Ranjan, 2019) and a Hindu God was *Shri Krishna's Janam* (Krishna's birth) (1918). Throughout each decade, a theme emerged in order to represent the time period of India at that time. The 1930s consisted of a time where Indian cinema focused on national unity (Metaxas, Bouka, and Merkouri, 2016). In this decade, *Kisan Kanya* (Farmer's Daughter) was released, which was India's first color film in 1937. This movie primarily focused on the plight of poor farmers. Another notable film in this decade is *Achhut Kanya* (Untouchable Maiden) in 1936 which focuses on the social position of girls in a low caste system. Transitioning into the 1950s and 1960s, films were focusing on socio-political messages (Metaxas, Bouka, and Merkouri, 2016). In this decade, *Mother India*

(1957) was released and became the first Hindi film to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1958. This film primarily focuses on a single mother who faces several obstacles in her life, while trying to raise her sons. The 1970s and 1980s consisted of a time in which social classes were seen to be relatable among viewers. The 1970s and 1980s era also consisted of a time in which Bollywood was focusing on ‘social realist norms’ (Bhaumik, 2004). In these two decades, the rise of new Bollywood actors emerged, primarily, Amitabh Bachchan who was later given the “angry young man” trope (Sharpe, 2005). These decades featured films such as *Sholay* (Embers) in 1975 and *Deewar* (The Wall) in 1975 as well. These two films focused on the socio-political climate during the 1970s decade in India. Lastly, the 1990s era was meant to promote the ‘liberalization of the Indian economy’ (Metaxas, Bouka, and Merkouri, 2016). The 1990s era allowed for Bollywood films to explore different styles of plots in films, since this was the era that India went through a positive economic change (Kripalani, 2001). The films that were created in the 1990s explored themes such as love, youth, freedom, and desire. These themes are seen through the classic love story plot-line, but also featured the characters living abroad, which also attracted Indians who live outside of India.

Initially, Bollywood films used to have a common theme featured in films, in which the love of the nation outweighed personal desires. However, the 1990s era changed this theme and started focusing more on individualism and personal desires. There is a transformation in films that were featured in the 1970s and 1980s compared to now. The rising culture of the 1990s era allowed for the films in this decade to focus primarily on joyous lifestyles. With India making the transition from an era that was originally geared towards social status, class, and political issues, the concept of freedom and individuality started to appear more often in films. The new lifestyle that represents freedom and youthful living began after India’s economic liberalization

started to focus on “a new culture of consumption” (Anjaria, 2013). The shift amongst a simple Hindi film to Bollywood occurs by the elite content that is presented in this film. Films were able to gain audience attraction by featuring extravagant styles of living as well as a change in culture, by adapting to Western styles of living for those who were living abroad. With the films featuring a wealthy lifestyle, audience viewers were able to correlate the concept of Bollywood as luxurious (Anjaria, 2013). The 1990s era allowed for the change of derivative plots and instead started to focus on a concept called “New Bollywood”.

The term “New Bollywood” emerges from Goswami’s piece in which she explains how recent Indian films are transforming to advanced modernization. Advanced modernization in India began in the early 1990s (Goswami, 2016). Advanced modernization in Indian cinema has occurred due to recent trends in order to target a particular audience. With this transformation in films, it increased my interest as to how the transformation was portrayed in Hindi cinema. With the emergence of films featuring NRIs (Non-resident Indians), there is a constant struggle amongst adapting to a new culture, but also remaining and upholding traditional values. This struggle can cause conflict with identity and new surroundings may influence pressure to adapt to a new way of living. By analyzing Bollywood films from the 1990s to 2016, I further look into the socioeconomic and cultural changes in Indian values and how these changes are shaping a female character’s identity in the film. Since the 1990s era was the era that showed a prominent change in films focusing on concepts such as advanced modernization and personal desire, I decided to select films from the 1990s to 2016 to analyze the changes that have been featured in Hindi films and how these changes are shaping the protagonists’ identity.



## F. **Gendered Representation in Bollywood**

With the Bollywood timeline starting from 1912 to the present day (2019), analyzing how gender is portrayed in these films is an important concept to look further into as time has progressed. As previously discussed, gender has been observed in multiple media platforms. While it is noted that men and women are held to their stereotypical behavior in the media, it is important to look at how gender is represented in Bollywood films as well. A majority of women in Bollywood films have been subordinate or underrepresented, compared to men (Ghaznavi et al., 2017). Female characters do not have much of a role in Bollywood films compared to the men on screen in these films. (Gupta, 2015). Through a feminist perspective, “Mulvey (1975) asserted that women are on display as erotic objects for both the characters within the narrative and the audience” (Ghaznavi et al., 2017, pg. 25). Whereas men are portrayed to pursue a “traditional narrative” in which he controls the events of the story. Within each decade, a certain theme emerged in Bollywood films that would represent the ongoing position of how the nation was at that given period in time. Through these themes, the viewers are able to engage and are able to relate to how the characters are living in this period of time. In this thesis, I dive deeper and observe how the woman gender is presented within each given time period. With women consistently perceiving similar roles throughout the industry in which they are sexualized and hold to the standards of traditional roles, they are still seen as submissive towards men. Ghaznavi et al. (2017) support how female characters are often sexualized or depicted in traditional roles.

In the *Bollywood Industry* section, I mention two films: *Mother India* (1957) and *Deewar* (1975). Throughout these decades, the primary theme in films were either socio-political issues or social realist norms. In *Mother India*, the protagonist is a woman named Radha (Nargis), who becomes a single mother raising her sons, after her husband walked out on their family. During a

severe storm, a cunning money-lender offers to provide food for Radha's family if she marries him, in which she refuses. Several years later, her sons are adults and one of her son's seeks revenge on the money-lender by attacking him and kidnapping his daughter. Ultimately, when Radha finds out her son killed the money-lender and kidnapped his daughter, she shoots him and her son dies in her arms. Radha's presentation in this film has redefined "Mother India". The character of Radha is presented in the film in which she still maintains her "authentic identity, as symbolically represented in the myth of the nation as mother" (Jha, 2011, pg. 290). In this film, Radha is portrayed as a victim, as she faces several losses: her husband, her sons, and even her identity is at stake, when she is faced with several obstacles throughout the film, such as poverty and hunger (Jha, 2011). Ultimately, while Radha does end up killing her son due to his behavior, she is looked at in the film as a "mother-protector of the village...and thus secures their function in the national body politic as future mothers of the nation" (Jha, 2011, pg. 293). Even though this film has a female lead as the protagonist, it is interpreted that she is looked at as a mother, one who takes care of others, rather than as a hero.

In *Deewar*, the film focuses on two brothers who are surviving in the slums of Mumbai, after being betrayed by their father. Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan), ultimately ends up becoming a smuggler in the underworld, whereas his brother Ravi (Shashi Kapoor), is the exact opposite. Ravi works for the police and realizes that his brother Vijay is a wanted criminal. The film primarily focuses on the different lifestyles of both brothers, but ultimately, Vijay decides to quit his life of crime. Although Ravi and his mother have moved out after discovering Vijay's crimes, Vijay asks for forgiveness. Vijay's mother does not accept his forgiveness and both brothers end up fighting, with Ravi ultimately killing Vijay. This film primarily focuses more on the political climate that was happening in India at the time. In the 1970s, there was a further gap between the

rich and the poor due to government mismanagement and corruption (Virdi, 1993). The film also briefly touches on gender discrimination. In a particular scene in the film, a woman does not accept the food that Ravi gives to the family. Instead, the woman starts to argue how the state rather protects serious criminals, and runs after those who steal food, Virdi (1993), discusses that the woman is silenced immediately and is not educated for making comments like that by her husband. Virdi (1993) further analyzes how “the uncomfortable voice of a dissenting woman is silenced---or almost silenced”. Even in this time period, it is shown how women are treated poorly, even if they have an opinion on a certain topic.

Bollywood has struggled with representing women against traditional stereotypes (Gupta, 2015). Bollywood heroines in films are often represented as characters that primarily serve household and domestic duties (Sharpe, 2005). By upholding these family values, they are given the *Sita/Savitri* trope. The *Sita/Savitri* image is a theme criticized by scholars in which, “Sita is representative of a virtuous wife, whereas suffering Savitri who rescues her husband from death are all part of the preparation for suffering in the roles of wives and mothers” (Gupta, 2015, pg. 109). Bollywood films tend to recreate the notion with the *Sita/Savitri* trope (Gupta, 2015). Within the films, the female characters that represent the *Sita/Savitri* trope are perceived differently among viewers, based on the preconceiving notion of what *Sita/Savitri* represents. With the ‘Sita’ trope representing a woman who is more ‘traditional’, she is perceived as likable among viewers, compared to Savitri who demonstrates independence but cannot display the traditional feminine tropes that audience viewers are used to seeing (Gupta, 2015). These representations of how the audience views the women can influence viewers in how women should be perceiving themselves in their personal lives (Ghaznavi et al., 2017). With women being perceived as traditional, there is a notion that women are considered to be pure. Women’s

bodies are considered to be pure in Indian culture (Mankekar, 1999). Women's bodies are deemed as important since they allow for reproduction and the continuation of a family lineage. Through the Indian nation, sexual purity is considered to be sacred, in which women feel as if they are meant to obey this tradition in order to fulfill the expectation of what is considered 'ideal'. While women are given these expectations, it is necessary to look at if these expectations are changing. While times are changing, it is important to look at female gender representation and female gender roles in Bollywood films throughout the years to see if gender equality is being recognized. By analyzing films within the past three decades and with the changes that have occurred in Indian society, it is important to look at the themes presented in the films to see if gender equality is being recognized in India.

#### G. **Globalization**

Once the popularity of Bollywood films started rising, it soon made its way internationally. Bollywood started to make its appearance internationally after the premiere of the 2008 British film, *Slumdog Millionaire*. Globalization is defined as the following, "A process, (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and power" (Held, D., McGrew, A., Goldblatt, D., & Perraton, J., (1999). After the hit 2008 British drama film, *Slumdog Millionaire*, Bollywood has gained its reputation as a cultural film industry that tends to target the Indian diaspora (Matusitz & Payano, 2012). In order to reach the Indian diaspora, Bollywood films are mainly spoken in Hindi, in which the language was later known as a global lingua franca (Matusitz & Payano, 2012). With Hindi being the national language of India, the films do not discriminate against social classes and beliefs, rather they bring everyone together as a community to enjoy the film. Rao (2010) argues

that globalization is changing people's boundaries of self, perception of time, and their ideas. With the changes in boundaries, it can impact others to think differently than what they originally were taught to believe. Although globalization can change an individual's perspectives, Bollywood films have been successful in such a way that the producers create content that allows the diasporic community to relate to their cultural identity while living abroad. Bollywood films have been globally recognized due to the Indian diaspora.

Indian cinema has been able to show influence throughout world cinema (Datta, 2000). With Bollywood films being able to attract audiences internationally, "Indian media companies have entered into production and distribution agreements, with global media conglomerates, as in the partnerships between Disney and Yash Raj Films, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox and Dharma Productions and Warner Bros. and People Tree Films" (Monteiro, 2014, pg. 435). Within the Indian diaspora, Indians who live overseas have a sense of nostalgia for Bollywood films (Datta, 2000). Bollywood films have become a fan-favorite, especially within the Indian diaspora with Bollywood films being viewed all over the world. Bollywood is inhabited to a larger audience since "films are being viewed across South Asia, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, and Russia (Kaskebar, 1996)" (Takhar, Maclaran, & Stevens, 2012, pg. 267). Although there are a variety of genres in Bollywood films, the romance genre is known to dominate Bollywood films. This romance genre presents a fantasy dream sequence towards the viewers which have triumphed other genres. The romance genre has primarily focused on a hero with outstanding qualities who is usually admired by everyone. It further leads to the romantic hero who is given a task to save an individual from some sort of conflict (Takhar et al., 2012). While producers and directors aim for the storyline to be family-friendly, storylines often are blended with a mix of comedy, action, and romance.

A mere distinction between Hollywood and Bollywood movies is that Bollywood films tend to incorporate musical numbers in their films. A marketing strategy utilized in Bollywood films is that producers tend to release the movie soundtrack before the film comes out in order to gain sales during the premiere of the film (Takhar et al., 2012). By releasing the soundtrack, the audience is able to experience a part of the movie, by listening to the songs that will be featured in the film. Although there has been some doubt about Bollywood movies appealing to US mainstream audiences (Matusitz & Payano, 2012), Bollywood films generate a formula in which they are able to create films that lead to “an excitement that alludes to an extraordinarily creative and commercially attractive vitality while, at the same time, maintaining a close relationship with their roots as they negotiate transitional impulses (Sarkar, 2008)” (Matusitz & Payano, 2012, pg. 126). By looking at how Bollywood films have made their mark internationally, audience viewers in India and outside of the country are recognized with the types of films Bollywood creates. With Bollywood films continuing to strive internationally, my focus remains on the films from the 1990s up until present day with which I analyze how the films have presented themes within this time period and if there have been any cultural changes regarding gender representation of women and identity representation presented in the films throughout this time span. By looking at how the cultural changes are presented in films, it allows me to focus on the concept of the woman gender and if gender equality is being achieved, even after Bollywood has made its exposure in Western cultures. Since the West has influenced gender equality (Haq, 2013), it is necessary to look at Bollywood films and see if the Western influence has made an impact as to how female characters are represented in the films.

## H. **Political Economics: Bollywood Films**

There has been an attraction to Bollywood films globally. Bollywood films are known to be the largest film producing center in India (Chemmanoor & Pandya, 2017). In order to understand the reasoning as to why Bollywood films are so popular among viewers, it is important to look at the political economy of Bollywood films. Rasul and Proffitt (2012) discuss the importance of political economy to understand how the entertainment industry is dominated. Political economy has a broad definition, however Mosco (2009) defines political economy as, “the study of social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources” (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012, pg. 564). Understanding the political economy in Bollywood films is important for this thesis as it allows for a better understanding as to how the time period was reflected while the film was being created, as well as a better understanding as to how the distribution of films made an impact on the audience viewers. For the past 65 years, Indian cinema has some of the most distinguishing features in the subcontinent’s culture (Chemmanoor & Pandya, 2017). The economics of Bollywood plays a significant role in the country and in the market. It is difficult to determine what can constitute a movie as a “success” film, however it ultimately depends on the audience preference. The audience can determine the success of movie, rather than the choice of actor and marketing techniques (Chemmanoor & Pandya, 2017).

When it comes to audience selection of films, audiences tend to select films based on the respect of their views towards the actor, as well as “their views on character, liking in films, and preference of themes in films” (Chemmanoor & Pandya, 2017). While it is difficult to determine which actor or actress is popular in Bollywood cinema, actors that receive prestigious awards

during film ceremonies often receive recognition from categories such as “People’s Choice”, can help determine which actors should be featured in films.

Predicting the performance of Bollywood films is difficult since one cannot expect each individual to like every movie that is created in Bollywood. With the growth of different types of social media, opinions and analysis of upcoming movies have become more frequent to post on social media, which is one way to promote an upcoming film (Gaikar et al., 2015). Opinionated pieces and promotion of films on social media sites are ways for the film to gain recognition. Twitter and hashtag promotion are also key components as to how films can gain recognition. Prior to social media promotion, historical data usage was utilized to predict the performance of films (Gaikar, Marakarkandy, & Dasgupta, 2015).

Through the 1990s decade, the concept of dance became popular in Bollywood films which allowed for a rise in recognition of films internationally. Since Bollywood films tend to release the soundtrack for their songs before the movie releases, it gives the audience a chance to become familiar with the music that is associated with the film. Each Bollywood song tends to be a featured dance number and eventually once it hits the big screens, they become widely popular. The ‘dances’ that are featured in Bollywood films have caused interest in viewers since the concept of dance can be seen as “a collective institution of neoliberal governmentality and discipline (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002)” (Morcom, 2015). With Bollywood movies featuring musical pieces that showcase actors and actresses dancing, it creates an influence for audience viewers to learn the steps of the dance for a certain song. The promotion of the songs being used in dance studios has allowed for greater recognition of the films. These songs also play at wedding events, which can allow individuals to dance to them during *sangeets*, which is a musical event that happens during the day before the wedding. The promotion of these songs



being played at wedding events are also techniques that allow for viewers to become familiar with the music that is associated with a particular movie.

Looking at political economics in Bollywood films helps understand how the films perform due to a variety of external factors domestically and internationally. The films that have a higher box office collection have a reasoning as to why they performed so well. Earlier, it was discussed how viewers tend to watch films based on their favorite actor, genre, or preference in themes in films. My primary goal for this thesis was to analyze how gendered representation impacts the female character in Bollywood films and how it shapes their identity post the 90s era through a thematic analysis. By looking at how the political economy plays a role in Bollywood films, I was able to search for films that performed well in the box office and had a controversial topic as the main theme for these three films.

The three movies I have selected for this thesis are films that deal with a controversial topic and strays away from the common theme of 'nation'. Straying away from the common theme of the love of the nation in Bollywood films allowed me to explore the controversial themes that are present in these films, as well as observe if gender representation of women has evolved within these three decades. It is important to observe the films with controversial themes with a female lead, as it allowed me to analyze how each female character handles the problem they are dealt with and explore how each female character develops their identity through the problem they are dealing with in the film.

## I. **Intersectionality**

As I dive into this study, I am utilizing intersectionality theory to help further analyze how women are represented in Bollywood films based off their gender, class status, and age. Before diving into this theory, it is important to note that intersectionality can be defined in

multiple ways. Intersectionality can refer to several socioeconomic factors. In her piece, Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) focuses on intersectionality through race, gender, and class. Crenshaw focuses on the violence of women of color through structural intersectionality. Structural intersectionality looks at how women of color experience violence differently compared to white women (Crenshaw, 1991). Since the primary focus on my thesis is on how the woman gender and identity are represented in Bollywood films through socioeconomic status, rather than violence, I looked into additional scholars who utilize intersectionality theory in their work. Feminist scholar Patricia Collins analyzes intersectionality with factors such as gender, race, class, and sexuality that determine how social inequalities are taken into account. I decided to pursue Collins' definition of intersectionality since the scholar focuses on multiple factors that can shape an individual's identity based on their social inequalities.

