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Journal of Macromarketing published online 14 May 2012
DOI: 10.1177/0276146712441799

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Journal of Macromarketing
000(00) 1-14
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DOI: 10.1177/0276146712441799
http://jmk.sagepub.com


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Abstract

Using the British Sikh community as its research context, this article explores the influence of the Bollywood film genre on what Vertovic refers to as the "diasporic consciousness" in relation to this community. Bollywood attempts to speak to the diaspora by conveying a new sense of "Indian-ness," one that is less about citizenship and more about imagined identity and community. The authors investigate what they have termed the "Indian imaginary" and how the values embedded therein impact on the lives of young British Sikhs. The findings discuss three emergent core themes: (1) reaffirming pride in Indian heritage; (2) evoking romance and longing; and (3) reinforcing family values and a sense of kinship within the British Sikh diaspora. The overall contribution of the article is twofold. First, it illustrates how the globalization of Bollywood affects the Indian diaspora at a local level. Second, it shows how Bollywood provides an important space for negotiating and reconciling various tensions between family-based and more individualistic value systems. Ultimately, then, Bollywood offers young British Sikhs a particular, hybridized representation of courtship and marriage that is both romantic and familial, and that serves to reconcile Eastern and Western marital relationship ideals and oppositional cultural discourses.

Keywords

Bollywood, British Sikh, film genre, diaspora, romance, love

The Hindi film industry, based in Mumbai, India, is popularly referred to as Bollywood, a term formed by integrating the former name of Mumbai (Bombay) and Hollywood (the center of the United States film industry). Bollywood offers an enormous production output of approximately 1,000 films a year compared with Hollywood, which released just over 500 in 2010 and indeed it has become an important catchall term for global Asian popular culture (Kaskebar 1996). Bollywood's origins can be traced back to 1913, when the first silent Indian feature film, *Raja Harishchandra*, was released by Dadasaheb Phalke through Bollywood's film production center, known as "film city" (Nihalini and Chatterji 2003). Yet, despite this long-standing history, global recognition, and numerous box office hits since the 1960s, Bollywood was only officially recognized as an industry by the Indian state on May 10, 1998. This recognition reflected the fact that India had recently become a valuable player in the global market, an "attractive and safe site for foreign investment" (Mehta 2005, p. 137). The prior reluctance to acknowledge that Bollywood is a major global industry probably reflects the fact that as a specific genre of film making renowned for both its popular appeal and formulaic nature, Bollywood has had to work hard to be taken seriously. Indeed, it has often been disparaged by film journalists for its characteristically overwrought and elaborate plots, escapist and fantastic storylines, exaggeratedly elaborate costumes and

settings, simplistic romantic plots, and soap opera nature (Dudrah 2006). Significantly, although other smaller film industries exist in India, such as "Tollywood" (the Telugu film industry based in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh), "Kollywood," (the Tamil film industry based in Chennai), and the "Punjabi" film industry, none of these are quite as popular or as dispersed and pervasive as the Bollywood film industry across the Indian diaspora.

From a macromarketing perspective, it is important to understand the societal impact of processes of globalization (Eckhardt and Mahi 2004; Kilbourne 2004). To this end the study draws its theoretical framing for this study primarily from Appadurai's (1990, 1996) insights into processes of globalization and transnational identity production. In particular, it draws on Appadurai's "theory of rupture" (Appadurai 1996, p. 3), which takes media and migration as its twin poles of

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influence on how modern subjectivities are imagined. Appadurai (p. 4) argues that electronic media such as the cinema, offer new resources “for self-imagining as an everyday social project,” thereby creating “communities of sentiment” (p. 8), namely groups of people that share the same feelings and imaginings. This is comparable to Anderson’s (1991) concept of nations as “imagined communities” that can be distinguished “by the style in which they are imagined” (p. 6), and above all, it addresses the cultural roots of these imaginings. Anderson’s work, like Appadurai’s, thus emphasizes the historical role played by the media in enabling communities of readers to spring up that related themselves to others “in profoundly new ways” (p. 37). He particularly notes the important part played by fiction, which “seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations” (p. 36). Both Appadurai and Anderson thus highlight the symbiotic relationship between the media, nationhood, and geographic dispersal. These latter two concepts are further elaborated on by Vertovic (2000), who refers to the “diasporic consciousness,” a sense of relationship across dispersed domains that give members of a diasporic community multiple reference points through which to identify with both a homeland and their country of residence (Weerakkody 2006). This is characterized by identity negotiation across these different domains that results in a synthesis or hybridization of cultures.