Looking at intersectionality is important while observing Bollywood films because it allowed me to analyze how the woman gender, their class status, and their age is represented and to discuss the social inequalities that may be present. Social inequalities are constantly challenged in which those who wish to challenge it will "explain their experiences with social inequalities around them" (P. H. Collins, 2015, pg. 3). Throughout her piece, Collins (2015) aims to find a solidified definition of what intersectionality entails of. Collins points out how intersectionality can be related towards racial formation theory in which intersectionality can build on the racial formation theory by "moving beyond a mono-categorical focus on racial inequality to encompass moral forms of inequality that are organized via similar logic" (P. H. Collins, 2015, pg. 5). Intersectionality also looks at forms of oppression and how women deal with it throughout their lives. It is important to look at how women deal with oppression in their lives because each woman handles oppression differently. Intersectionality looks at how women

face different forms of oppression, however, it also indicates that women will experience and handle their oppression differently (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008). Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008), point out that oppression may have different meanings per individual. They claim that “oppression in one context may be different in other” (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008, pg. 6). The primary question that is meant to be asked is why women were put at these disadvantages in society. The ‘Triple Oppression Model’ suggests the following, “Multiple oppression of women on the basis of class, race, and gender, sometimes addressed as the ‘Big 3’ master categories, guided theoretical and empirical research on gender issues up to the 1900s (cf. Davis, 1983; Segura, 1993)” (Bürkner, 2012 pg. 182). With the definition of intersectionality changing throughout the years, it is important to note that intersectionality can be critiqued into identity politics. Mentioned in Bürkner’s study, Lutz (2007) criticizes identity politics through constructivist views of identity formation. Lutz (2007) discusses “intersectionality as a heterogenous effect of ‘doing gender’ or ‘doing ethnicity’” (Bürkner, 2012, pg. 183). Winker and Degele (2009) claim that intersectional analysis should “focus on context-dependent or even situational discrimination” (Bürkner, 2012, pg. 184). Ultimately, Winker and Degele (2009) claim the method of intersectional analysis to focus on “reconstruct[ing] interdependencies between social structure, symbolic representations, and identity constructs” (Bürkner, 2012, pg. 184). The formation of intersectionality can be divided into 4 different categories according to Winker and Degele (2009, pg. 51). The four categories are as follows: class, gender, race, and body. (Bürkner, 2012). Each category has a construct in how they are classified:

Class stabilizes power relations due to income, education, and social descent. Gender by heteronormativism, also by declaring heterosexuality and dual-sexuality natural. Race is categorized by power relations on the basis of structural asymmetries between symbolically classified- quasi-natural-human groups. Body constitutes power relations between groups on the basis of bodily features such as age, attractiveness, and ability (Bürkner, 2012, pg. 185).

This quote reiterates that each category refers back to power. Those that are perceived as “dominant” do not have to deal with inequality, however, individuals who are not granted the same privileges will face some sort of inequality, whether it be presented through their class, gender, race, or body. The power relations among each category help understand the perspective of inequality that consistently occurs for those who fit into one of the categories above. In my thesis, I also look at how socioeconomic factors such as an individual’s class status and age play a role in shaping an individual’s identity. By utilizing intersectionality theory, I analyze the protagonists’ background by looking at their socio-economic background, class status, and the power structure that is represented in the film and analyze how their upbringing can shape their identity.

#### J. **Intersectionality in India**

By observing Bollywood films, my main area of focus is looking further into intersectionality and how it is presented in Bollywood films. Before looking into Bollywood films, it is important to see how intersectionality is presented in India.

The study of gender in India has led to confusion and multiple viewpoints as to how it should be viewed. Gender in India can be looked at in multiple perspectives through gender, intersectionality, and inequalities. Purkayastha et al. (2003) discuss the three dimensions that overlap when discussing gender in the Indian context. Instead of categorizing gender as a privilege, Purkayastha et al. (2003) emphasize the ‘key interactions of gender, class, religious, and regional specificities as key for understanding the conditions of men and women’ (Purkayastha et. al, 2003, pg. 505). The differences in cultural background, environment, and religious backgrounds have been factors of inequality and how each woman handles inequality. Power differences in different locations can create an impact as to how each woman handles

inequality as well. Societal attitudes that are displayed towards Indian women are shown to be conservative.

In Indian society, there is an ideological view of how women are represented, “women as wives and mothers and subordinate partners in domestic life (Nambisan, 2005, pg. 12)” (Haq, 2013, pg. 173). Haq (2013) further explains how daughters are told to follow the commands of the men in their lives. Beginning with their father, then on to her husband, and once she becomes a widow, to obey her sons. The preference of male children is still considered to be high in Indian culture (Haq, 2013). This act of patriarchy has been a controversial issue in Indian culture. Through a feminist perspective, patriarchy is defined as, “A term for naming gender inequality or gendered power relationships between women and men” (Patil, 2013, pg. 847). Gender is classified as “one dimension of power struggle alongside caste, class, religion, and location” (Lotter, 2017, pg. 98). With gender differences creating a problematic issue in Indian society, it creates inequality for women who are treated unfairly compared to men. The power inequalities that women face can shape their identity. The caste and class women come from can shape their identity as well. As mentioned earlier by Samuels and Ross-Sherriff (2008), each woman handles oppression and inequality differently. This refers back to the intersectionality theory as it references how social inequalities can shape an individual’s identity. The treatment of women compared to men in Indian society is something that needs to be further explored through films as well. With my thesis focusing on gender representation of women and identity representation, intersectionality theory blends into this study as I observe the woman gender, their class status, and their age. These three factors are looked at in the film to determine how it shapes their identity. I identify how each female character handles the inequalities that are presented to them based on these factors.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **A. Thematic Analysis**

The qualitative method that I used in this study in order to recognize themes, is thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is a broad area of research, that can be defined as the following, “It is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006)” (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, pg. 2). Conducting a thematic analysis constitutes within six steps as cited in Braun & Clarke (2006), first, the research must familiarize themselves with the data. After the data is collected, coding categories must be created and themes should be generated. After these are created, the researcher must review the themes, define themes, and lastly must locate the exemplars in the given text (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). The purpose of thematic analysis is for the researcher to discover themes and concepts that revolve around a study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is applicable to this study since it allows for the discovery of themes that can help answer how the female gender is being represented in Bollywood films throughout the past three decades. Braun & Clarke (2006) further discuss how thematic analysis can be utilized in several ways throughout a qualitative research study. The scholars claim that a thematic analysis can be a contextualist method, “which acknowledge the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pg. 9). When it comes to selecting the themes that will be in my data set, Braun & Clarke (2006) specify the importance of providing a deep analysis of the data set so the themes can be easily recognized as well as it represents an accurate reflection of the data set. A latent thematic analysis was utilized for this study since I identified the underlying meaning of how female gender and identity are represented in Bollywood films. Braun & Clarke (2006) define the

following as a latent thematic analysis, “identify or examine underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations-and-ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (pg. 13). Since my thesis focused on female gender and identity in Bollywood films, utilizing a thematic analysis can help answer how a character’s identity is shaped and how female gender is represented throughout the film in that given time period.

Utilizing Braun & Clarke’s method of thematic analysis help answer my research question of how the woman gender is represented in Bollywood films and how the situation a character is given shapes their identity. The purpose of the thematic analysis in this thesis is to look at themes that represent themes through qualitative data. With my thesis primarily focusing on female gender representation and identity in Bollywood films, a thematic analysis is applicable towards this study since I was able to identify and interpret the larger themes that are present in these films. In order to determine what themes are present in the films, first, I watched each film multiple times and I took detailed notes that revolved around the female characters in the film. I created coding categories that specified the female lead’s behaviors towards her wants, desires, and noted their socioeconomic factors and the opportunities they were or were not given in the film. These codes helped create the themes, as well as the patterns that may be present in select films. I was able to then analyze the themes that are present in each film to see if changes in the woman gender have been achieved throughout each film. Thematic analysis is applicable towards this study since the researcher can apply this methodology towards a critical approach. Applying a thematic analysis through a critical approach can allow for the researcher to “interrogate patterns within personal or social meaning around a topic, and to ask questions about the implications of these [patterns]” (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The primary research question of this thesis is to investigate female gender representation and identity in Bollywood

films, in which the themes that will emerge throughout this thesis will be focusing towards the primary female characters representation and their identity in these films. In the instance that there may be more than one main female character, I looked at the main character, as well as the supporting actress if her role is actively present throughout the film as well. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that a thematic analysis will allow for a researcher to examine the ‘perspectives of research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights’ (Nowell et al., 2017). Although I did not analyze research participants, I analyzed the female characters in the film, and was able to create and develop themes that are present in the film, which allowed me to discover how the female identity is represented in Bollywood films within the past three decades.

The films that were looked at started from the 1990s and ended in the year 2016. With a rough estimate of a 10-year span among Bollywood movies, I was able to analyze the themes that are present in each film to see if changes in women have been achieved throughout each film. Identity was looked at as well to understand how the protagonist of each film develops their own individual identity through the cultural and socioeconomic changes that are present in the film. The films I looked at are the following: *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006), and *Dear Zindagi* (2016). My reasoning behind these three films is that they are fairly popular films that performed very well at the box office within India and overseas. Each film discusses a controversial topic for the Indian audience. The first film, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* is a popular film that focuses on Indians living abroad, which also resonates with the Indian diaspora throughout the world. *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* is also a successful film, that tackles the controversial topic of adultery in marriages. At the time, this was a topic that was not talked about as much and since Bollywood created a film about it that



performed well in the box-office, it seemed fitting to analyze how they presented this topic. Lastly, *Dear Zindagi* focuses on the stigma of mental health, which is a topic that is still considered to be taboo and less talked about in Indian society. This film also performed well at the box-office in India and overseas. With each film exploring a new concept that resonates with the new generation, I wanted to explore the patterns and themes that were present in the film concerning women. Each film has its own take as to how female gender and identity are represented; however, it was within my interest to look at each film separately to gather each theme and see if changes in female gender and identity representation have occurred in Bollywood cinema.

## B. **Summary of Chosen Films**

### 1. ***Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995) (The Big-Hearted Will Take Away The Bride):***

Directed by Aditya Chopra in 1995, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ) stars Shahrukh Khan and Kajol in the lead roles. The plot revolves around Simran Singh (Kajol) who lives a conservative lifestyle with her younger sister and parents in London. Although they live in London, their father, Baldev Singh (Amrish Puri) raises them with traditional Indian values and stays true to his culture. Meanwhile, Raj Malhotra (Shahrukh Khan) also lives in London and is raised by his liberal father, Dharamvir Malhotra (Anupam Kher). When Simran's father gets a letter from a childhood friend saying he wishes for his son to marry Simran, the marriage is confirmed, much to Simran's dismay. Simran convinces her father to let her travel around Europe before she gets married and her father agrees. On her trip, Simran encounters Raj and he consistently annoys her, leading them to have a rough start. However, once Raj and Simran miss

their train and get separated by their friends, they end up getting closer and ultimately fall in love. When the trip ends, Simran confesses to Raj that she is engaged and Raj hides her feelings for her. Once they end up back home, Simran realizes she too has fallen in love with Raj. Simran confesses to her mom that she has fallen in love with Raj, however, her father hears this and is furious. He immediately moves to India with his family to make Simran's marriage happen immediately. Raj follows Simran to India to try to win the approval of her father, however, he is presented with multiple difficulties while trying to prove his love for Simran. Ultimately, after a fight scene amongst Raj and Simran's fiancé, Simran's father understands Raj's love for his daughter and lets her be with him.

2. ***Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna (2006) (Never Say Goodbye):***

Directed by Karan Johar, *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* features an ensemble cast of Amitabh Bachchan, Shahrukh Khan, Abhishek Bachchan, Rani Mukherji, Preity Zinta, and Kirron Kher. Dev Saran (Shahrukh Khan) is a famous soccer player, married to a successful business professional Rhea Saran (Preity Zinta). They have a son, Arjun, and Dev's mother, Kamal (Kirron Kher) lives with them. On the day of Maya's (Rani Mukherji) wedding to Rishi Talwar (Abhishek Bachchan), Maya and Dev meet and talk briefly before Maya goes off to get married to Rishi. As they part ways, Dev permanently injures his leg and can no longer play soccer.

Four years go by, and Dev is incredibly bitter, short tempered, and rude towards everyone as he had to give up his dream, while his wife Rhea is successful and makes her the breadwinner of the family. Maya is also unhappy in her marriage as she found out she is infertile and does not show any love towards her husband, Rishi. Through mere coincidences in the film, Dev and Maya run into each other after last meeting each other four years prior. As they spend more time

with one another, they begin to fall in love with one another, but do not admit it, as they are both married.

Shortly after, as Dev and Maya try to help one another out with each other's marriages, they realize that they both are unhappy in their own marriages, and their partners are equally frustrated since they notice the lack of affection from their spouse. After Dev and Maya fight with their respective spouses, they both end up at the train station, admitting they fell in love with each other. Both Dev and Maya start to have an affair with one another, meanwhile Samarjit (Amitabh Bachchan), Rishi's father, and Kamal start to notice their children are in unhappy marriages and try to figure out a solution to make their children's marriages successful again.

Meanwhile, Dev and Maya continue their affair, and are caught in the act of embracing one another by Samarjit and Kamal outside of the train station. Both Dev and Maya felt guilty, and before Samarjit passes away, he tells Maya to divorce Rishi if she is not in love with him. Both Dev and Maya decide to end their affair, and tell their spouses what has been going on. Both Rishi and Rhea, after finding out, demand a divorce from their spouses and kick them out of the house. Dev and Maya part ways, and lie to each other by saying that their spouses have forgiven them.

Three years go by, and Rishi visits Maya to tell her that he is marrying again. Rhea attends Rishi's wedding with her new boyfriend, Jai (Arjun Rampal), and she notices Maya at the wedding. Both Rhea and Rishi tell Maya that Dev is heading to Toronto and encourage her to be with him. As Maya reaches Dev at the train station, Dev pulls the emergency brake, stopping the train, and runs to be with Maya, ultimately starting their love story together.

### 3. **Dear Zindagi (2016) (Dear Life):**

Directed by Gauri Shinde, *Dear Zindagi* features Shahrukh Khan and Alia Bhatt in the lead roles. The plot focuses on our protagonist, Kaira, (Alia Bhatt) who is living in Mumbai as a promising cinematographer. After a breakup with her boyfriend who shortly gets engaged to someone else, life seems to fall apart for Kaira. She is later kicked out of her apartment and is forced to move back in with her parents in Goa, however she does not get along with her parents. Kaira is shown to be depressed with her sudden change in events and ends up seeking therapy, where she is assigned to Dr. Jehangir “Jug” Khan (Shahrukh Khan). She starts to open up about her life falling apart and starts to gain a better understanding of herself. A common theme shown in the film is that Kaira tends to let go of relationships when she feels herself getting too attached to her partner. Jug notices this and we learn that Kaira was abandoned as a child by her parents when they leave her with her grandparents for most of her childhood. When Jug tries to assure Kaira that everyone makes mistakes, he convinces her to forgive her parents. Slowly, Kaira starts to get closer with her parents ultimately forgiving them and starts to feel better about herself and her relationships. Ultimately, the movie ends with Kaira letting go of the past and focusing on her current self.

#### IV. Analysis and Discussion

Based on a thematic analysis of the following three films, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006), and *Dear Zindagi* (2016), I was able to find four major themes that emerged in each film, and how some themes were presented similarly despite the time frame, whereas other themes were presented in a contrasting manner throughout the three decades. By applying Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis methodology, I was able to analyze each film by watching them multiple times in order to discover patterns about how the woman gender has been represented throughout a span of three decades. Not only was I able to find patterns about the woman gender, I was also able to discover patterns that represented how each woman's identity was shaped in these films. Through Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis methodology, I watched the three films several times and coded the data that aligned with my research question. With my research question looking at the differences in gender representation of women and identity development through socioeconomic status in Bollywood films, I was then able to explore and categorize the hidden themes in each film from the previous codes that were noted. Ultimately, I was able to identify the themes and subthemes within each film. This then allowed me to analyze how women are being represented in Bollywood films throughout the past 30 years. The four major themes that will be looked at and analyzed in my thesis are 1. Independence, 2. Desire, 3. Traditional Indian Values, and 4. Identity. These four parent themes were created from sub-themes that were found in the films as well. Within each parent theme, the sub-themes will also be discussed.

##### A. **Independence**

The first major theme that was interpreted from this analysis was Independence. In this section, I will be analyzing and defining how the theme of "independence" was witnessed in

these movies, how they were displayed, and the overall meaning of independence per female lead within each film. Through my analysis in all three films, independence is presented in ways in which the female characters take control of their lives. It also marks how the female lead embarks on a journey in which they make decisions on their own, without the permission of anyone else.

1. ***Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge***

In *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), we witness an unmarried woman, Simran, who lives with her parents and younger sister. In the introduction, we are seen that she has dreams to find her one true love. She secretly reveals to her mom that there is a boy who she has yet to see, but for some reason, she knows that he will be the love of her life. Her mom, instantly rebuts saying these dreams do not exist for women, rather, she is forced to marry a boy that is picked out by her father. In this scenario, Simran is demonstrated to have lack of independence. Her being controlled about the boy she is forced to marry illustrates how she still must obey her father, compared to what she wants to do. Women in this time period are meant to obey their fathers, or the male figures in their lives and throughout the film, we see that Simran obeys her father primarily since she is terrified of him (Mankekar, 1999).

One of the sub-themes that was found in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, is patriarchy. Patriarchy was grouped into the overall theme of Independence, because in Simran's case, her entire life has been ruled by her father. As defined by Patil (2013), patriarchy is defined as "gender inequality or gendered power relationships between women and men". Simran's lack of independence is a conflicting issue, since she is a young adult, yet she has to ask permission before being allowed to do something or to go somewhere. We see in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* how Simran reacts to each scenario when an opportunity to be on her own is presented.

The theme of independence is demonstrated in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* through the main female lead, Simran. The previous example of Simran not being able to choose a boy she wishes to marry, only represents one aspect of the lack of independence in her life. It also shows how patriarchy is still common within the 90's era, as her, her sister, and her mother, must seek approval from the male figure in the house. Further into the film, we notice a major climax in the film is that Simran wishes the travel across Europe, alone. Given the time period, while the 90's era in Bollywood was a formation of youth culture and new experiences, the thought of a girl traveling alone, was not common and considered to be dangerous. Girls are often told at a young age that they should not go out late at night (Wazir, 2013). Simran, slyly tried to ask her mom to let her travel, but even her mother could not grant permission unless her father said yes. This case of patriarchy demonstrates Simran's lack of independence, and in order for her father to say yes, Simran performs her daughterly duties the next morning (i.e., morning prayer, offering *prasad* to her family). Her father, who watches her with a smile on his face, comes to talk to her, honoring how she is a blessing to their family. Once Simran asks her father if she can go to travel Europe on her own before marriage, her father accepts, under the condition that she must remember that she is getting married when she comes back. This particular scene illustrates the heavy influence of patriarchy in Simran's life. This notion of patriarchy resembles the power "that a husband had natural authority of his wife and children" (Patil, 2013). Simran's adventure in Europe illustrates how her identity is shaped, since this is the first time she is on her own. With her father letting her travel Europe alone, we are able to see Simran's character grow since she has been given her independence before she sets off to marry the boy her parents have picked out for her. In this section, standpoint theory and intersectionality theory blend together. Simran's 'standpoint' is primarily her being a young woman in a society that favors men. Both

her gender and age have her realizing that she is not able to travel on her own. She must seek approval only from her father, since her mother cannot give her the same permission to travel on her own. Intersectionality theory blends into this scenario as well, because we see that although Simran comes from a well-to do family, her being a female and her age is a problem for her to go out on her own. The four dimensions of intersectionality mentioned by Bürkner (2012) (Class, Gender, Race, and Body) also play a part in Simran's life. The fourth dimension (Body) claims that one's age, attractiveness, and ability also play a role in power struggles. In Simran's situation, it happens to be that due to her age and her gender, she is faced with an inequality. She has to battle against her father to do what she wants, but ultimately ends up losing a majority of the time since he has more power over her.