Using the British Sikh community as the research context, an exploration of the influence of the Bollywood genre on the “diasporic consciousness” is offered. First, a discussion of the background to the Bollywood film industry is offered in more detail with particular emphasis on the genre’s key characteristics and how it creates imagined communities of viewers (Anderson 1991). Then the interpretivist methodology is described that sought insights into how the cultural values embedded in the Bollywood genre play out in the lives of third-generation British Sikhs. Three key themes emerged as significant in Bollywood’s cultural mediation of diasporic tensions that this group experience, namely: (1) reaffirming pride in Indian heritage; (2) evoking romance and longing; and (3) reinforcing family values and a sense of kinship. The overall contribution is to illustrate not only how the globalization of Bollywood affects an Indian diaspora at a local level but also how this genre opens up an important space for negotiating and reconciling various tensions between familial and more individualistic cultures that third generation British Sikhs find themselves juggling.

An Overview of the Bollywood Film Industry

Perceived as the Indian (Hindi) version of Hollywood, Bollywood is the largest film producer in India and is one of the largest film producers worldwide. Bollywood not only denotes the large number of films made and viewed in the city of Mumbai but also the distribution, subtitling, dubbing, and viewing of these motion pictures worldwide. With the theme of what Mehta (2005) describes as a “family love story” (p. 139), the 1995 release of Aditya Chopra’s box office hit, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, affectionately known as DDLJ, has helped to

establish Bollywood movies (and Bombay filmmakers) in overseas markets. The film was awarded the prestigious filmfare award (Oscar of India), as it exposed issues that “migrated Indian communities may be facing, such as maintaining an Indian identity and community in a Western environment” (Mehta 2005, p. 145). The reach of Bollywood films in India is estimated at 65 percent of India’s rural population, including a relatively affluent middle class of approximately 150, 250,000 (Bhatia 2002). It is estimated that India’s 800 cinemas sell 10 million tickets daily, and have 5 billion visits annually (four times as many as the United States), generating an estimated income in the region of £500 million and employing over 500,000 full-time workers (Dudrah 2006, p. 35). However, it is apparent that in monetary terms, Bollywood comes second to Hollywood in terms of global film industry status (Kerrigan, Fraser, and Ozbilgin 2004). The stars of Bollywood films are extremely popular among their targeted audiences and are highly paid, considering the budgets of the films. Significantly, the influence of Bollywood is so colossal that movie stars are elected officials, and temples are constructed for some of them (Venkatesh and Swamy 1994; Rajagopal 2001). The lead star in a film often receives as much as 40 percent royalties for a typical film, and stars are sometimes working on ten films at any one time throughout the country (Gokulsing and Dissanyake 2004). The primary objective of Bollywood movies is to provide three to four hours of escapism, and the format is often very similar for each movie, with a few songs and dances, top stars, a story between the songs of boy meets girl, lots of action, and typically a happy-ever-after ending.

However, the Bollywood film industry is more than just popular Hindi cinema for Indians in India. In many respects, Bollywood films have become an international obsession with the Indian diaspora, and these films are viewed across South Asia, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, and Russia (Kaskebar 1996). Thus, Bollywood is fuelled by a larger audience eager to consume this genre (Britt 2002) with around 15 million expatriates accounting for 65 percent of Bollywood’s earnings (Dudrah 2006). In the United Kingdom alone, there are over 4,000 video shops that cater to the consistent demand for Bollywood movies (Dudrah 2006). Furthermore, mainstream chains such as the Odeon, UCI, Vue, and Virgin cinemas have been quick to cash in on the growing demand for Bollywood movies in the United Kingdom. In fact, the Bollywood hit *Lagaan* was entered into the best foreign film category at the Oscars in 2005 (Dudrah 2006), and the film *Devdas* (by Sanjay Leela Bansali) was featured at the Cannes film festival in 2002. This marked the departure from the highly genre specific nature of films that were emerging from Bollywood to ones that offered wider appeal and were perceived to have greater artistic merit. Bollywood movies now regularly appear in the UK top 10 and US top 20 ahead of many big budget Hollywood movies.

The Bollywood Film Genre

According to Sarkar (2008), “Bollywood is a signifier that celebrates the uniqueness of Indian cinema in terms of certain

essential, even reified features, including song and dance sequences, an overarching melodramatic mode, epic structures, storylines derived from mythologies and Sanskrit dramaturgy that usually lead to feel-good resolutions that intimate a set of structures that uphold a civilizational moral universe” (p. 4). Sanskrit drama is based on music, dance, and dramatic gestures. Other influences on Bollywood include folk theater and Parsi theater, which contributes to its melodramatic flavor, namely that there is an exaggerated plot and characters in order to appeal to its audience’s emotions. Hollywood, particularly its musicals, also has had a part to play in the development of the Bollywood genre. Sanskrit, the ancient religious and Indian language of the Vedas and of Hinduism, has been a particularly strong influence in Bollywood film genres, and indeed ancient religious scriptures of Sanskrit and its mythology provide the basis for numerous Bollywood films.

Similar to the Hollywood film industry, the Bollywood film industry has identified various genres of movies, such as “devotional films, social films and topical films” (Dudrah 2006, p. 33). However, unlike Hollywood movie genres, nearly all the famous Bollywood films have been of the romance genre. This ancient genre has its roots in the concept of fantastic and romantic adventures, often featuring a hero with superhuman qualities who goes on a quest to rescue a damsel in distress. According to Dudrah (2006), “romance and eroticism have always featured highly across the spectrum of Indian cinema and romantic films have been popular from the very beginning of Bollywood movies in particular” (p. 179). Each movie will have a core story and numerous small stories that are built around it, and this can include some comedy, action, and pathos. Nihalini and Chatterji (2003) suggest that, regardless of genre and themes, Bollywood movies have to be produced in such a way as to appeal to the masses and to all age groups, from a five-year-old child to an eighty-five-year-old grandfather (Miller 1975). They are required to have impressive stories, amazing and heart touching performances, lovely music, breath-taking locations, elaborate dance sequences, and perfect looking actors and actresses in the leading roles.

Unlike the Hollywood film industry, Bollywood movies have until recently largely been musicals, and indeed the success of them often depends on the quality of the music. Bollywood movie producers tend to release the movie soundtrack before the movie itself in order to increase the audience and movie sales. In this respect, Bollywood films are clearly very different from Hollywood films, as Gokulsing and Dissanyake (2004) suggest, and, unlike Hollywood films, Bollywood films typically consist of “songs, dances, love triangles, comedy and action all mixed up in a three to four hour long extravaganza with an intermission” (p. 18). These particular types of Bollywood movies are typically referred to as “masala” (Indian spice mixture) movies (Ganti 2004).

A familiar and basic feature of Bollywood movies is the theme of a boy-meets-girl love story, which is set against a backdrop of binary oppositions, such as East and West, tradition and modernity, rich and poor, and so forth (Dudrah 2006). Similarly, conforming to the integration of “binary

oppositions,” Bollywood movies uphold the beliefs of love mythology, where love conquers all and individuals only attain completeness or a full identity by marrying for love (Harrington and Bielby 1991). However, Bollywood movies must also uphold family values and traditions, and reconciling these two potentially conflictual aspects often creates considerable tension in Bollywood films. This tension is illustrated throughout the family love story films genre and is exemplified by films such as *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (K3G), (sometimes happiness, sometimes sadness), or *Hum Saath Saath Hain* (we are together and support each other).