Once Simran leaves her home to travel to Europe after receiving her father's permission, the concept of this newly given freedom is foreign to her. She almost misses her train and the way she boards is the train is by a stranger to her, who we later find out is Raj. While Raj comes to her rescue, Simran tries to avoid him at all costs, which ultimately fails, as they keep running into each other. Simran avoids Raj solely for the purpose that she shows no interest in him, but is forced to interact with him once they both miss their train. Initially, Simran demands Raj to leave her alone, and that she will fend for herself, which illustrates that she does not need to be taken care of. Once Raj leaves her alone, we see that Simran is struggling to survive on her own, almost gets arrested, and only manages to escape because Raj came to her rescue. Raj was able to talk to the police and have them let Simran off with a warning since she did not have her passport. Instead of thanking Raj, Simran then decides to yell at Raj, who ultimately argues with her saying he was only trying to help. This entire scene reflects the concept of patriarchal authority again as well. Although it was not Simran's father who saved her, it was still another



man, and even after the argument, Simran did as she was told and followed Raj for help. In this scenario, Simran's independence is shattered when she decides to travel Europe with Raj, rather than being on her own, since she realizes that she cannot handle this trip alone.

While Raj and Simran travel across Europe, Simran is faced with multiple obstacles. One instance is when Raj and Simran are forced to share a room. Coinciding with her values which will be discussed in the "Traditional Indian Values" section, Simran takes upon herself that she will not share a room with a boy before marriage. Once again, she demonstrates her independence, by leaving the room and spends the night in a barn. Although she attempts to be on her own, she has trouble starting a fire. Raj comes in as her savior, and offers her food and alcohol to keep warm. We see that while Simran is given multiple chances to be on her own, she fails at doing things on her own. Raj is always there to save her. This time in Europe illustrates how Simran goes off on her own without her family, but yet cannot truly be deemed as an independent woman, since she has Raj consistently saving her from trouble.

Once the trip to Europe has come to an end, Raj and Simran say their goodbyes, as Raj knows that Simran is about to get married. However, on their way back, both Raj and Simran realized they have fallen in love with each other. Simran, who decides to share this with her mom, realizes that nothing can come of it, as she is already expected to marry someone else. Her father overhears this conversation and is unwilling to accept her love for Raj. Instead, the father decides that everyone should move back to India and get Simran married right away. This once again illustrates Simran's lack of independence and presents patriarchal authority. Her father, who trusted Simran to go on this trip, is now resenting the fact that she has fallen in love with someone else. Simran, who is forced against her will to move back to India to get married demonstrates that she has not been granted the right of independence thus far. This scene

demonstrates patriarchal authority and reflects back towards standpoint theory, since Simran, who is terrified of her father, does exactly what he says. The concept of patriarchy in this film revolves around Simran's father who uses his dominance and authority as a man to have control and power over the situation, whereas the daughter must "follow the command of her father before marriage" (Haq, 2013). Standpoint theory revolves around this particular scene because as a woman, Simran is not able to make any decisions on her own, since her father is the head of the household. With Simran already knowing she cannot tell her father about Raj, standpoint theory is presented in this scene because in a society where she is aware of the privileges men have over women, she cannot go to her own father about her wants and desires, since it is assumed that he knows best, compared to her. She is oppressed by her father and his wishes when he forces the family to move back to India. When her mother tells her husband to hear her out, he does not agree and silences her. This scene also demonstrates the power struggle between a man and a woman, as the woman cannot have an equal opportunity of saying what is important to her. This scene creates a problematic issue for women as the 90's era consisted of a time that allowed for individuals to have more access to freedom, however it seems to be going in the opposite direction for women thus far in this film.

Throughout the remainder of the film, we witness and analyze Simran's battle between her love for Raj and doing what is expected of her, which will be further discussed in the section on "Identity". Focusing on the Independence theme, Simran consistently goes to her mother for advice, in which, her own mother tells her she must forget about Raj, because she herself had to make sacrifices for the male figures in her life. Her mother tells her that is how life is supposed to play out for them. Simran, who is disappointed in hearing this, decides to accept her fate and tries not to argue anymore with her parents.

This scene is important in the film, because we see Simran's character being tested. The concept of independence is formed in films by analyzing how the characters are able to make decisions on their own, but rather in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, we see that Simran cannot make any decisions for herself. These constant scenarios demonstrate that in the time period of the 1990s, independence for girls is still a rare feature. When analyzing the socioeconomic and class status in the film, Simran and her family are from a well to do family. They live in London, with their father owning a store. Making the transition from India to moving towards a Westernized culture, Simran and her family still maintain their traditional Indian values, but while it is to be assumed that Simran and her sister would have more freedom as they are outside of their homeland. Instead, we witness that the concept of independence is lacking in this era, since she must gain approval for things she wishes to do.

As the film progresses after the intermission, we notice that Simran and Raj are reunited and instead of shunning Raj away, both her and Raj come up with a plot that allows for them to be together, which will further be discussed in the section on "Desire".

Within the 1990s, we witness how independence was illustrated for females. It was not as common and shown to be as an idea that a girl can only dream of. Through the struggles that Simran faced in order to be with Raj, we notice that ultimately in the end, she was able to be with him since her father gave his approval before she could marry him. I wanted to then see if the theme of independence has changed in female leads at all, so I chose a film that happened roughly ten years after. *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* focuses on a much touchier, controversial topic for most adults; adultery in marriage. This film came out in 2006 and features an ensemble cast, making it a hit in the box office. I primarily chose this film for two reasons: first, to look at how the female leads were to handle a situation as controversial as this and secondly to analyze how

their identity is formed, since both female leads come from different backgrounds while growing up.

## 2. *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*

While watching *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, there were multiple patterns that were witnessed that involved the female leads to make their own decisions, without any patriarchal authority. Two subthemes that were found in this particular film, primarily, were confidence and success, which clouded under the parent theme of Independence. In *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, we have two women, who are both in failing marriages. Rhea Saran (Preity Zinta) is an established woman, who is the head of a successful fashion magazine, married to Dev Saran (Shahrukh Khan), a retired soccer player, due to an injury. Before Dev's injury, we notice that both Dev and Rhea are two successful individuals, who happened to be college sweethearts and got married shortly after, and they now have a son. The other female lead, is Maya Talwar (Rani Mukherji), an orphan, who is set to marry her childhood friend, Rishi Talwar (Abhishek Bachchan). Maya is seen to be more domesticated, compared to Rhea, as she consistently takes care of the home and her husband. Throughout this film, there are variations as to how independence is constructed, based on these two female leads.

Beginning with Rhea's character, we notice in the beginning, that she confidently walks in to her job interview with her boss saying how she is the best person for the job. She lives her own life and does not oblige to her husband's career ever, yet we are given an image of an ideal marriage, two working parents, who are both supportive of each other's dreams, and they have a loving son. After Dev's injury, he turns into a bitter, rude, man who is now shown to be unsupportive towards everyone around him. Dev's ego is brutally hurt, since he is no longer the breadwinner of the family, and that his wife is. Although we notice in the beginning that Rhea

does not show-off about her career to her husband who is in this injured condition, we can interpret from Rhea's behavior that is she well to do and is not reliant on her husband to take care of her. Rhea's career alone, demonstrates a shift as to how independence has changed within ten years. A lot of Rhea's success exemplifies her confidence. When her company does well, we see that her successes alone come from her hard work. Rhea does not have the burden of having to be a stay at home mom, rather she is able to work and provide for the family as well.

Analyzing Maya's situation from early on in the film, we see that she is set to be married to her childhood friend, and is having doubts about marrying this man. Her and Dev coincidentally meet (right before his injury) and Dev tells her that she should trust herself in marrying this man. Maya ends up marrying Rishi, despite the fact she still is not sure if she loves him. While Rhea establishes confidence in herself, Maya does not form this confidence in herself until later in her marriage. Although Maya tends to hold the status of a domestic housewife and a school teacher throughout her marriage with Rishi, she is unhappy in the marriage. This can be argued that she seeks dependence from her husband, instead I argue that she feels that she is trapped and is looking for an escape from her marriage, which leads her to have an affair with Dev. Her having an affair can correlate with multiple themes that I have analyzed in these films. However, focusing on the theme of independence, Maya is shown in the beginning that she is a woman who compromised on this marriage to her childhood friend, yet she presents her independent self when she is able to clearly demand what her expectations are in her marriage with Rishi. Although at times they constantly bicker, they end up resolving their issues at the end of the day. When Rishi is persistent on being intimate with Maya, she refuses, which also demonstrates her ability to not give in to her husband when he demands sexual relations from her. In this scenario, we see the concept of patriarchal authority failing, since the woman is not

agreeing to her husband's demands (Haq, 2013). Maya ends up defining why she is not comfortable with doing certain things with her husband. In result, her husband ends up forgiving her and attempts to not make her feel guilty.

Comparing these two scenarios show how Maya and Rhea are able to interact with their husband, without them having to conform to their own beliefs. Looking at these two female leads, we can see that they are able to vocalize their own beliefs and expectations about their identity, rather than being forced into making a decision they are not okay with. These two examples are able to represent the concept of independence, as both female leads are able to display confidence in their personalities.

Success is also a subtheme that was recognized in this parent theme since we are presented with multiple examples that both female leads demonstrate in the film. A key example in the film that demonstrates success for the female leads in when Rhea is offered a promotion at her company. In this particular scene, Rhea's boss gives her an opportunity to run the business in a different location. Rhea explains that she needs some time to think about it. After an anniversary celebration with Dev, Rhea casually brings up the conversation about her promotion. While this initiates her success, Dev takes this personally and gets angry with her. He starts assuming that she already has accepted it without discussing it with him. She argues that she decided not to take the promotion for the sake of her family, but this insults Dev even further, with him asking why she even bothered to bring it up if she already made her decision. In this scene we see that Rhea is deemed to be successful due to her promotion, as well as that she presents the pattern of independence by discussing her promotion with her husband and ultimately standing up for herself when he starts to attack her. The openness of communication that is presented in Rhea's character ties back to the thematic pattern of independence since she

now is able to use her voice when she knows she is not being treated well. I apply this scene towards the intersectionality theory because during Rhea and Dev's argument, we see that Rhea is being oppressed by her husband, because he starts arguing with her, putting her down, and is not supportive of her career due to his hurt ego. Intersectionality theory is applicable to this particular scene since although we see that Rhea is doing quite well for herself in terms of her career and comes from a well-to-do background, her being a woman and her identity as an Indian woman is the reason why she is being oppressed by her husband. Power relations play a role in this scene, because the audience still sees the power dynamic between a husband and a wife. We are shown that Dev still holds the power in this relationship when he criticizes his wife, whereas Rhea has to deal with her husband's irrational behavior. Haq (2013) also mentions how gender stabilizes power relations by the "woman acting obedient towards her husband, and yet cannot exercise her independent will" (174). Even though we see that Rhea is standing up for herself in this scenario, a conflict emerges between the couple and no solution is found. This pattern shift has changed from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, since in that film, Simran was not able to make her own choices throughout a majority of the film. Although this is considered to be a prominent scene of independence in Rhea's point of view, there is a breaking point that happens in Maya's life which also represents her independence.

In Maya's situation, we witness that she is somewhat more submissive towards her husband, but she is still able to hold her ground when she believes that she is not being treated fairly as well. The subtheme of confidence and success (slightly) is present in Maya's life is during the period when her and her husband Rishi get into an argument about Maya not willing to show more affection. Rather than her accepting everything that her husband is saying about her is true, she argues back as well and claims that she should not feel forced to do things that

she is not comfortable with in their relationship. While Maya argues back, she further proceeds to walk out on her husband in the middle of the night. This prominent scene illustrates the confidence Maya has in herself by not tolerating the negative qualities her husband says about her and she is also able to vocalize herself when she feels that she is being mistreated. I argue that the subtheme of success is present in this particular theme, not through a professional standpoint, rather through a personal standpoint. I argue that standpoint theory correlates with this scene because she challenges the dominant male ideology of her husband having the “control” in the relationship. Standpoint theory relates back to individuals who do not have power, and their take on society. Throughout the literature, I discuss how Indian women do not have as much power compared to men. By Maya walking out on her husband in the middle of the night, she is therefore challenging the dominant male ideology, since she is not obeying her husband’s orders. We watch Maya grow from a submissive partner in her marriage to a woman who can stand her ground. This later form her identity, which will be discussed in the “Identity” section of this thesis. Independence is also shown in Maya when she walks out on her husband in the middle of the night and chooses to find Dev in a train station and admits her love for him. Independence is a crucial theme in this particular scene since Maya is able to leave her home when she chooses and also admit something that she was fearful of, not knowing how Dev would react. These examples presented in both women illustrate to the viewers how women are starting to have a voice about their expectations and wants. Independence is starting to be present in women throughout this time span, because we are given patterns that illustrate how women are able to stand their ground and not be told what to do constantly. As of right now, we are seeing the concept of patriarchal authority being overturned.



Looking at *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, we witness how independence is exemplified between the two female leads. Both Maya and Rhea demonstrate the theme of independence in this film because they do not have to oblige towards their husband or the male figure in their life. Patriarchy is rarely shown in this film, since both women are able to have careers, commute and travel on their own to their respective areas of work, and do not have to tell the male figure in their lives everything that happens to them, unless they are willing too. An example of this was mentioned earlier when Rhea did not tell her husband about her promotion immediately, rather she discussed it with him after giving some thought to it on her own. While we see a change within ten years about how independence is slowly changing among females, I chose to take on a third film within another ten-year time span since I wanted to see if this pattern was developing or decreasing.

The third and final film that I chose to look at was *Dear Zindagi* (2016). Overall, *Dear Zindagi* is a coming of age film and brought an awareness about the importance of mental health in the Indian community. *Dear Zindagi* primarily focuses on a young woman named Kaira (Alia Bhatt), who is an upcoming cinematographer that wishes to create her own film one day. Throughout the film, Kaira seeks out a therapist to help her out with some problems she is facing in her life. Her therapist is Dr. Jehangir 'Jug' Khan (Shahrukh Khan). In this film, we navigate Kaira's journey towards life, which made this an applicable movie to analyze since we are able to witness how her character grows after seeking therapy.

### 3. *Dear Zindagi*

Independence is displayed in multiple ways throughout this film. In *Dear Zindagi*, we are introduced to Kaira, who lives alone in Mumbai, focusing on her career. She is in her mid-twenties and seems to have somewhat of a strained relationship with her parents. However,

we are able to see that she has a care-free life, primarily surrounding herself around her friends and her work. A scene in the film that displays her independence is in the beginning of the film when she willingly chose to break-up with her boyfriend in order to pursue another man. While this scenario indicates that she does not want to be alone, I argue that she demonstrates her independence in this scene because she knows what she wants and knows when to end relationships, rather than having someone else decide when it is not right for her. This is also a shift in how relationships are perceived, since the woman is now able to make decisions about a relationship, rather than just having the man make the decision about the relationship, which once again overcomes the patriarchal authority. Independence in this scene is featured through Kaira's ability to walk away from a situation that she is unhappy with, and she knows how to put herself first.

Another example of independence in the film is featured when after Kaira decides to break up with her boyfriend, she chooses to pursue another man. However, her mind immediately changes when the man she wishes to pursue asks her if she would like to come to America with her, and to make things exclusive in their relationship. The man who asks her this question (Raghuvendra), states that his ex-girlfriend will also be there, but he is not worried about her since he wants to pursue a relationship with Kaira. Immediately, Kaira changes her mind, because she does not want engage with someone seriously if he has unresolved relations with his ex, or she assumes that is the case. Her body language points at signs that she is not interested and leaves him sitting alone at the bar. Kaira's independence is featured here because she knows that she does not want to get hurt in this situation. Rather than following Raghuvendra around, knowing she may possibly be not the girl he ends up with, she wants to detach herself from him in order to protect herself.

However, a turning point occurs in the film where Kaira's independence gets taken away from her. After rejecting the opportunity to work in America with Raghuvendra, Kaira suddenly finds out that she is being kicked out of her apartment, since her landlord decided that they only want married couples to live in that building. Frustrated with work, her relationships, and now her living situation, Kaira is forced to move back home. In this situation, we can see that Kaira is back to living with her parents in Goa, India, and since she has a strained relationship with her parents, she does not talk to them as much. Instead, she tries to avoid her parents and still live on her own terms. Her parents who try to get involved in her life fail in doing so, since Kaira is not as open about her life, as we have seen in Simran's case with her mother in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. After some persistence from her father, Kaira decides to help out a family friend in promoting their new business. Kaira's relationship with her work illustrates how career focused she is about her job. She tends to put in all her energy doing what she loves for a living, rather than finding a man to marry and settling down in her mid-twenties.

While helping her family friend out with her business, that is when Kaira overhears Dr. Jehangir 'Jug' Khan give a lecture about mental health and the importance of it. She is fascinated by his lecture about mental health and decides to sign up for therapy to see if it will be beneficial for her. This marks the turning point in the film, primarily, since we are about to witness how Kaira takes the time for herself to discover the things that are truly bothering her, and we see how she starts to become self-aware of her own behavior towards others. I marked this scene as a pivotal point that demonstrates independence, since she is taking responsibility for her actions and seeks to improve her lifestyle. Responsibility is a subtheme that was noticed in this pattern since each film has a scene that demonstrates how the female lead has to take on in order for them to do what is right for them and their lifestyle. By Kaira taking on the initial responsibility

for her overall well-being, we see that she is able to take control of her own life, rather than having to rely on someone else to tell her that she needs to seek help.

By analyzing these three films, the overall theme of independence has varied throughout the past three decades. By witnessing how independence was featured in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, and *Dear Zindagi*, I was able to see how each female lead reacted when decisions had to be made about their own lifestyle. First and foremost, I noticed throughout this theme that each female lead is fairly privileged, and when analyzing their socio-economic status, each character is well to do financially, which puts them at a higher-class status. For Simran in *DDLJ*, I witnessed that independence for her was her tackling on her own journey to discover and explore Europe, however I also saw that Simran was never truly able to be independent on her own, as she was still relying on others for support. Whether it be her father making decisions for her or Raj saving the day when she was trying to escape from her own marriage, Simran's independence was not as visible as it was in the other two films. Although this movie was released in 1995, I can argue that for the time period it was created in, the film start to show signs of advanced modernization, in which girls were able to seek some aspects of independence, and in Simran's case, it was allowed for her to take a trip on her own, without her family members. Looking at Maya and Rhea's situation in *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, we see that the theme of independence has gradually evolved within the past ten years compared to when *DDLJ* was created. We are able to see that although Maya has a loving husband, she is still unhappy in her marriage and decides to have an affair with Dev, only because she knows it will make her happy, despite the fact that it is wrong. When Rhea comes to find out about Dev's affair for Maya, she demands for a divorce, which indicates that she is not relying on him for anything and can take care of herself on her own. Lastly, we see that in *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira

takes on independence by living on her own, having a successful job, and is working on improving herself, without anyone else's opinion. Intersectionality theory primarily reflects on *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, compared to the other two films since we see that Simran's character faces more oppression in her life due to her age, class status, as well as her being a woman, compared to the other female leads.

From the 1990s up until 2016, we can see that the concept of independence has started to change for women. By witnessing what Simran's behavior was like compared to Kaira, we see how each female is able to demonstrate their independence, depending on the time period the film was created. Although it was harder to do so in the 1995 film, it became more evident in 2006 during *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, and it became even more prominent during *Dear Zindagi*, when we saw the female lead was able to stand on her own ground, even when things were falling apart for her throughout the entire film. While independence has certainly changed throughout the past three decades, it is a prominent theme that allowed me to see how gender representation in women has evolved thus far. Independence is a key theme that should be deeply acknowledged because it allows for how women are being represented in these films. Through the pattern of independence, we see that the concept of patriarchal authority has started to diminish throughout each decade. In 1995, we saw that the turn of the era required a lot of permission from the male figure in the home and gradually, we saw that women in the latter two films were not as reliant on their parents as much.

#### B. Desire

The second theme that was found in these films was Desire. In this section, desire will be defined as the overall pattern in which the female leads in each film go after what they truly want, regardless if it is considered acceptable by society. Desire is an important theme that has

been illustrated throughout these films since it represents the wants and needs that the woman character is hoping for in order to be happy, and in turn, it can help her shape her identity, which will be discussed in the identity section. The patterns of desire will be looked at and analyzed in this section throughout the three films that were analyzed.

1. ***Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge***

In *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, the main piece of desire was Simran's admiration of Raj. Throughout the film, we see the two star-crossed lovers fall in love with each other, however they are unable to be together due to Simran's engagement with another man. The concept of desire is witnessed throughout this movie, since Simran and Raj attempt to be together, but they must face a number of obstacles in order to be together. Prior to their meeting, we see in the beginning of the film that Simran writes down her dreams and hopes into her diary. She has a fantasy about the man she wishes to marry, but she cannot reveal it to anyone. This particular scene was discussed in the 'independence' section and how it demonstrates Simran's lack of independence, but it relates heavily towards desire since it allows for her to fantasize and dream about her wants. The film is carefully constructed that while Simran discusses her 'dream boy' to her mom, we have a glimpse of Shahrukh Khan's character, Raj, and how ideally, both are meant to be together. This scene has illustrated Simran's desire since she is in deep thought about what the boy she will marry be like. It is an important scene as well, since Simran's mother later argues that girls are not allowed to dream or have hopes like this, as their life will be figured out for them by their father. In this time era, we see that girls are still not given much freedom about their wants, and they constantly have to fight for what they want. They still do not have the same privileges as boys do. Haq (2013) mentions that women are taught that "suffering in this life is bearable by hoping for a better life after death...by bearing the burden of this life through

self-sacrifice”. I argue that there is gender discrimination about wants and desires, since we witness in Raj’s case, once he finds out that Simran is the woman he wants to be with, his father encourages him to go after her, whereas in Simran’s case, her father forces her to marry someone else. Intersectionality plays a role in this scene as well, since we see that Simran is suffering from gender inequality even though she is from an upper-class status, she does not have the same rights as the men in her life, such as having the right to dream. Aside from being a woman, Simran’s age also plays a factor as well. Since Simran is considered to be at an age that is appropriate for marriage, the viewers see the differences as to how boys select their life partner, compared to how girls have their life partner arranged for them, by their father or other male figure in their life. Simran realizes that her needs are not being met, because she is being oppressed by her father in doing what he thinks is best for her.

We see multiple of examples of desire in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, and while the main focus of Simran’s desire is Raj, there are multiple examples in the film that demonstrate how much of a desire Raj is to Simran, which I what I will primarily be focusing on when analyzing this thematic pattern. Although Raj and Simran’s love story did not initially start off well, Simran began to admire Raj once her and Raj left the Europe trip. Simran’s desire towards Raj started once she started telling her mother about him. She was cheerful, giddy, and excited and even her mother was fascinated. She ended her story saying how much she loved him, with her father overhearing. While her father was angry and upset, he had no consideration for her feelings and forced the family to move back to India, as discussed earlier. Once the family reaches India, we notice how Simran is miserable. Her grandmother notices and asks her son why Simran is so upset. Instead of handling the situation, he asks his wife to tell Simran to forget about Raj.

In this particular scene, I analyze how Simran and her mother have a conversation that the girls are supposed to sacrifice everything for the men in their lives. Her mother promised that her daughters would never have to do that, but ultimately, she realizes she does not have a choice, and instead forces Simran to not think about him anymore. Intersectionality and standpoint theory blend into this scene together. Intersectionality is present when we see Simran as a woman from a well-to do family, who is still faced with inequalities about being with the person she loves. She cannot be with Raj, primarily because of the patriarchal authority from her father. Her age also plays a factor in this role, because unless she married, she is under the control of her father. Standpoint theory is reflected in this scene as well, because Simran's mother, who had to give up the privilege of an education so her brothers can be educated, and then had to give up her happiness, so her husband can be happy demonstrates that a man's happiness is more important her own, and she is trying to reflect these values onto Simran. This scene also reflects the concept of desire, and how it is unfulfilled for women in the 90s. The mindset of having to forsake your happiness for the men demonstrates that the needs and wants for women have not been accepted yet (Haq, 2013). Although we see that Simran is unable to be with Raj, we see that this film tries to create that possibility. This film decides to take a chance at allowing the young loves to go after what they want, but is aware of the various obstacles that may occur while Simran tries to be with Raj.

Simran's desire for Raj plays a crucial role in the film, because we start to see how much she is willing to go against her own father in order to be with him. One of the turning points in the film is when Simran is told by both her mother and father to forget about Raj, instead we witness that Raj has flown to India in order to try to "win" Simran. In a dream-song sequence "Tujhe Dekha To Ye Jana Sanam" (When I saw you sweetheart, I knew...), the audience is



exposed to Simran and Raj's desire to be with each other. We see both of the star-crossed lovers imagining what their lives would be like together. This song brings importance to the concept of desire, because we see that Simran's true desire is Raj, instead of the man she is engaged to be married to. This concept of desire for Simran brings the viewers hope as well, as they are being exposed to the idea of Simran possibly having her dreams come true. Throughout the entire first half of the film, we see how girls are represented, and how they are not allowed to explore their dreams, desires, and wants. When Simran's mother clearly defined that for her, Simran soon started to accept her fate, but it is when Raj came back to India in order to claim that he will fight for her, which ultimately brought her joy. While Raj fights for Simran, this can also be argued that Simran is still looked at as an "object" that a man has to fight for, I argue that the film primarily focuses on Simran's desires throughout the film, and that her main desire is Raj, and Raj has her consent in ultimately "fighting" for her. This scene is critical to keep in mind, as the assertion of desire and wants was starting to look feasible for girls.

After the turning point of Raj arriving in India to convince her parents that he should marry her, Simran's desires only become stronger. Throughout the engagement ceremonies, Simran is expected to perform certain rituals for her husband, which will further be discussed in the "Traditional Indian Values" section of this thesis. However, we notice that Simran's desire to be with Raj influences how she performs these rituals. She only allows Raj to complete these rituals with her, in private. This demonstrates the act of desire, because Simran is completely in love with Raj, that she is willing to do anything in order to be with him, even if that means going against what she knows is right. In this particular scene, we see that desire is present in Simran and it plays a part in how her identity is formed.

Desire is an important theme to consider in gender representation throughout this thesis since it allows for an analysis to witness if women's needs are met, since there has been an imbalance in equality for men and women in India. With *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, allowing to present the concept of desire in women, it is exposing this concept to be fair for both genders, rather than only allowing the concept of desire to exist in men. We see in Bollywood films that women are not being represented equally compared to men, so with *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* presenting this concept in a gradual way, we are able to analyze how complex the theme of desire is for women. We are presented with several obstacles in Simran's case, that making the theme of desire, a nearly impossible goal, unless she fights for it.

While we witness how desire starts to make its appearance in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, we notice that in the 1990s era, desire was slowly making its way to be a fundamental concept in recognizing women's wants and needs. Recognizing these needs and wants in women is a crucial step in analyzing how gender is being represented in women, since it allows us to analyze if there have been any changes compared to the literature. While we see that in *DDLJ* the film starts to present the concept of desire, I then proceeded onto *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, to observe if this theme was present or if it was not acknowledged at all.

## 2. **Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna**

In *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, we see that the two female leads are self-sufficient and are able to voice their own opinions, as mentioned in the section on Independence. While analyzing this film, I still followed the idea that desire meant the women were able to go after what they wanted, and the things that truly made them happy. With *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* being a film that focused primarily on adultery, the concept of desire was highly prevalent in this film, because we see Maya being the woman who has an affair with Dev (Rhea's husband).

Maya's affair with Dev illustrates the limit she willing to cross in order to be happy. However, Rhea, who is unaware of the affair has her own desires. Her desire focuses mainly around work as well as trying to understand her husband and why he is so withdrawn from her. Throughout this film, both Maya and Rhea's characters were looked at. They were both analyzed since both of their desires were different things, and it makes it more difficult when a person who is desired, is already married. This is similar to Raj and Simran's love story in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, since Simran was already engaged, but Maya and Dev's love story is considered to be more controversial since both individuals are married to other people. After analyzing *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, I was able to detect the scenes in which the theme of desire was present for both Maya and Rhea.

In *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, the thematic pattern of desire appears more frequently than it has in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. Since the 2006 film focuses on marriage and adultery, the theme of desire was transparent throughout the entire film. In Maya's life, we notice that she is in an unhappy marriage, with her husband Rishi. Although Rishi loves her a lot, we see that Maya feels as if she has compromised in her marriage with Rishi. Maya's true object of desire in this film is Dev, but she knows that she cannot be with him since they are both married. Ironically, in the first meeting between Maya and Dev we see that they do not get along, because they had a misunderstanding and Dev was coming off incredibly rude to Maya. However, a few interactions later, Dev and Maya keep running into each other and both admit to each other that their marriages are failing and that they are unhappy.

The concept of desire becomes visible in Maya's life when her and Dev begin spending more time together. Dev and Maya start spending time together because both of them feel as if they are able to relate to one another about what is going on in their lives. Maya and Dev start to

realize that their feelings are growing stronger for each other when they start exploring each other's interests with one another. In true Bollywood fashion, another dream-like song sequence, "Mitwa" (Beloved), presents itself in which we see both Dev and Maya slowly falling for each other, without the other knowing just yet. This song illustrates the concept of desire since we are able to see how happy Maya is when she is around Dev. She is able to handle his flaws, and does not complain about them, as she does when she is with Rishi.

Looking at Maya and Dev's relationship, we see that the more time they spend together, the more admirable Dev becomes to Maya. Maya's affection towards Dev ends up turning into a desire because she is willing to ruin her marriage in order to be with him. The climax of the film occurs during the anniversary of both Maya and Rishi as well as during Dev and Rhea's anniversary dinner. Both couples end up at the same restaurant, however after the dinner, Rhea and Dev get into an argument in which Dev leaves and heads to the train station. Maya and Rishi also get into an argument after their anniversary dinner. When Maya refuses to show affection towards Rishi, he is furious and insults Maya, causing her to run out and end up at the train station as well. In this scene, we see that Dev openly admits his love for Maya and Maya a few moments later also admit that she loves him too. This leads to another dream-like song sequence "Tumhi Dekho Naa" (Now, look what has happened), in which both Dev and Maya start their affair with one another. This scene resembles the concept of desire in Maya's life because it is witnessed that she is able to detect what makes her truly happy, and with her desire being Dev, she goes after what she wants. The dream-song sequences in this film primarily reflect the pattern of desire as well, since both songs ("Mitwa" and "Tumhi Dekho Naa"), can be looked at as symbols of 'desire'. In both songs, the protagonists are fantasizing what their life would be like, if they were with their ultimate desire. In this case, it happens to be Maya fantasizing about

Dev, and we see that Dev is fantasizing about Maya as well. This concept of desire is important to acknowledge in *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* because we see a shift in how women are being represented in the early 2000s. Not only is desire something that is acknowledged, but now it is being sought after as well. This is relevant to my prior research question as now we start to see that the woman is able to make her own decisions about her life, despite it going against her traditional values, which will be discussed further in the “Traditional Indian Values” section of this thesis. While we see that Maya’s true affection of desire happens to be a man she is not married too, I also acknowledge Rhea’s true form of desire, and for her, that happens to be her career and an attempt at saving her family life from falling apart.

Looking at Rhea’s character in the film, we see from the very beginning that she is a confident woman who is quite successful in her career. For her, things change in her married life after her husband Dev gets injured and can no longer be the breadwinner in the family. When Rhea starts to see how rude Dev is to everyone around him, her only wish is for Dev to love her again the way he did before he got injured. Her desire revolves around having him show affection towards her again, as we see in multiple scenes throughout the film.

We are aware that Rhea’s desire is also Dev, because she is willing to do anything to make her marriage work with him. We are able to see Rhea’s ‘desire’ of Dev in the beginning when she consistently gives him affection and reminds him about how much she loves him. She yearns for the feeling of love from her husband, because she feels like he cannot express his emotions anymore. In one particular scene, we see that there was a confusion among Dev and Rhea and while Dev tries to hide his jealousy, Rhea sees right through it. She tells Dev how much she admires his jealousy, and likes the fact that he showed it because it means he has “some love left in his heart”. This scene relates to the theme of desire since we can see the love

Rhea has for Dev and she is trying to express her love to him in ways he can understand it. Other acts in the film that demonstrate Rhea's desire for Dev is when she takes the first initiative when trying to solve the arguments that come up throughout their marriage. These acts of trying to save the marriage also demonstrate Rhea's desire of making her marriage work and the amount of affection she has towards Dev and her family. We see that desire works differently for both Maya and Rhea. In Maya's case, we see that Maya is willing to ruin her marriage and even Dev's to go after Dev, but it does not make her a bad person. It is simply her putting her needs and wants above everything else. A subtheme that was classified in both Maya and Rhea's cases of desire is stubbornness. The subtheme of stubbornness applies into this parent theme of desire since both women are willing to go after what they want, even if they know they are the ones who are going to have to put more of the effort into it. Desire is important to recognize in this film, as it has shown drastic changes compared to *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. Not only does Rhea focus her desire on Dev and her family, she also focuses it on her career.

Although we see Maya's prime focus of desire to be solely on Dev, we notice that Rhea also focuses on her career throughout the entire film. Tying this back to independence, we see that Rhea is also passionate about her career. The concept of desire is visible in Rhea's journey towards her career as well. She becomes the boss at an international fashion magazine and it is seen that she puts her career as one of her top priorities. She strives to be the best and almost anything she talks about will have to do with her career. She is proud of the success she has built into the company and will not stop at being the best until it is known that she is the best at what she does. When Rhea's company becomes the second best in the world, instead of celebrating, she tells her team they will not celebrate until they are the number one fashion magazine in the world. Her efforts into her career collaborate with the concept of independence but also play a

role in the theme of desire. With Rhea being the sole breadwinner in her family, she has to push herself in order to take care of her family, and with her family being a desire in her life, she tends to make herself the best she can be at work in order to fulfil her true desire.

Witnessing both Maya and Rhea's 'desires' there is a lot to unpackage in their approaches towards fulfilling their desires. While both women have defined their independence in the earlier section, they also have different ways of approaching their desires. Desire is an important theme that needs to be analyzed, because we see how it shapes both women's identity. For both women, they still suffer in their marriages, although they are able to escape the patriarchal act, both women still face a power struggle when they go after the things they desire. For Maya, her main desire was Dev and a way out of her failing marriage. She was able to spend more time with him because he reciprocated the same feelings for her. However, Maya was able to lie to her husband and went against her own values when it came to Dev because the attraction was just too strong. While having an affair is morally wrong, for Maya, the temptation of being with someone she truly cared about played more of an impact compared to her idea of what was considered right and wrong. The power struggle in her situation is presented in the film when Maya's father in law tells her to divorce her husband, in order to go after what she wants or if she wants to obey her role as a wife to her husband for the rest of her life. On the other hand, we have Rhea who is trying to solve her marriage, but also juggle her career and try to establish herself professionally as well. In this film, both women still face problems in their life and are suffering on their own in order to improve their lives. I argue that intersectionality theory is not present in this pattern of desire, since both women are not being oppressed based on their desires, compared to Simran in *DDLJ*. Rather, we see that the women are only suffering because they know they are battling their wants and desires against what is expected of them. The primary

subtheme of stubbornness is witness in both females because both women are willing to fight for what they want, which ended up being the person or thing that they truly desire. While both of them have their own means of doing it, we see that the concept of desire is present in this film, based on how the women approach their object of desire. This is an important scene to acknowledge in this time period because we see how women are getting a chance to go after what they want, but they still have power struggles to deal with. With the progression of desire and how it is somewhat accepted for women, I further look into *Dear Zindagi* to analyze how the concept of desire is represented in the film, if it is at all.

### 3. *Dear Zindagi*

In *Dear Zindagi*, we have learned that Kaira is struggling with her mental health and seeks out a therapist in order to help her with the problems that she is currently facing in her life. The 2016 film focuses mainly on self-awareness and is a coming of age film, but there are some scenes that have tackled the concept of desire, and how Kaira goes after what she wants as well. In this section, I still define the theme of desire as a concept in which the woman goes after what she wants in order to truly be happy. With Kaira being an independent woman living on her own and having her own career, we see parts in the film where she also goes after her desires as well. For Kaira, her desires mainly revolve around work and her romantic relationships. In this film, Kaira's desires were difficult to navigate since the film is primarily focusing on her journey to self-care. I argue that Kaira's primary desire is to take care of herself first, but will also discuss her desires she has towards her career and the desires she has in her romantic relationships. I argue that her mental health is the most important thing in her terms of desire because we see Kaira make an attempt to seek out a therapist, even though she knows that people may criticize her for going to see a therapist. Her fears about what others may say play a role in



her character, because it is a fear that she needs to overcome and it is a fear that we see she struggles with in the film.

In this thesis, I do not subject the theme of desire to only relate to an infatuation or a lust towards another individual, as I discussed the importance of Kaira's career earlier. I argue that her career fits into the theme of desire because it is something that she constantly wants to get better at, and finds the way to better herself. I argue that desire does not only have to be viewed romantically, rather it should be viewed as any element that allows a person to pursue what they actually want, rather than something they are expected to want.

While watching *Dear Zindagi*, the theme of desire appeared in the beginning, when we see Kaira's determination and passion about her job as a cinematographer. The theme of desire is present in the beginning because we see Kaira constantly asking the director if she can shoot and create her own short film, instead of just being an assistant. She tries to persuade her co-workers that she is a qualified person to work on larger films and even take direct her own films. Although she is constantly shot down, she does not give up so quickly, rather she keeps working on the films and aims to achieve her goal. This mild example in the beginning is important to analyze in this thesis because she demonstrates how she is willing to go after her dreams, despite the fact that she is constantly hearing that she is not good enough to direct films on her own yet. Instead of taking no for an answer, she ultimately tries to better herself. This scene demonstrates the beginning patterns of Kaira's desires as we watch her strive in her career. The concept of desire is relevant in this film as it will allow me to analyze the changes that have occurred from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* to *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* and ultimately up to *Dear Zindagi* to see how desire is presented within these three different time periods. It is interesting to see how

in *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira's career is noted as a priority, rather than her attempts at finding a partner for marriage.

Earlier, I argued that desire is not just limited towards lust and infatuation, and while I argue that desire is meant towards any element that allows an individual to go after what they truly want, we see that desire is both present and also lacking in Kaira's romantic relationships. While Kaira initially breaks off relationships she does not want to be in, she goes back and forth a lot on what she actually wants out of life. Desire is witnessed in her romantic relationships because in some scenes, we see Kaira lust after some men, but it is ironic because she tends to end relationships before she gets attached too quickly. For Kaira, relationships are a crucial part of her identity because we see that she cannot hold stable relationships with her romantic partners for a long period of time. However, I analyze how desire still takes a part in her romantic relationships. When initially meeting Raghuvendra, the man who later got engaged to someone else, we see Kaira's desire to lust after him when she starts putting up pictures of him and her in her apartment. She desires to go after him, but initially we can tell that she does not want to pursue him when she realizes she is getting too attached to him. While pursuing these men, we still see how Kaira chooses to let the men come to her, in which I further argue how instead of desiring other men, Kaira becomes an object of desire.

In the film, we see Kaira be involved with multiple men in romantic relationships. However, I have noticed that while Kaira does pursue relationships with several men in the film, we see that she ultimately ends up becoming the person who is desired, when these men are trying to win her heart. This becomes problematic, because we see her desired in a way where if she is not interested, they keep trying to pursue her until she has to make her intentions clear. This type of toxic masculinity resonates back to where women are still seen as objects and are

lusted after in Bollywood films (Ghaznavi et al., 2017). While analyzing her relationships with former partners, I noticed with her first boyfriend we see in the film, she instantly breaks up with him after her feelings for him faded. He did not persist her to change her mind, but when Raghuvendra tells her he is open to being more serious with her, we see that he is not comfortable with her saying no to him. In a particular bar scene, we see Raghuvendra trying to pursue Kaira to come to America with him, but when she declines, he still decides to pull her closer to him to have her really think about her answer. While we see that eventually Kaira is able to break free from Raghuvendra, we are able to see how Kaira is wanted by several men. After hearing about Raghuvendra's engagement to someone else, Kaira later gets into a relationship with a musician named Rumi. Rumi also does whatever he can to make Kaira fall in love with him, and he does so precisely through music. Although they end up breaking up as well, we see that throughout these relationships, Kaira is seen to be desired, rather than her lusting after these men. Kaira tends to hold high standards when it comes to her relationships, but we see that the men who win her heart for that short period of time, end up doing whatever it takes to win her heart. I argued that Kaira is shown to be an object of desire in this film in her romantic relationships since although Kaira makes her intentions vocal in the beginning, the men she ultimately ends up dating and breaking up with, have a hard time dealing with the rejection and try to win her back when they can. This scene reflects towards the power struggle between men and women as well. Except instead of Kaira dealing with the men's behavior begging for her to come back, she is able to walk away from them, which is starting to show the audience how a woman does need to tolerate this type of behavior.

The final scene of desire is scene in *Dear Zindagi*, is present when we see that Kaira takes the initiative to seek out a therapist in order to help her overall well-being. Kaira is

introduced to Dr. Khan after hearing him speak at a lecture about mental health awareness. When Kaira attends her first meeting with Dr. Khan to talk about the things in her life that is bothering her, we see that she is avoidant and is embarrassed to be in therapy. Eventually, Dr. Khan encourages her that while others may have their opinions about it, it will ultimately help her for the better. Desire is present here because Kaira knew that she was struggling and went after what she thought was right and would help her with her problems. This scene is important to look into, because for the first time, Kaira put herself first when she knew that she was struggling. While this can be linked with the theme of Independence, it is also linked with Desire, because after the first initial meeting, Kaira keeps going back to therapy in order to work out her issues. This is important to note because although there are social stigmas about going to therapy, that did not stop Kaira from attending therapy, because she knew it was working for her.

Throughout the past three decades, each female lead had a different approach and scenario as to how they approached the concept of desire. In *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, we see that Simran's main desire is Raj, and only wanting to be with him. In this time period, her desire is considered to be important, because this is still at period where girls did not have much of a say in how they can live their lives. *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* attempted to break these pre-negotiated stereotypes since we are able to see that Simran is able to break these stereotypes, however she has to face several obstacles in order to go after what she truly desires. We also see her going against what she knows to be right, in order to be happy. In *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, we see that desire is looked at negatively here, since the movie discusses a controversial topic of adultery and has the chances of ruining a marriage. Although these consequences are negative, we still see how Maya decides to risk everything she has in order to be with her 'true' desire, which is Dev. The theme of desire in this film has been portrayed in a negative aspect, since

ultimately it ruins the marriages between two couples, but it also demonstrates how women are willing to get what they want, despite the negative drawbacks. In Rhea's case, we see that her desire is presented more positively, however it does not give us the ending we were still hoping for. Her desire towards fixing her family life did not work out in her favor, despite the fact she tried hard to keep her family together. Her desire towards her career seemed to show more importance, because in some scenarios, she was more concerned about how she can improve herself at work, and even had doubts about her marriage in which at times she wanted to be single. Lastly, in *Dear Zindagi*, desire is shown all throughout Kaira's life. We are able to see her desire towards her career, in some parts of her relationship, and throughout her entire journey of trying to better herself. While the theme of desire is more prominent in Kaira's individual self and towards her career, it was interesting to see how she was still considered as an object to be desired after the men she was in relationships with. Throughout these past three decades, I have seen that the theme of desire has mainly revolved around men, but as time evolved, it was interesting to see how different elements in one's life influenced how much a person can go after something.

This theme of desire was important to acknowledge in this thesis, because it began to show how desire can lead to one ultimately forming their own identity, and how women are starting to be looked at differently, aside from just a housewife. We see the change that in the 90s era, desire was sought to have more freedom in one's life as well as being able to do what the individual wants to do, even if that means rebelling against traditional values, which will be discussed further in this thesis. We see that in the early 2000s, women are now starting show more independence, and they still have the audacity to do what they want to do, even if it is frowned upon. Lastly, we see prior to the end of the decade in 2016, we see that desire is

something an individual does not think twice about, rather, they go after what they want. The only part that is shown to be problematic is how women are still shown to be as someone who is ‘desired’ rather than holding their own equal status to men. In the first two films, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, I discuss ‘dream-song sequences’. This concept is to be understood as a symbol of desire. The songs that I mention in these two films reflect how the protagonists start to fantasize a possible “what if” if their dreams, wants, and desires actually come true. While I do not mention any dream-song sequences in *Dear Zindagi*, I argue that Kaira still has desires in the film, however, they are not presented through a song, rather, she attempts to make her dreams come true, instead of fantasizing about it. Although not present in all films, intersectionality and standpoint theory revolve around this topic primarily in *DDLJ*, since we see the discrimination Simran has in her life, due to the patriarchal control in her life, her needs being unmet, and her sacrificing her happiness for the men in her life. The discriminations Simran faces are primarily because of her gender and her age. Although she comes from a well-to do family in India, she still is oppressed by her father.

### C. **Traditional Indian Values**

The third thematic pattern that was found in this study was “Traditional Indian Values”. This theme has emerged in all three films. After seeing how these values make their presence in all three films, I have defined traditional Indian values as concrete values one has to maintain and uphold by adapting to cultural norms. In the literature, Indian values are presented through strong familial relationships (Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010), as well as dressing conservatively (Kripalani, 2001) and as well as maintaining their ‘purity’ before marriage (Mankekar, 1999). These ideas are known to resonate with Indians as well. It was interesting to see how these traditional values were implemented in the films throughout the past three decades. With my first

chosen film being released in 1995 and my final chosen film being released in 2016, it was intriguing to see how each film decided to have the female lead relate a concept back to their own idea of what Traditional Indian Values meant to them. While absorbing this pattern, multiple subthemes emerged in each film, and a common pattern that appeared is gender upbringing and gender stereotypes. These patterns fell into Traditional Indian Values because we are shown in each film how the woman gender is raised, compared to the male. Gender upbringing and gender stereotypes falls into the Traditional Indian Values category because in this section, each film has a scene in which the female leads wonder why they have to act a certain way, whereas the male lead can get away with problematic behaviors.

1. ***Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge***

Beginning with *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, the pattern of “Traditional Indian Values” emerged throughout the entire film. With this film being released in 1995, there is a constant struggle the youth face about staying true to their culture, but also trying to fit in with the changes of society. *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* is a unique piece that has been selected because for the first time, the audience gets to experience how non-resident Indians (NRIs) adapt to a new homeland. The audience also sees how Simran primarily struggles with balancing the values she was taught versus the Western values she is being exposed to in London. In this film, the concept of the woman gender is brought up and how the woman gender is expected to act in this time period as well. In this pattern, I selected scenes that stood out the most when the female leads talk about stereotypical norms and traits that were expected of them.

Traditional Indian Values were present in this film from the very beginning. In the beginning of the film, we see Simran, her sister, and her mom talking about why their mother calls their father everyday making sure he arrives at his place of work safely. In this scene, the

youngest sister teases her mom asking why she has to do this every day, in which the mother later responds by saying that “one day you will understand”. We see that this scene reflects the common notion of how women are portrayed as caretakers, with Simran’s mother checking in on her husband to see if he has reached safely. Simran’s mother is also a stay-at-home mom, and we see that her prime duties are taking care of the house and raising her daughters. When we look at Simran’s character, we see her as a bright, bubbly, individual who has many hopes and dreams as to how her life should be like. However, in the film we see that she battles with what she wants (her desires) and what is expected of her (traditional Indian values).

We see traditional Indian values emerge into Simran’s life when she is faced with the battle of wanting to go onto a Europe trip with her friends or waiting to go back to India to get married to a man she has never met before. She realizes that when her friends ask her to explore Europe with them, Simran’s immediate reaction is saying that her father will not allow her to. Her immediately jumping to that conclusion shows us that she is still restricted under the values that she was taught by her parents, in which girls should not be able to travel alone. When Simran decides to ask her mom, her mom gives the reaction that Simran was expecting, that she would have to ask her father in order to go on this trip. While Simran prays for and hopes that her father is in a good mood, it is apparent that Simran wants to go on this trip, despite the fact that she might not be able to, depending on what her father says. In the scene that leads up to this, traditional Indian values are apparent when we see that once the father figure comes home, the girls and mother are sitting in the living room quietly reading, listening to Hindu hymns. The sense of patriarchy is relevant here, because the female characters are adapting to how their father wants them to be, rather than being their true selves. Although the father comes back



angry after a mishap at his place of work, the next day, we see Simran do “everything right” in order to please her father.

Before asking permission from her father if she is allowed to go on the trip to Europe, Simran is up early in the morning, before her parents, praying to God and offering *prasad* to her father when he arrives. These aspects of Simran represent her displaying the traditional Indian values. Her father is impressed because Simran has not adapted to Western ideals while living in London. The concept of “western ideals” refers back to Hall’s interpretation of how the West is looked at. Stuart Hall (1992) argues that the West can be used as a model of comparison, in a way to “compare what extent different societies resemble, or differ from one another” (186). In this case, Simran has adapted to the cultural norms of Indian culture by still doing what is expected of her and not forgetting where she came from, despite the fact that she came to London at a young age. I use Hall’s definition of the “West” to argue that Simran’s father looks at the Western ideals differently, compared to his own. Simran’s father takes pride in knowing that his daughters are true “Hindustanis”, since they follow the traditions that are expected of them. Shortly after, before Simran asks her dad if she can go to the Europe trip, her dad acknowledges the fact that he is proud of her and everything she has done, he further states that she is a good daughter and he is blessed to have a daughter like her. With Simran’s father stating she is a good daughter; he exemplifies this through her acts of staying rooted towards her culture. These traditional values of being close to one’s culture is highly regarded in Indian culture and a majority of films prior to the 1990s showed the importance of staying close to your culture, but this film presented it in a different context, by showing how Indian values can still be reciprocated while living abroad.

Once Simran is granted permission to go to Europe, that is when we meet Raj, who has been giving Simran a hard time during the trip. After missing the train one day, both Simran and Raj have to work together in order to get back to the rest of the group. One particular scene that stood out in the film is when Raj and Simran are forced to share a room. Initially, the thought in Simran mind was that if they shared a room, Raj would take advantage of her. Although she ends up leaving, she ends up back in the room after drinking too much that night. Raj brought her back to the room and Simran wakes up in Raj's clothes. Simran goes against the norm of not drinking, and instead, ends up very drunk while trying to stay warm. The sense of freedom has given Simran more leeway to act differently, because she is not being watched. This will further be discussed in the identity section. Coming back to the scene where Simran and Raj end up sleeping in the same room together, Simran, who is now sober, wakes up in panic and shock. She assumes that her and Raj had sex that night, which makes her nervous, upset, and scared. When Simran starts yelling at Raj, falsely accusing him of taking advantage of her, Raj firmly tells her that he did not do anything to her, and states that he knows the honor of an Indian girl. In Indian culture, sexual purity of an Indian woman is a symbol of "the purity of national culture" (Mankekar, 1999, pg. 739). This is a powerful scene because the audience is shown that a woman's virginity is considered to be sacred in Indian culture, and this scene is also emotional since it reiterates back to how important these traditional values are, and how girls view themselves, if they do not uphold themselves to these values.

Towards the climax of the film, when Simran is telling her mother about Raj, her father overhears, and immediately demands that the family moves back to India in order to get Simran married. While this is talked about in the section on Independence, it is relatable to this section on traditional Indian values as well, because according to her father, Simran went against her

values by falling in love with a different boy than the boy her parents initially picked out for her. Initially, arranged marriages were common in the Indian culture, and love marriages were rare. They were only ideas and not reality, in this era. Arranged marriages “sustains the patrilineal and patrilocal family system and caste system (Karve 1965; Kolenda 1987)” (Allendorf & Pandian, 2016). With *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* representing the idea that love among the youth can be found outside of an arranged marriage, the movie slowly started to introduce new concepts outside of traditional Indian values. The film was starting to break the traditional norm of arranged marriages and introduced the idea of a love marriage. The traditional norm of having an arranged marriage was a concept that deemed to be accepted in Indian culture, which is why when *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* introduced the concept of a love marriage, it portrayed all the possible obstacles that can happen when trying to go against the norm of what one is used to.

A subtheme that was found in this film was gender upbringing. Throughout a majority of the film, Simran questions why she is put in a predicament where she cannot be with the person she loves, due to her father being against it. These thoughts correlate to traditional Indian values since girls are expected to uphold a certain ideal version of themselves, as discussed in the literature. Women are shown to be submissive, forgiving, and need to adapt towards their male partner or figure in their lives. This exact stereotype is presented in the film as well. Once Simran and her family move back to India for Simran’s marriage, her parents both realize that she is still in love with Raj. When Simran’s mother talks to Simran, she tells her daughter that she had to make so many sacrifices as a woman. She had to put off her education so her brothers can be educated, then she sacrificed her happiness for her husband’s happiness, and she said she did not want the same thing to happen to her daughters. However, she then rebuts and tells her daughter that she needs to forget about Raj for the sake of her father’s happiness. As discussed

earlier in the section on “Desire”, this reflects back to the standpoint theory, since Simran’s mother is in a position of lesser power, and views the world in such a way that men are the authority figures, while women have to obey. Simran’s mother goes against the idea that a woman’s happiness is ideal, and instead sides with her husband, when telling Simran that Raj should be forgotten. The concept of “Pita, Pati, Putra (Father, Husband, Son)” is followed in this scenario. Haq (2013) argues that an Indian woman is told since childhood that she must obey the commands of the men in her lives, starting with her father before marriage, then her husband, and ultimately her son after her husband passes away. Simran later realizes that she is not even sure that Raj loves him, rather she compliments her father in saying that he only knows what is best for her.

This scene emphasizes the problematic issue as to how girls are looked at and how they do not have a saying in their own decisions. Furthermore, I argue how intersectionality yet again plays a role in the oppression of women in this time period. The power imbalance between men and women in this film is rather high, and we see that women are oppressed when forsaking their happiness for their father and husband, regardless of their age and class status. While this resembles towards creating their own identity, this scene plays a major role in traditional Indian values, because Simran is sacrificing her happiness in order to honor her father and mother. Respecting your elders and maintaining family relations is a core value in Indian culture (Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010), and the film shows how Simran respects that by trying to forget about Raj. However, the gender upbringing is also present in this scene, when we see how Simran’s mother tells her how she had to sacrifice her happiness for the male figures in her life. Lajjo (Simran’s mother), passes this characteristic down to her daughter, she is going to have to do the same as she did, because that is what is expected of girls. This brings us back into how traditional Indian

values are incorporated in the film. In the 90s era, it was still common for traditional values to take place, but the transition into the “new youth culture” is trying to create that divide.

We see how traditional Indian values are heavily emphasized in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, since the time period was still adapting towards the new advanced culture. The values that are meant to be honored and kept sacred towards an Indian woman are heavily present in the film and instead of the female lead arguing against it, she accepts it, because she feels as if she has no other choice. How Simran is presented in *DDLJ* represents the struggles girls go through, when they are forced to choose between what they actually want versus what is expected of them. This later plays into how her identity is shaped which is the final pattern that is discussed in this thesis. Jumping ahead to ten years later, I look at *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* to see how Traditional Indian Values are presented in the film between two female leads. While we see that Maya and Rhea come from different backgrounds, both women still struggle with this concept, along with trying to adapt to their marriages. In this film, I analyze both how Rhea and Maya are presented with situations that relate back to maintaining and upholding the traditional Indian values and how they go about the situation. This movie was interesting to analyze for this pattern since the film primarily focuses on adultery and infidelity, two themes that are already frowned upon across all cultures, so noticing how traditional Indian values played a role in these female leads’ decision making throughout the film was quite surprising.

## 2. *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*

Since Maya’s character is more controversial, I paid closer attention to her, since she is the one who ultimately ends up cheating on her husband Rishi, with Dev. Traditional Indian Values come into play in Maya’s life from the very beginning. In the beginning of the film, we see that Maya, who is fully dressed up in bridal attire is second-guessing her marriage.

She happens to be talking to Dev, who is a complete stranger at the time about love and marriage. While Dev promptly asks her if she is even in love with the man she is marrying. Maya says that she is doing it because she is an orphan and she is happy that the family who raised her wanted her to marry their son. Looking at this scene, we see that Maya is not exactly happy with the situation she is in, she is having second thoughts about her marriage, and is only marrying Rishi because she feels as if she owes it to him, since he has asked so many times. This sense of compromise that Maya is giving to Rishi refers back to her being submissive and non-confrontational about some aspects about her life. The subtheme of gender upbringing relates to this context, because although we are unaware of how Maya was raised prior to being adopted, she still believes that she has to get married because it is expected of her, even though she is not completely in love with the man she is married to. It is expected for girls to be passive and submissive, which is what is being shown here through Maya's thoughts about marriage.

As the film goes on, another scene in which traditional Indian values are present is watching Maya and Rishi's married life. We are shown multiple gender stereotypes in this relationship between the couple. Maya, who is constantly cleaning the house and taking care of both Rishi and her father-in-law seems to fit the stereotype of how women are meant to be caretakers of the house. We see Rishi's behavior of not helping his wife out with household duties as well, which establish stereotypical behaviors among men and women. Living with the husband's family is a traditional value that has been established in the Indian community, and we see that in their family dynamic as well. Maya lives with Rishi and his father, since Rishi's mother has passed away. It is interesting to see how this familial lifestyle has been set up as a traditional lifestyle without any changes in how women have been presented when it comes to maintaining and upholding domestic duties. Traditional Indian Values are relevant in this scene

because of the gender-based norms that are presented in the film. We see the woman as the caretaker and the man as the breadwinner. Although Maya does work, her work is not as heavily emphasized in the film as Rishi's is. We see him go to work and come back several times, but it is not only until after the divorce where we see Maya's job become more present in the film. We also see these values be present in scenes when Maya is living with her husband's family, instead of having both Maya and Rishi live on their own. The familial bond is a value that is strongly emphasized in Indian communities and it is shown that ten years later compared to *DDLJ*, that is still a value that is accepted and normalized.

The final scene where traditional Indian values are presented in Maya's life is when she has to remember the promise she made to her husband, about always being faithful towards him. I understand that being unfaithful in a marriage is frowned upon among several cultures, but I felt this scene was important to include in this pattern, since Maya went through the religious rites of the marriage in the beginning of the film. As Maya and Rishi's wedding goes on, we first see that the couple takes seven rounds around the fire, traditionally known as *Saptapadi*. The rite of saptapadi indicates the vows between then man and the woman, and each round around the fire indicates a different vow. The concept of saptapadi binds the couple together, promising each other they will be together for the rest of their lives. We are also shown the auspicious scene of her husband, Rishi, applying *sindoor*, the traditional red powder applied by the husband, indicating that the woman is married, on Maya's parting-line of her hair. These emblems indicate that she is a married woman (Kripalani, 2001). Applying this powder to a woman also indicates that she will be faithful to her husband as well. This scene is important to look at when observing the pattern of traditional Indian values, because although Maya has made these promises towards her husband, she ultimately ends up breaking them, when pursuing her affair with Dev.

The significance of the Indian wedding demonstrates irony into Maya's character since we see that halfway in the film, she breaks the promises she made towards Rishi and goes against the traditional Indian values that were exemplified earlier in the film. Earlier in the film we saw that Maya was compromising herself into her marriage with Rishi, which ultimately made her unhappy. The breaking point of Maya destroying these promises is when she decides to have sex with Dev, committing an act of adultery. This act of behavior goes against the pattern of traditional Indian values, which created a controversial turning point in the film. Since adultery is generally frowned upon across cultures, standpoint theory can be applied to understand this scene. With acts of adultery and infidelity generally being frowned upon, this scene emphasizes on Maya's behavior and she feels a small amount of guilt since she will now be labeled as an adulterer, rather her desire towards Dev tend to overrule her thoughts about being labeled as an adulterer, since she still decided to be unfaithful towards her husband and in her marriage. Maya did not care about what was considered to be right or wrong, since she was already unhappy in her marriage. Since she knew that sleeping with Dev was already wrong, she still felt as if she should, since she truly loved him, even though it went against her values and how she was completely okay with breaking the trust and bond she formed with Rishi.

Looking at Rhea's character in this film, we see that the traditional Indian values are hardly present in her life. Rhea demonstrates herself as a woman who is self-sufficient, independent, and ultimately the breadwinner in this familial lifestyle. While Rhea and Dev live with Dev's mother, that is as close as it gets for Rhea to have traditional Indian values present in her life. With the subthemes of gender upbringing and gender stereotypes present in the overall pattern of traditional Indian values, we see that Rhea and Dev end up going against the stereotypical gender norms. Since Dev's accident, we notice that Rhea has to be the breadwinner



for the family since Dev lost his five-million-dollar contract to play soccer. In Rhea's life, there are two major scenes I will discuss that relate towards traditional Indian values and how they impact the couple's lifestyle.

After realizing that Dev and Maya are starting to form feelings for each other, the dream-sequence like song "Mitwa" plays in the background. In this song, we see that Dev and Maya are helping each other out by surprising their spouses with an anniversary dinner. After the dinner, Rhea and Dev end up back home, and when Rhea mentions to Dev that she received a promotion at work, but said no to it without discussing it with Dev, we see that Dev has a hurt ego over all of this. He then gets angry at Rhea for not telling him and both of them get into an argument. Dev's anger gets to the better of him and he ends up yelling at their son as well. Rhea is angry with him for treating their kid so poorly, but Dev rebuttals by saying that Rhea is never home to take care of him. Rhea gets angry and tells him that she is too busy working, earning money for the family, which hits Dev's ego. This part in the film shows the audience how gender roles can be reversed, but even when they are, both the man and woman have mixed emotions about it, since they are still being blamed for not doing "their part" in the marriage. I relate this scene to traditional Indian values, because the subthemes of gender upbringing and gender stereotypes are highly visible in this scene. While society is used to the woman being the caretaker and staying at home, we see that Rhea is actually the breadwinner, who is more focused on her career, rather than making sure her family life is stable at home as well. As mentioned earlier, intersectionality plays a role in this scene. Earlier, I discussed how Rhea has to deal with Dev's rude behavior, but intersectionality blends into this scene because although Rhea is an Indian woman with a high-class status and a successful career, her husband still oppresses her, yells at her, and insults her for doing better than him in her career. Rhea is still at a disadvantage in this scene, because she is

not receiving the respect from her husband, nor is she looked at as a successful mother by her husband, since she is never around to help raise their son. Rhea no longer holds her duties as a “traditional Indian wife” and that is being used held against her. Since she is not playing the role of the “devoted wife” (Haq, 2013), that is being held against her by her husband.

Intersectionality is apparent in this scene because Rhea’s identity as an Indian woman, who is working, with a relatively high-class status, is being used against her by her husband since she is not fulfilling the expectation of being a good mother or a traditional Indian wife. Rhea ultimately ends up being a victim in her own home, since she cannot receive the same respect from her husband as she does in the workplace. This scene actually rejects the concept of traditional Indian values since we see how much the couple argues and that both Dev and Rhea are not acting like a married couple, rather they act as if they are two single people, who live in the same house. Traditional Indian values indicate values about a sense of belonging in one’s family, which we see that are broken here as well. Dev and Rhea’s marriage is already destroyed at this point, so we see how the values are implemented in the film, even if they are not being represented as clearly.

After their fight, we see that Dev and Rhea are not on speaking terms, which coincidentally enough, Maya and Rishi are also not speaking to each other for other reasons. In this final scene, I will demonstrate how gender upbringing played a significant impact as to how traditional Indian values are formed in Rhea’s life. Rhea is talking to her mother-in-law about what happened between her and Dev. While this puts her mother-in-law in a tough position, deciding between her son and her daughter-in-law, she tells Rhea that Dev is like this due to his nature. While Rhea is furious, her mother-in-law still says that Rhea should be the one to reach out first as it is her duty. When Rhea hears this, she is annoyed and asks “Why does the girl

always have to do the right thing first? Why can't he?'. This is a powerful sentence as it brings up the issue that girls need to be held responsible for the problems that happen in a marriage or anywhere else. The man's behavior is acceptable, but the woman should be the one who should try to fix things. This relates to gender upbringing as to how women are taught that they need to behave in a certain way in order to be liked and appreciated, compared to men, where they are allowed to get away with any type of behavior. I link this scene to the pattern of traditional Indian values, because it is shown that Rhea has to adapt to what is expected of her, when problems arise in her marriage. She has to adapt to and maintain certain cultural norms, even though this film has showed us that the traditional Indian values do not really apply in her lifestyle with Dev. They apply more towards Maya's character, but in Rhea's situation, we see that she lives her life differently, which shows us that she is more independent and has adapted towards Western ideals.

In *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, both female characters were presented with situations that they tested their character and whether they had to adapt towards Indian ideals or if they were completely against it. A lot of traditional Indian values stemmed from gender norms and stereotypes, since the culture still focuses on male privilege and women have not yet reached the same equality level as men. With Dev's ego being hurt that his wife is working and he is not, demonstrates that the equality and level of respect towards women has not been accepted yet. Although there are some changes, we see in *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* about traditional Indian values that were not present in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. In the former film, we see that both Rhea and Maya do not conform towards everything their husbands say, rather they still make decisions on their own, which is linked similarly towards the pattern of independence, except for the fact that in this pattern, the women are still making compromises in order to make

their marriages work because they are afraid people may look at them differently if they have a failing marriage. Whereas in *DDLJ*, all the problems were immediately reported to the parents and they had control over the situation of whatever was happening in Simran's life.

After analyzing both of these films, I jump ahead another ten years to analyze how traditional Indian values have emerged in 2016 in *Dear Zindagi*. Looking at this film allowed me to observe how traditional Indian values are present in the film or if they are completely dismissed due to the era between *DDLJ* (1995) and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006). With the economy shifting, ways of living, and technology advancing in 2016, it is important to realize that the way individuals are raised are changing, which is why looking at Kaira's character in the film is important because we are able to see if the traditional Indian values were implemented in her character and how her ways of living have changed since her character is completely different from both Simran, Maya and Rhea.

### 3. *Dear Zindagi*

To start off with, Kaira is the only female lead out of all three films who is single and not forced to get married anytime soon, despite her being in her twenties. This already shows us the differences between her and the other female leads. Kaira is exempt from living with her parents, because she has a job out in Mumbai, although her family lives in Goa. This setup alone, differentiates her from following traditional Indian values, since she moved out of her parents' house before getting married. Primarily in this film, we see Kaira as a young, independent woman and although we covered her nature in the pattern of "independence", earlier, I keep reiterating the fact that the women in these films are demonstrating their independence, because as stated in the literature earlier, women were always taught to be dependent on their spouses or towards a male figure in their life. Seeing how Kaira is able to handle her life on her own already

shows a shift as to how familial relations and the strong bonding of family is non-existent in Kaira's life, which I will discuss further in this section.

Kaira's upbringing as a female was much different from her brother, Kiddo. In the film, when Kaira comes home, we see that Kaira does not have a strong relationship with her parents. She gets irritated, frustrated, and annoyed at them whenever they try to talk to her. She only gets along with her younger brother, Kiddo, because she feels that he understands her. Later in the film, we see that Kaira's upbringing was much more different compared to Kiddo's. Throughout Kaira's therapy sessions, Kaira opens up about how her parents were absent from her life during her childhood because they had to take care of the family business and could not manage bringing her to the multiple locations they traveled to. So, we see that Kaira was raised by her grandparents. The lack of parental attention in Kaira's life show that she is not as close to her parents, because they were not there for her when she was younger. The pattern of traditional Indian values is destroyed here, because we have seen in the previous two films that the either the female leads are either close with their parents or at least have an existing relationship with their in-laws. In this situation, Kaira was not around her parents while growing up, so the way she was brought up by her grandparents affected her beliefs, compared to how she would have been if her parents have raised her. Since Kaira was unable to be around her parents, she has brought that anger with her into adulthood, and only seems to have that familial bond with her brother. Her parents, however, were around when Kiddo was born which leads me to argue about the preference of male children over female children in Indian culture. In my literature review, I discussed how male children were preferred compared to female children (Haq, 2013) and in this film, we see that happening since Kaira's parents were around for Kiddo and not herself. The

sense of jealousy we see in Kaira is primarily targeted towards her parents, rather than her brother. The gender upbringing between both siblings differ.

In a family party, Kaira's parents talk to their guests about how Kaira always struggled in school, but continuously praise their son, Kiddo about how he was the dream child that any parent can hope for. The subtheme of gender upbringing is present in this specific scene since we see how the parents do not have much to say about their daughter, rather they have a lot to say about their son. My chosen method of intersectionality relates towards this particular film since we see the favoritism between boys and girls in Indian culture. Intersectionality relates towards this scene since the audience is able to see the gender inequality between both Kaira and her brother. Not only does Kaira not get time with her parents when she was growing up, rather she was at a disadvantage by not being able to study internationally like her brother did or have a positive parental relationship like her brother does. The factors that determined this for Kaira was primarily due to her being a woman as well as her age of being too young to travel with her parents when they left her with her grandparents. This scene is actually shown to be problematic because the audience sees how the male child is still favored, compared to the female child, despite the female child being the oldest.

The pattern of traditional Indian values is applied towards this scene because we actually see how the values are not presented similarly as they were in the previous two films. Seeing how the pattern of traditional Indian values is actually dismissed in this film shows the audience how in some cases, not every individual has the same values and ideas in mind, or they do not think of what is expected of them, rather they live the way they should. Gender upbringing plays a major role in this particular scene because we saw the differences between a male child and a

female child and how they were raised differently, which sadly, contributed towards the traditional Indian values as how the male child is still preferred.

Another scene that depicts among traditional Indian values that correlates with gender stereotypes is when Kaira is in therapy and starts talking to her therapist about her dreams. Before I dive into this scene, I want to mention that while I talk about traditional Indian values, a lot of the values I focus on also relate towards the female lead's upbringing, what is expected of her, and gendered based stereotypes. When talking to Dr. Khan about her dreams, Kaira specifies a very specific dream she has been having constantly. In her dream, she falls off a building and when she falls a lot of people just stare at her. Married women are in the crowd of people staring at her and they start laughing. After this dream, she wakes up and tries to gain a sense of meaning as to what it represents. After hearing about this dream, Dr. Khan decides to ask her about her romantic relationships. He asks if she is currently seeing anyone and when Kaira brings up a new man, Dr. Khan is somewhat shocked, and Kaira immediately reacts asking why he is so shocked that she is talking to a different man now. While Dr. Khan tries to reassure her that he was unaware, Kaira jumps to conclusions that he is defining her as a slut. This scene represents how women are looked at in society if they have more than one romantic relationship. I categorized this scene into the pattern of traditional Indian values, because traditionally, it is only expected for a woman to be in one relationship and then be with that partner for the rest of their lives. Kaira struggles with the fact that society is judging her because she is not fitting the ideal standard as to how a woman should be, in Indian society. When she decides to argue with Dr. Khan saying that a woman is defined as a slut by having more than one romantic relationship in her lifetime, the audience also sees that this way of thinking has been established and normalized. With a woman having more than one romantic relationship, often times, the woman

will be judged for not being faithful or for losing her purity, which demonstrates the struggle that Kaira is dealing with, by not adapting towards cultural acceptable norms. I argue that intersectionality is present in this scene. Women are often referred to as ‘sluts’ by having more than one romantic partner which correlates with their sexual orientation, as well as by their gender. Only women are looked at negatively, whereas men do not have a negative reputation for having more than one romantic partner. Dr. Khan later reassures her that if men can have more than one romantic relationship in their lifetime, a woman can as well. He uses the analogy of individuals testing out a chair before selecting the best one. He compares that to the dating lifestyle in this generation. Ultimately, before picking out a partner for life, one must get to know the other person, and if they do not like who they are with, there is nothing wrong with finding someone else before settling down. This ideal has changed the concept of traditional Indian values whereas previously, having an option to date others was nonexistent. We see in *Dear Zindagi*, that arranged marriages are becoming rarer and that love marriages are more common.

In this film, we have seen that the past three examples are scenes that are actually going against the traditional Indian values except for the upbringing of Kiddo and Kaira. With Kaira’s broken familial relationship, her living on her own, and the acceptance of having more than one romantic relationship, there is one scene that tries to target a traditional Indian value, and that is making sure the girl finds a partner to settle down with. When it comes to settling down, in the prior to films we saw that once a girl became of a certain age, she was expected to get married. While this is just an expectation, it has slowly become a norm as well in Indian culture, where most women are typically married by age 25 (Desai and Andrist, 2010). With the past three examples showing the audience that traditional Indian values are starting to be broken in this new generation, we see that the concept of marriage is still one that is highly talked about and



does not seem to be going away for a while. With Kaira being in her twenties, the audience sees that she is well educated, has a career, lives on her own and has a good life, when her relatives come along, they bring up the question of marriage. With Kaira saying that she does not want to get married right away, her family members immediately tell her that “now is the right age to be looking”. The concept of a woman being successful and independent is still foreign, and girls are still getting pressured into getting married and settling down, even when they do not want to or are not ready yet. When analyzing this film, the concept of marriage seems to be an idea that girls are now pushing off, because they want to settle down first independently, and think of marriage later. While this norm is usually controversial between the older generation versus the millennials, this film represents that despite the traditional Indian values changing overtime, marriage is a concept that is hard to convince to the older generation to change their mind on, since ultimately, a woman is expected to settle down with her partner.

Looking at traditional Indian values in all three films have allowed me to observe and analyze how the values have been presented throughout this time span. I also argue that intersectionality was present in all three films. Each woman in the film was at a disadvantage in some way. For Simran, she had to accept her fate and sacrifice her happiness for her father. In Rhea’s situation, she had to deal with oppression from her husband by not being a “good mother”, according to traditional Indian values, and lastly, Kaira was not given the same opportunities as her brother due to her gender and her age. She is also looked at negatively for having more than one romantic partner as a woman. While the values of patriarchy and family were quite common and apparent in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, it was interesting to see how the familial relationships were still present ten years later in *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*. The act of patriarchy was not as relevant in the second film, compared to the first. Looking at *Dear Zindagi*

ten years later showed the most changes as to how traditional Indian values are being adapted in a female's life. The pattern of traditional Indian values is meant to be looked at values that the female lead is expected to follow throughout her life. Throughout this section, I mainly discuss how maintaining one's purity before marriage, strong familial relationships and gender norms are noted as ideas that relate to traditional Indian values. These are the main ideas that also resonate with Indians throughout this time period, since the film emphasizes these ideas heavily in the films. Out of all three films, it was surprising to see how different Kaira's character is presented compared to the other female leads in the other two films. The biggest change is comparing both Simran and Kaira's character. With Simran's character being completely controlled by the male figures in her life, we see that Kaira takes full control of her own life. The traditional Indian values that Simran presents in her life (i.e. daily prayer, living with her parents before marriage, and honoring her respective familial relationships) give the audience an adaptation as to what an "Ideal Indian Girl" should look like at the time. While looking at Kaira, the viewers see a young woman who is independent, living on her own, and has a broken family relationship, however she is not looked at in a negative light either, rather she is representing how a woman can still be likeable without adapting towards the traditional Indian values. While these traditional Indian values can make up one's identity, it is also important to realize that the pattern of traditional Indian values was looked at to understand how these values are representing the women in these three films. My final pattern of "Identity" will discuss how the main female leads' identity is shaped through the problems that they are presented with in the film, ultimately focusing on the second part of research question; how a woman's identity is shaped in Bollywood films throughout the past three decades.

#### D. **Identity**

Throughout my analysis so far, the first three patterns I discussed about (Independence, Desire, and Traditional Indian Values), each pattern in some shape or form has impacted the female lead's identity. Throughout this section, I will be incorporating how select scenes from each film has created an impact on a female lead's identity. I decided to conclude my analysis focusing on identity since ultimately, I aim to look at how the gender representation of women in these films have shaped their identity. For this section, I define identity as how an individual represents themselves, whether or not they choose to follow the gender norms that has been assigned to them.

##### 1. ***Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge***

Beginning with *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, the pattern of identity emerged throughout the entire film. We saw that in the other patterns, she was primarily holding a battle against herself when she had to decide between what she wanted (desire) versus what she was expected to do (traditional Indian values). In the literature, Simon During discusses that an individual can have multiple identities. He further explains his definition of identity as the following, "Gender, race, or ethnicity, and class are the identities, most of all, by which we are placed socially...and the relative weight of identities change across time and space" (During, 2005, p.146). The part that I focus on in this section is how the weight of identities can change across time and space.

Analyzing Simran's character was challenging while focusing on the pattern of identity, because we see in the film how she is presented with multiple opportunities, but is being held back due to her positioning as a woman and her age as well. This is where I focus on

intersectionality as well, due to her status of being a woman and her age. In the film, we see that social inequalities are fairly high in Simran's lifestyle, since she is under patriarchal rule by her father. In this time span, this was considered to be normal. With men having the power in the house, women did not have as much of a say. As mentioned in the literature, power structure is correlated with intersectionality when focusing on gender. Gender is classified as "one dimension of power struggle alongside caste, class, religion, and location" (Lotter, 2017, pg. 98). Since Simran did not have much a say in her decisions, her identity was constantly shifting throughout this film.

Throughout the course of the film, we see that Simran has her life planned out for her. After revealing to her mother that she dreams of meeting the love of her life, her mother tells her she is being naïve, as she can never be in love with someone she has never met. Shortly after she confesses to her mother that she has been "seeing a boy in her dreams", which gives her hope that she will find true love one day and exclaims her happiness by dancing to an item song, "Mere Khwabon Mein" (The One Who Comes In My Dreams). While she fantasizes about meeting her true love, her dreams are suddenly destroyed when her father tells her it is time for her to get married. Simran, who realizes that she is not allowed to dream, sadly accepts her fate and gets ready to marry the man her father has picked out for her. In this scene, Simran later tells her mother that she does not have the right to dream, because everything she can do will be decided for her. Her mother tells her that she can dream, but she should not get her hopes up. Intersectionality and standpoint theory are blended in this scene. With Simran claiming that she does not have the right to dream, we see that she is already viewing the world as a place where girls do not have a say in their future, and is accepting that this is how the world is for all girls. Simran is accepting her position as one that is "less privileged" and understands the power her

father has as an authoritative figure, versus her lack of power as a woman in a society that favors men. This scene illustrates to the viewers how gender inequality is presented in India. Through the act of patriarchy, Simran cannot say no to her father, because she is supposed to do what he tells her to do. While this scene was presented in the beginning of the film, we start to see how it shapes her identity later on.

As the film progresses, Simran gets some independence by traveling Europe alone, in where she meets Raj there. After meeting Raj, we see that Simran who initially has “ideal Indian girl” traits instilled in her, she tries to find herself while she is on the trip. In one particular scene, we see that once Raj offers Simran alcohol to stay warm, she refuses because of how she was raised. However, when she notices that drinking alcohol is the only way to stay warm, she ends up finishing the entire bottle. Without her parents looking over, we see that she is more open to trying new things and her being drunk takes the audience into another song-sequence, “Zara Sa Jhoom Loon Main” (Let me dance a little), in which we see Simran freely expressing herself, her wants, and desires through the song. This is the first time in the film where we see the romance blossom between Raj and Simran. In this song, we see Simran completely forget about the values she was taught and acts completely differently prior to how we saw her acting with her parents. This particular song later transitions into the scene where Simran wakes up in the hotel room, wearing Raj’s clothes.

While I discussed this scene in the “Traditional Indian Values” section, I also bring it up in this section, primarily to discuss Simran’s reaction when she thought she had sex before marriage. Mankekar (1999), discusses how women’s bodies are considered to be pure in Indian culture. This ideal concept of being pure also impacts a woman’s identity. With the initial thought that Simran lost her virginity before marriage, she felt ashamed and immediately thought

she was a disgrace to her family. When Raj claims that he understands the honor of an Indian woman and would never do anything to disrespect that, the film indicates how valuable a woman's body is. Although in the previous scene, we see that Simran went against some values by getting drunk with a boy she hardly knows, we also see that still holds the values she deems important close to her heart. I saw that this scene portrayed a shift in Simran's behavior and that her identity was starting to change, because she is able to make decisions for herself, rather than her parents making them for her, since she is still on vacation without them.

When it is time to head back home, Simran realizes that she has to go back and get married to Kuljeet, the man her father picked out for her. Both Raj and Simran at this point know that they love each other, but know they cannot do anything about it, since Simran is engaged. When Simran tells her mom about Raj, her mom gets excited, but her father is disappointed. By falling in love with Raj, Simran's father tells her that he disobeyed her and needs to get married immediately. Once again, we see how Simran does not have a choice in deciding what to do, rather she is back to how her life used to be. The patriarchal rule in her household triumphs Simran's wants and beliefs. Her trip around Europe was more of a fantasy, where she could things on her own, make her own decisions, and live life on her terms. Once the family moves back to India to get Simran married, we see her battle with her wants between what her parents want for her.

As mentioned in the "Traditional Indian Values" section earlier, a scene that discusses the differences between boys and girls come up. Simran's mother comes into Simran's room and tells her that in order for her to move on, she must forget about Raj and focus on her marriage to Kuljeet. While Simran's mother understands where Simran is coming from, she tells Simran that when she was growing up, she had to sacrifice everything for her brothers and her husband.

Simran's mother promised herself she would never let their daughters sacrifice their happiness, but Simran's mother still tells herself she has to respect the promise she made to her husband, and tells Simran that she will not be able to live the way she wants, since it is one of the factors that comes with being a girl. Her mom tells Simran that women are born to sacrifice for men. This scene once again outlines the standpoint theory; in which Simran's mother knows her positioning as a woman in a society that favors men is less privileged. This scene also outlines the power struggle and patriarchy issue that occurs in India. Women in this time frame are still struggling to gain their independence and freedom, since they are unable to make decisions on their own. While Simran struggles with this decision, she accepts the fact that she cannot be with Raj and sacrifices her happiness in order to make her father happy.

Shortly after, Raj arrives to India, and while Simran who keeps imagining things, finds out that Raj actually is in India. They reunite and once again a dream-like song sequence starts playing, "Tujhe Dekha To Ye Jana Sanam" (When I saw you sweetheart, I knew...) in which Raj and Simran realize that they are meant to be together. When Simran immediately blurts out that she wants to elope with Raj, the audience sees how she wants to put her happiness first. She is willing to go against everything her parents said in order to be happy. We see a shift in identity in Simran in this scene because initially, she was willing to do everything for her parents, but her desire towards Raj has her changing her beliefs. When Raj hears this, he tells her that he does not want to "win" her this way. The fact that Raj is telling Simran that he cannot elope with her, shows that he wants to respect her parents' wishes, even though Simran is completely against the idea. Simran pleads Raj telling him that he will never understand, but he says there will be a way to get them to be together. In this scene we see that Simran's identity fluctuates since she is torn

between doing what she wants and what her parents want her to do. Even when Simran tells Raj she wants to elope; she decides to listen to Raj when he says he has a plan.

Throughout the rest of the film, we see ways that Simran is rebelling against her parents' wishes by not performing the traditional rites for her engagement with Kuljeet. When it is time to put the rings on each other, Simran comes up with an excuse that she hurt her hand, so Kuljeet has to put the ring on her right hand, instead of her left. When fasting for her soon to be husband, Simran pretends to faint, so Raj can be first to feed her, rather than Kuljeet. These small acts of doing what she wants for Raj, demonstrates that she is starting to take control over her own life, rather than having her parents make the decisions for her.

Ultimately, everyone finds out about Raj and Simran's affair, and her father is furious. He shuns Raj from their family and tells him how much he has disrespected their family by playing with everyone's emotions. When the train departs and Raj leaves, we see Simran begging her father to give him a chance and openly admits that she loves him. This scene in the film demonstrates how Simran is fighting for what she wants and she is being honest about her true intentions. In the end, her father lets her be with Raj by telling her that nobody can love her more than he can. He gives his blessing and tells her to go live her life with Raj. Through this scene, we see that Simran's identity has emerged slightly, by being able to ask for what she wants, even if it is against her parents' wishes. Although she had to go through a lot pain in order to get to this situation, we see that her identity has transformed tremendously throughout the film.

In *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, analyzing Simran's identity was complex, because she had several roles that she had to play. Not only was she forming her own identity, she had a lot of expectations from others as how she should be seen. She is an older sister, a daughter, and an



engaged bride. Each person in her life had a different expectation of her, but we saw that Simran could really be her true-self when she was with Raj. Simon During's definition of identity came to be true when analyzing Simran's character, she had multiple identities in the film and they kept changing as the film went on. While we see in the 90s era, it was hard for women to have the same equality as men, we see that there are still strides being made towards it. Although Simran was completely ruled under patriarchy in this film, her identity was primarily shaped around that. She was known to obey her father her entire life and even once Raj came into the film, she was never truly independent, as he was helping her out in her decision making as well. While we see that Simran's identity was shaped through her upbringing and her surroundings, I then look into *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* to see how the female leads identities are shaped through their experiences.

## 2. *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*

While watching *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, identity was challenging to analyze since both women were coming from different backgrounds, however I was able to analyze how their identities were shaped, based on the experiences they went through in the film. In this film, I follow Simon During's definition of identity, when he claims that an individual can have multiple identities throughout their lifetime. In this film, looking at both Maya and Rhea has allowed me to understand how the woman gender is represented in films after marriage. The other three patterns I analyzed allowed me to look at how these concepts shaped their identity. In this section, I discuss how their identities were shaped through their experiences in the film.

In this film, I analyze Maya's character and how the experiences she has been through has ultimately shaped her identity. In other sections, I have discussed that Maya grew up as an orphan, so while her adoptive family treated her like their own daughter, she felt safe. However,

in the early part of the film, we see Maya's character as indecisive, since she goes back and forth on whether or not she wants to marry her childhood friend, Rishi. She feels as if she compromised in her marriage to Rishi, as discussed earlier. When observing Maya and Rishi's relationship, several times, she tolerates his behavior and when she tries to get him to listen to her, he refuses, and she starts to call him a child. In this scenario, Maya's motherlike instincts take over every time she feels that Rishi acts more like a kid, rather than her husband. In this particular scene, Maya's identity is more than just a housewife, she feels as if she has to act like a mother to her husband, which upsets her. Instead of feeling like Rishi's partner, rather she feels as if she has to perform the role of a mother, despite the fact the couple has no children. Maya, who we see is frustrated and confused in her marriage, ultimately becomes unhappy and starts seeking out other ways to gain her happiness back.

It is revealed in the film that Maya cannot have children, but she becomes a school teacher, since she feels that is the closest way she can feel like a mom. Maya's motherlike qualities are heavily present, which reveal gender norms slightly. In Maya's life, she naturally takes care of the house, her husband, and since she has no children, she is a teacher and acts like a mother to them. Her motherlike qualities are present when she fears that a child is being kidnapped and tries to save the child, when in reality, she accidentally takes Dev's child away from him. When Maya meets Dev in the hospital after an injury through the kidnapping misunderstanding, she discovers that Dev is an incredibly bitter man and wonders how Rhea deals with it all the time. Although Dev is still rude to Maya, Maya is still soft-spoken throughout their entire conversation. In this scene we witness the dynamics between gender-stereotypical behavior. We see that Maya is more passive and softer in her tone of voice, and Dev acts in a way that represents the alpha-male trope. Maya's identity in this particular scene

represents her as a woman who follows the typical gender norms for a woman, in which she does not talk back to the men who speak rudely to her in the beginning of the film. While she does portray these feminine qualities, her husband will mock her for it, since he feels that she does not pursue any other interests in front of him. Rishi mocking Maya for her obsessive cleaning habits, as well as the fact that she cannot have children, which indicates another sense of the power-struggle dynamic for men and women. This sense of power-struggle ties back to intersectionality since Maya does not receive the respect, she knows she deserves from her husband.

Intersectionality blends into Maya's identity because although she is married, her not being able to have children as a woman is looked at as a disability and as someone who is inferior (Haq, 2013). Since she cannot have kids, she constantly has to deal with her husband making blunt comments to her about the situation as well. I argue that with Maya's inability to have children and being a woman, she is being discriminated by her husband since there are times, he will make her feel bad about not being able to have children. Her husband does what he wants, even if that means making his wife feel bad about herself. In this case, we see Maya as a victim in her own home. Although Maya does contribute to the gendered expectations, each time she asks Rishi for help, he refuses and then the conversation turns into an argument and both of them are left unhappy.

In the beginning of the film, it is safe to say that Maya has demonstrated several qualities that represents her identity as only a wife, since the viewers do not see much of her career until later in the film. Once Maya forms a closer bond to Dev, we see that her identity starts to shift and she is known as more than "just a wife". In the film, the amount of attraction and desire Maya has towards Dev, allows us to see a different side of her, compared to when she is with

Rishi. Dev and Maya's relationship has deeply affected Maya and the viewers see a completely different side of her as their relationship progresses.

Initially, while Maya only seems to see Dev as a friend, both of them try to help each other since they both know their marriages are failing. At some points in the film, Dev will constantly flirt with Maya and give her compliments, making her feel better about herself, since at times she does not feel appreciated by her husband. In order to make Maya feel beautiful, Dev offers to help her out by suggesting what she can do in order to feel loved by her husband. Dev constantly compliments Maya's body, at first, making her feel uncomfortable, but only to later realize that she must be comfortable in her own skin if she wants to feel desired. A problem with this is that although Dev has good intentions for Maya, the way he talks to her still comes off as disrespectful, because he is making sexual advances towards a married woman. Slowly, as Maya warms up to Dev, we see that she starts to reciprocate these flirtatious advances towards Dev as well. Her identity has completely changed from being submissive towards her husband, and she becomes more dominating towards Dev, because her desire towards him has taken over. This identity change reflects back on Derrida's definition of identity since she is presenting a different side to her towards another individual.

Maya's identity from being a woman who initially followed the "ideal Indian girl" norm, is starting to change as she is willing to go against her values and start to go after what she wants. Two of the major patterns, desire and traditional Indian values play a part in Maya's identity since she is battling against herself what she knows to be right and what she wants to do. In the climax of the film, we see Dev and Maya at a train station after a fight with their spouses. We see a huge shift in Maya's identity at this point because she becomes persistent in wondering why her and Dev are standing at the train station in the middle of the night. She becomes

dominating and yells at him wanting to know the answers about her questions about love. When Dev blurts out to Maya that he loves her and she loves him too, Maya walks away, without admitting the truth. Dev's sense of ego is too high for him to realize that Maya may not actually be in love with him.

Right after this scene, Maya replays her argument with Rishi and the Dev's confession of his love to her simultaneously. She battles with herself not knowing what to do in this situation because although she is married, she is in love with another man. Soon enough, we see Maya admitting her love to Dev, and realize that she is going after what she desires. Maya's identity at this point is no longer that she is just married, but she is a married woman having an affair with a married man. While this is frowned upon in most cultures, the film demonstrates the differences between a man and a woman having an affair. Both parties know what they are doing is wrong, but we see that Maya feels more guilty about it rather than Dev. Instead of Dev feeling guilty, he instead gets jealous that Maya is going home to another every night, whereas Maya feels guilt every time she goes back to her husband. In this scene, we see Maya struggling with her identity, because she only saw herself as a married woman, but now she is also seeing herself as a person that is not considered to be respected. As soon as Maya starts having an affair with Dev, her identity has shifted once again, which illustrates how During's definition of an *inherited* identity (2005) is shown through the choices Maya makes in her life.

Towards the end of the film, we see another shift in Maya's identity. Ultimately, Dev and Maya realize what they did is wrong and must tell their spouses about what is going on. Even though Rishi has not been the ideal husband to Maya after criticizing her for not engaging in sex with him, Maya still decides to tell Rishi what happened. Rishi, obviously does not handle the situation well and the first question Rishi asks Maya is if she slept with Dev. When Maya admits

it, Rishi goes around breaking everything in the house and yells profusely at her. Maya at this point, is broken and realizes it is time for both of them to move on. They both get a divorce and Maya moves out and starts a new life in a new town. Here, she is now a divorced woman, single and her identity has changed once again.

While we see the major changes in Maya's identity, we also see how Rhea's identity is shaped in the film. Though not as major as Maya, we see that Rhea's identity is shaped primarily towards her career and her relationship with her family.

In the beginning of the film, we see that Rhea is in position of authority at her job. We see that she does whatever she can to make sure she is the best at her job. Although her job is not the most important part of her life, it later ends up being her number one focus since Dev can no longer provide for the family. In Rhea and Dev's relationship, we see that gender norms are backwards as discussed in the "Traditional Indian Values" section. Rhea's identity in this film is shaped in multiple ways, through her career and her relationship with her family.

Beginning with her career, we see that Rhea is mostly focused on work and even when she is given opportunities to advance in her career and is even given the opportunity to cheat on her husband, because of how successful she is in her place of work. Rhea's identity as a working mom is present in this film, because the film solely focuses on her at work or talking about her work. When it comes to handling the family matters at home, she focuses more on her son, rather than Dev, since he has become cold and bitter towards everyone around him. In the beginning of the film, we see that Rhea's boss, Jay (Arjun Rampal) is infatuated with her and slyly asks her if she would be interested in starting a relationship with him. While she is flattered, Rhea firmly states that she is married and is not the type of woman to engage in an extramarital affair. In this scene, the viewers can see that Rhea's identity consists of her being confident, strong-minded,

and has some sense of stubbornness when it comes to focusing on her career. Relating this back to gender norms, I argue that Rhea is starting to go against the gender norm of women just being the caretaker, rather she is starting to prove that she is able to focus on her career as well.

A pivotal scene that has been discussed several times in this thesis that defines Rhea's identity is the scene where her and Dev get into a fight after their anniversary dinner. I mention this scene in the "Traditional Indian Values" pattern as well because we see that Rhea and Dev follow the opposite of their gender norms. While Rhea is shown to be the breadwinner of the house, she realizes that she is also failing as a mother, since Dev is constantly the one who is attending their son's events and constantly taking care of their son. Dev blames Rhea for their son's mishaps because she is not here to help teach him what is right and wrong. Shortly after, Rhea insults Dev by saying that she is too busy to take over everything since she is the one who is earning money for the family. We see that in this scene Rhea's identity is not necessarily focused on being a good mom, rather we see that her identity is shaped primarily towards her career. Her identity as a mother is non-existent because her major scenes in the film are focused on her job and trying to repair her relationship with Dev; not necessarily with their son. We can see in the film how Rhea's identity has not shifted much overtime, unlike Maya's.

In these films, both female leads have had a difference in how their identity is shaped. In Maya's case, we see that she completely changes her identity from being someone who was open to compromising on almost everything, being submissive towards her husband, to ultimately going after what she wants, even if it means breaking cultural and societal norms. While Maya's identity has shifted in multiple ways, Bollywood still presented her in a way that gave her a happy ending in her life. Only in these films can we see the most tragic events, have a better outcome, but the film also displays the hardships and troubles she went through while she was

trying to figure out what she really wanted the entire time in the film. Looking at Rhea's character, her identity was shaped primarily towards her career. We are given a look at how women have can have careers and run the family household if need be in this era, which made it eye-opening in the Bollywood industry. Previously in the 90s, we saw that Simran was not able to make any decisions for herself, rather she was told what to do her entire life. We see that for Rhea, she was able to make a majority of the decisions, since ultimately, she was the one who was providing for the family.

After analyzing both *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, I now move on to discuss the findings of "Identity" in *Dear Zindagi*. In this film, Kaira's identity is shaped in multiple ways. Her upbringing was different compared to the other female leads I looked at in the film, so her identity is bit complex.

### 3. *Dear Zindagi*

As previously discussed, we see that Kaira is an independent woman, with a few close friends, a promising career, and is currently in a relationship in the beginning of the film. Although it may seem like her life is perfect, we start to notice that she is truly unhappy in her situation. Her identity in the beginning is shaped by her picture-perfect life, but the audience is shown a side of her that is frustrated with the world because she is not happy with the way her life is going. With Kaira being a woman in her mid-twenties, the audience tries to ask why she is not happy, and why she is willing to risk a relationship, by cheating on her significant other. What Kaira truly wants is happiness, but she is not sure how to get there. When this film was released, "modern India has achieved tremendous gains in gender equality" (Chowdhury & Patnaik, 2010), but the equality line was not at the same level as men just yet.



With Kaira focusing on her career, her identity is molded into an individual as a cinematographer. While she is initially a learning cinematographer, she persists the director to let her shoot her own short film. The director reassures her that eventually she will, but now is not the time. Kaira who is taken aback by these comments, accepts it and moves forward. We see that she is the type of person who accepts whatever criticism is given to her and she does not try to change much about the situation. While she tells her friends that she is hoping for a chance at directing her own short film, she still feels fearful that she may never get the opportunity. I argue that intersectionality is presented in this particular scene because Kaira is not given the opportunity to shoot her own short film primarily because of her gender and her age. The theory is implemented here because her social identities are preventing her from being able to create her own projects. With the director telling her “now is not that time”, she is discouraged, yet her determination shows the audience that she is not willing to give up.

Kaira’s identity is partly shaped through her career as well, when she gets offered a position to work with Raghuvendra on a film in America. Initially, he offers her the part because he feels that she is the best person for the job, but later he changes it because he has romantic feelings for her. This scene illustrates Kaira’s identity as a desired woman, rather than being known for her talents as a cinematographer. This scene still indicates that Indian women are looked at objectively, prior to their talents (Ghaznavi et al., 2017). In prior Indian films, literature suggests that women are meant to only appear in films to perform domestic duties and to be accommodate men (Ghaznavi et al., 2017). This scene demonstrates that Kaira was only invited because Raghuvendra wanted to form a relationship with Kaira. In this scenario, her identity is shaped in a way that she is not respected in her career, rather she is only given the position due to her being a woman. In this scene, we see that Kaira rejects the offer and tells Raghuvendra to go

by himself since she is not interested anymore. Although Kaira was not given the position fairly, we still see that her identity is shaken because she thought she was deserving of the position due to her talents.

This topic comes back into the film when Raghuvendra comes to Kaira's house and immediately degrades her telling her she was never mature enough to handle a position in America. With Raghuvendra's hurt ego, we see the power struggle that is presented between Kaira and Raghuvendra. Intersectionality is presented here once again, through Kaira's gender and her age. Raghuvendra blames Kaira for not being mature enough to tackle a project in America, and he also brings her gender into it, as he was disappointed earlier that she rejected him romantically. After hearing this, Kaira once again is disappointed and angry because she seems to be in a position where she cannot make anyone happy. Kaira's mental health takes a toll on her as well since she is constantly being dismissed from work projects, still single, and has to move back to her parent's house, even though she already has a rocky relationship with them. With her world turning upside down, we see that she is losing sense of who she is and ultimately becomes angry with the world. She is upset at her friends for having settled down, she is mad that her parents were absent during most of her childhood, and she is upset that she is not moving forward in her career.

Through societal expectations, women are taught that they should have our lives figured out at a very young age. Once women hit adulthood, women are either married or settled down. (Desai and Andrist, 2010). This film demonstrates the changes that not all women need to have their lives figured out right away. Focusing on the gendered aspects of the film, one topic that never seems to go away is the concept of marriage and relationships for a woman. Even though Kaira is back home with her parents, she constantly gets asked questions about why she is still

single and why she has not settled down yet. Although Kaira has a stable career, good friends, and lives on her own, her family friends constantly tell her that finding a boy to get married to after a woman turns 25 is difficult in this day and age. Her family friends criticize her for still being single and still hold onto the idea that Kaira will not be happy unless she is married. While this was talked about in the section on “Traditional Indian Values”, we see that Kaira’s identity as a single woman shapes who she is, because society expects her to have it all figured out, even when she knows she is not ready to settle down yet.

Even when Kaira tries to please everyone by being in a relationship, she has a dream where she is ridiculed by society for not being married. When explaining to her therapist that she felt ashamed in this dream, Dr. Khan asks her what sort of emotions were going through her mind before she had this dream. She told Dr. Khan that she had recently ended another relationship. As discussed in the section of “Traditional Indian Values” the concept of being labeled a slut is targeted towards women who engage in more than one romantic relationship. Without giving Dr. Khan the chance to speak, Kaira argues that others will judge her for having more than one relationship, just because she is not happy in the one that she is currently in. As discussed before, it is not common for women to date more than one person without being labeled as a slut, but the film is trying to illustrate that men and women are allowed to date in similar ways, whereas the women should not have to suffer if she is not happy. Before Dr. Khan explains to Kaira that this is okay, the audience sees that Kaira cares too much about what others expect of her, which is why she is having a hard time finding happiness in herself.

Looking at Kaira’s journey in the film, we see that she decides she needs to see a therapist in order to figure out why she is so miserable in her life. While this film primarily focuses on Kaira’s journey towards self-healing, a major aspect of this film concerns the

importance of taking care of an individual's mental health. We see in this film how mental health is something that is not spoken about publicly.

When Kaira decides to see a therapist, we see that her behavior is abnormal when talking to Dr. Khan. She is shy to admit that she has problems and uses a cover story to tell him that her friend is having problems in her life, but it is highly affecting Kaira. When Dr. Khan suddenly realizes that it is Kaira who is suffering in her life, he advises her that coming to therapy is normal, healthy, and a part of self-growth. The film shows us that mental health has yet to be accepted and only those who are considered 'crazy' see a therapist. Kaira feels ashamed that she is currently seeking therapy. Although her self-esteem is already crushed from the issues that are happening in her life, she still feels distraught about being in therapy. Although, she does give it a try and starts to notice that by talking about the problems in her life, she is starting to feel a sense of purpose again.

Previously, I addressed how societal expectations about mental health are more negative, and taboo, rather than positive in the film. A scene in the film addresses a stereotypical norm as to how mental health is perceived. When Kaira comes back home for a welcome back party that was held for her brother, Kiddo, she is forced to talk to her family and their friends about how she is doing in her life. Her parents start telling stories about Kaira when she was a child. They tell everyone that she misbehaved a lot and was a hard child to raise. They compare her to Kiddo, who never had any issues growing up. This frustrates Kaira, because she ends up telling everyone at the party that her parents abandoned her and did not come back for her only until they realized she failed the second grade. Bringing shame to the family, Kaira still reveals all the family secrets about she was not a good kid because her parents were not around to take care of her. On top of that, she finally admits that she is seeing a therapist. Immediately, she jumps to the

conclusion telling everyone that they can now talk about her since she is deemed to be ‘crazy’ for seeing a mental health professional, as mentioned in an earlier scene in the film. With Kaira referring herself as ‘crazy’, standpoint theory can be applied to understand this scene. Since Kaira is aware of the society’s views on mental health, she understands that by being in therapy, others will label her as ‘crazy’ or ‘unwell’. Kaira understands that society will see her as a weak individual, since she is seeking therapy. She understands the stigma around mental health, yet she decides to confront her family and her friends that she knows what they think about her being in therapy.

This scene demonstrates how much Kaira was hiding from her family since she was afraid that everyone would judge her for being in therapy. Kaira was struggling with her identity in this scene because on one hand she wanted to impress everyone with how well she is doing, but on the other hand she wanted to admit that she was struggling in life. While we see that Kaira openly admits that she is in therapy, looking at her parent’s reaction, the viewers can tell that they are embarrassed because they have failed as parents. I argue that the film suggests that they have failed as parents because their daughter is unhappy, not because she is in therapy. Her parents then try to convince her that they just wanted what was best for her, when they left her with her grandparents when she was growing up.

As Kaira continues on her journey for self-love and guidance in therapy, we find out that she reveals a lot about herself, which is what plays a major role in her identity. Once Kaira admitted to her therapist that she was abandoned by her parents as a kid and never felt loved by them, Dr. Khan tells Kaira that the reason she is so unhappy now is that she abandons relationships before the other party does, so she does not get hurt again like she did in the past. Kaira, then works on to improve all of her current and existing relationships with her friends and

family. She forgives her parents for abandoning her and she re-builds her friendships with friends that she has pushed to the side when trying to figure herself out. Ultimately, in the end, we see that Kaira is able to direct her own short film and not only is she proud and happy of herself, she realizes that her friends, family, ex-lovers, and the general public are in awe about her film, which describes the journey of a warrior princess who does not need rescuing from anyone. Ironically, once Kaira finds happiness in herself, we see the film ending, with a male suitor complimenting her film and asking if she is interested in getting to know him more. Here, we see that Kaira's identity has shifted from a woman who used to be angry about her life to a woman who has become confident in who she is and overall, a much happier person once she learned how to let go of the past.

Overall, this section of Identity presented how different women are represented in these three films. We see that in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, Simran's identity was mainly controlled by her father or by Raj, due to patriarchy. Simran was not able to make many decisions on her own, unless she was given permission to do so. Although the 90's era was the turning point in Bollywood films, we see the representation of young girls and how they are torn between their wants and desires versus what they are expected of by their parents. In Simran's case, her identity was shown to the audience as an "Ideal Indian Girl", who did all of the right things in front of her parents, until she went to travel on her own. Her experimentations with alcohol and talking to boys has changed her identity, causing her to rebel against her parents when she realized that she was falling in love with Raj. In *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, Maya and Rhea's identities were completely different. Maya, the main protagonist of the film was given an identity that shows the audience how she was submissive at first, but throughout the film, we see that she becomes more confident, bolder, and even willing to risk her values in order to get what

she wants in the end. Although this movie focused primarily on adultery and infidelity, we see that Maya's past upbringing and current state of unhappiness has shaped her identity to go after things that makes her truly happy, which in this case, happened to be Dev. For Rhea's character, we see that her identity was primarily shaped through her career, since she was the ultimate breadwinner in the family. Lastly, in *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira's identity was shaped by her upbringing and how she was never truly happy in the beginning. Although her life seemed as if it was perfect, Kaira ultimately was able to take charge of her future and shape her own identity, despite the hardships she went through when she growing up. While standpoint theory played a role primarily in *DDLJ*, intersectionality theory is present in all three films about each woman's identity. Primarily through their age, class status, and gender, each woman has dealt with a disadvantage in their life. They are unable to have equal opportunities compared to the men in their lives. In Simran's case, she was unable to make any decisions due to her gender and age, for Maya, she was ridiculed by her husband and became a victim in her own home for not being able to have children, Rhea was not adapting towards "traditional Indian values" that were expected for a girl and was put down by her husband, and ultimately, Kaira was not given the same opportunities in her career due to her gender and age. Comparing all three films, I discovered that independence, desire, and traditional Indian values have all played a role when it came to shaping one's identity. Although each woman had a different approach as to how they wanted to be seen, ultimately, the one thing each woman had in common was to find happiness in their lives.

## V. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I discussed the gender representation of women and how their identity is shaped in Bollywood films. My four major patterns that I talked about revolved around independence, desire, traditional Indian values, and identity. Each pattern signifies how the female lead(s) was represented in that film. It was interesting to see how each female lead was represented in a different light when it came to these four patterns. Although there are some themes that represented the female leads similarly throughout the decades, for a majority part of the films, each female lead had a new problem to face as the times changed. *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, and *Dear Zindagi* each presented the female leads with strength and confidence, but in each film, we see how the challenges they face are not easy, and most of the time, they are still suffering on their own.

With my thesis exploring how women are represented in Bollywood films through their age, class status, and based off their gender, I noticed that each female lead was well to do, financially, but ultimately, it was their gender and age that caused them to have to go through these challenges alone. Applying intersectionality and standpoint theory throughout this thesis allowed me to understand the disadvantages each woman went through, in order to shape their identity. Although not all themes demonstrated intersectionality theory, there were a handful of experiences that each woman went through where she was dealing with disadvantages in her life. Throughout *DDLJ*, I was able to analyze how independence was lacking in the 90's era for women. While the 90's era was a time to focus on youth culture, it was still a new concept to grasp. With Bollywood previously focusing on the concept of the love of the nation in its previous films, the 90's era has now started to introduce that this is the generation where the youth go after what they want. At a political economic level, while this film does extraordinarily



well in India and overseas, the main themes vector back to the Indian audience in India. With *DDLJ* primarily filmed in London featuring the characters as NRIs (Non-resident Indians), the concept of letting girls go after their dreams resonates with the Indian audience since there are scenes in the film which revolve around the Indian culture. We see the obstacles and struggles Simran faces when she tries to do what she wants. *DDLJ* introduced the concept that girls wanted more freedom, but they were still under patriarchal rule. Intersectionality theory and standpoint theory were prominent in this film since we were able to see how the women in the movies already accepted their fate and destiny, but we also see the multiple disadvantages Simran goes through when trying to be with Raj. The film brilliantly presented the hurdles a woman has to go through in order to get what she wants, even though the obstacles she faces seem to be never ending. Simran's independence was lacking in a majority of the film, and when granted, she did not know what to do with her newly founded freedom, and that is where Raj steps into the picture, because she still needed rescuing. When it came to discussing the concepts of desire and traditional Indian values, we see that in Simran's case, she is forced to follow the values she was raised with, because she did not have much of a say in her decisions, as she was still an unmarried woman. As mentioned, several times in the film, Simran had no place for dreams, because she was not allowed to dream. These three key patterns, ultimately shaped her identity.

With *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* discussing adultery and infidelity, it caused controversy in India and viewers were not appealed with a controversial topic such as this one being presented in Bollywood. This film was a turning point in Bollywood since it strayed away from the typical romantic comedies the industry is known for. At a political economic level, this film also becomes a vector towards the Indian audience since this film focuses on NRIs living in a

Western land, that deal with the controversial topic of adultery. While this film also performed well at the box-office overseas and in India, it vectors back to India since the film discusses the cultural values women are expected to have, even if they live abroad. In *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, the two female leads both come from relatively stable backgrounds. Although Maya was an orphan, the family that raised her came from a good background. In Rhea's situation, we do not hear much about her backstory, only that her and Dev were college sweethearts. By analyzing both female's style of living, it is inferred that they are well to do in this stage of their life. It can be argued that standpoint theory principles are present. While there were not any major scenes that demonstrated standpoint theory compared to *DDLJ*, it can be inferred that standpoint theory is slightly present since Maya is labeled as an adulterer, and understands societal views on that label. Intersectionality was presented among both women, regarding their gender as well as their class status, and even the fact that they were both Indian women, who were at a disadvantage between going after what they wanted and what their expected gendered norms were. By being an Indian woman, Maya and Rhea were put at disadvantages since they were battling between what was expected of them culturally versus what they actually wanted to do. The disadvantages that were presented to them primarily revolved around unfair treatment from their husbands about not fulfilling their duty as a wife/mother. While Rhea did try to move forward in her professional life, she is still at a disadvantage when it came to raising her son, since she was never around. For Maya, her not being able to have children which accounts for a disability, put her at a disadvantage, since her husband would consistently belittle her for it. Although both women have different lifestyles, it is shown throughout the film that Maya did not gain much independence, until she started to fall in love with Dev. Her desire towards Dev changed her personality and also shaped her identity as well. She sacrificed her values in order to

be with him. Looking at Rhea, we see that while she is very independent, her desire focuses more towards her career and eventually towards rebuilding her relationship with Dev. Her values are portrayed outside of the traditional norm, rather than traditional, since she ultimately is the breadwinner, rather than her husband. In Rhea's situation, her career shapes her identity.

Lastly, in *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira's role is different unlike the other female leads in the prior films. In *Dear Zindagi*, Kaira's independence is exemplified in the film by having a career, living on her own, and being single. I argue that standpoint theory plays a small role in this film, however it is not as present in this film compared to *DDLJ*. I argue that standpoint theory can be looked at when Kaira understands society's views on mental health and when she ultimately tells her family she is seeing a therapist, she calls herself "crazy" since that is how she thinks others will view her. Although this is somewhat present in the film, intersectionality is more present in this film. Kaira was put at disadvantages primarily due to her status of being a young woman and even though she came from a well-to do family, she had to deal with society shaming her for having multiple romantic partners. Kaira's upbringing was different as well, as she was abandoned by her parents, which caused her to grow up quicker. She felt unwanted at home and wanted to be away from her parents since the memory of being abandoned at a young age still haunts her. Kaira's sense of independence has been more accepted in this era (2016), and also since she is living in Mumbai, a modernized city in India. Although this movie focuses primarily on mental health, aspects of desire are shown in this film, through Kaira's love interests. We see that Kaira is seen as an object of desire by her suitors, rather than her chasing the men she is romantically interested in. Looking at traditional Indian values in this film, we see that in Kaira's case, the familial values have changed since she is not as close with her family, compared to what we see in the other films. We also tend to notice that the one common theme among all

three films is always asking when a girl is going to get married or how she should act in a marriage. It shows that being married plays a role in how their identity is shaped. Through a political economic level, this film has also done well overseas and in India. The plot line on mental health stigma vectors back to the Indian audience since primarily, the film is taking place in India, with the audience assuming these beliefs are common of Indian society. Also, the film tries to acknowledge the importance of mental health, bringing awareness to the issue in India itself. Ultimately, Kaira's identity has been shaped through her past experiences of being abandoned and her fear of being alone. These past experiences have shaped her identity where she is cold-hearted and bitter in the first half of the film, but throughout the second half, we see that once she starts going to therapy, she starts seeing the good things in her life and starts to let go of the past.

#### A. **Implications of Study**

The purpose of thesis was to look at the gender representation of women and how their identity was shaped in Bollywood films. This scholarship is important to acknowledge in the field of Communication Studies since it allows for scholars to address the problematic issues that are being presented in the media to this day. I purposely chose to start in the 1990s era of Hindi cinema since this is the time that Bollywood was straying away from politics as the core theme of the films, and rather started to focus on romance and youth culture. It was the embarking of a new generation. Once I decided to start in the 1990s era, I knew focusing on the woman gender was important to look at, since gender equality has yet to be achieved, despite the advances India was making towards its economy and social justice. I wanted to explore this area of study since it allows for communication scholars to apply media-based theories, such as the Cultivation theory and Social Learning theory. It is important to incorporate these theories into media studies, since

it allows communication scholars to analyze how the media plays a role in the eyes of society. These films were trying to reciprocate what was happening in that specific time frame and that is how girls were presented as well. When the film tried to show a scene that was “out of the norm”, for women, that powerful scene can create an impact as to how women can be represented in real life as well. This thesis also contributes to gender studies. Focusing on women in this thesis, has been relatively challenging, but rewarding. This thesis allowed me to analyze how gender inequality is represented in a third world country. By utilizing intersectionality theory and standpoint theory, this thesis was able to look at the differences among genders and how the woman gender still suffers despite her age and class status, and is provided with less opportunities and discrimination, compared to the man.

#### **B. Limitations and Future Research**

While I was able to analyze three different films throughout three decades, there were some limitations in this line of research. The sample was limited towards a small selection of Hindi films and while I argue that Indian women are being represented differently throughout each decade, this cannot be accountable for the entire population. Since I conducted a deep analysis within these three films, I am only able to argue how Indian women are represented within a specific time frame, rather than conclude that this is how all women are being represented within that specific time frame. With the small amount of films that I have sampled for this thesis, future research can look further into films outside of Bollywood and analyze how the gender of women is being represented in other films as well. Another limitation that was present in this line of research is creating too large of a timespan when choosing my films. While I naturally selected three films from three different decades, the analysis shows how some themes were barely present or were lacking in one film compared to the other. For future

research, perhaps look into films with a smaller timespan. Instead of doing a deep analysis of films every ten years, select more films within a smaller timespan, such as analyzing one film every five years, to show the audience how much or little can change in five years, compared to ten. My last limitation for this thesis was that I primarily focused on the woman gender only. While my main focus was to look at how women were represented in Bollywood films throughout these past three decades, an area for future research would be to compare the representation of both men and women, to see how both genders were represented in these films. By comparing how both men and women are represented in Bollywood films, it would allow for gender scholars to witness gender inequality in India, and if there have been solutions towards the problem.

Overall, this thesis has allowed me to explore and deeply analyze how the woman gender has been represented in Bollywood films. Throughout this thesis, I was able to analyze how the problems a woman faces, shapes her identity. Through the methodology of a thematic analysis, intersectionality theory, gender studies, and ultimately, media and cultural studies in communication, I have been able to deeply investigate how the woman gender is looked at and how she solves the challenges in her life, despite the unfair advantages she has, simply by her gender. Looking at the past three decades of these Bollywood films, gender representation of women has not yet reached the same equality as men, rather it has started to show improvement and is slowly reaching that stage, one step at a time.

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