More recently, British-born, Sikh filmmakers such as Gurinder Chadha have established a new hybrid genre of “Indian English Films” (Chatterji 2007), such as *Bride and Prejudice*, a Bollywood adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. This used a mixture of English, Punjabi, and Hindi dialogue and music. She also produced films such as *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), *Bend it like Beckham* (2002), and *It’s a Wonderful Afterlife* (2010). This genre of films tends to be about Sikhs who have grown up or lived abroad for a long time, typically in the United Kingdom. Interestingly, Britain seems to be the favored film location for some of the most renowned Mumbai filmmakers such as Karan Johar (*Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* 2001) and Aditya Chopra (*Mohabbatein* 2000). However, according to Chatterji (2007), the issue remains as to whether Bollywood has been redefined by Western sociocultural influences, or whether it has become a hybrid genre that holds its core values but has absorbed certain aspects of other influences, such as Hollywood. And indeed, Dudrah (2006) claims “the fascination for all things Bollywood has seeped into mainstream Western music, theatre, fashion, television and the high street department stores of the West” (p. 17). Lord Lloyd Weber produced the West End production *Bollywood Dreams* with Preeya Khalidas, and Bollywood has inspired a number of Hollywood musicals in recent years, including *Moulin Rouge* and *Mama Mia*.

Despite the many and complex influences that the Bollywood film genre draws on in its quest to emulate and compete with Hollywood, Rajadhyaksha (2003) argues that above all, the Bollywood genre conveys a “new sense of Indian-ness” (p. 32). Rajadhyaksha (2003) describes this new sense of Indian-ness as a “freer form of civilizational belonging, explicitly delinked from the political rights of citizenship” (p. 25). The objective is to understand a particular “Indian imaginary,” and how the values embedded therein impact on the lives of a “community of sentiment” (Appadurai 1996), namely young British Sikhs. This study explores the view that the consumption of Bollywood films “facilitates and mobilizes the transnational imagination and helps to create new ways for consumers to think of themselves as Asian” (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008, p. 216).

As part of this exploration, the research unpacks how the reception of Bollywood is mediated by social (Gentry and Commuri 2009) and cultural dynamics, and to do so it draws on Fish’s concept of interpretive communities that emerge in response to particular genres. Similar to communities of sentiment, members of an interpretive community share the same

emotions and fantasies, but also understand the mores and codes of a particular genre and thus interpret such genres in a common way.

There have been a number of key studies of interpretive communities in relation to nationalism and identity. Gaines (2005) study explores the difficulties of being an American doing ethnographic research on Indians in India and highlights how the concept of an "exotic other" is communicated in this process. Elsewhere, Murphy and Kraidy (2003) discuss how "orientalism" is a two-way process, whereby the East may "exoticize" the West and the West may "exoticize" the East, thus creating mutual objectification in relation to the "exotic other." Murphy refers to this process as the "negotiation and definition of Self-through-Other." In a study of TV viewers in Mexico, Murphy (1999) discusses audiences' decoding processes, including ideological incorporation and resistance (Fiske 1998) as well as the ritual and performative aspects of television viewing. His study underlines the fact that interpretive communities exist at both an institutional and semiotic level. He also emphasizes how the family provides "a locus for understanding how dominant social interests... are articulated... reproduced and reflected discursively and materially through the expression of taste, social class, and gender."

Similarly, Parameswaran's (2001) study of Indian middle- and upper-class Hindu women's reading of Mills & Boon romances in Urban India explores the interpretive strategies employed by this community of women readers in order to negotiate and reconcile the many conflicts and contradictions between their own lives and this Western romance genre. Hence the power of interpretive communities to create particular imaginary worlds that are adapted to their own cultural contexts. This is again well illustrated by O'Shea's (1998) study of traditional Indian dance that explores how two interpretive communities in India developed two distinct styles of dance, "with divergent notions of their pasts and futures" (p. 57). These different interpretive communities ultimately created "two discrete sets of aesthetic standards and choreographic conventions" (p. 57).

Each of these examples emphasizes the importance of framing consumption of particular genres within an interpretive community context. This is particularly important for this study, given that Bollywood films are consumed in social, collective groups in specific communities and often in family gatherings and settings (Gentry and Commuri 2009). Undoubtedly, then, the authors are studying "communities of readers," to use Parameswaran's (2001) phrase, and this knowledge informs their interpretive study of Bollywood.

Methodology

The data for this article was accumulated as part of a larger study investigating the use of Internet dating by the Sikh community. As part of this research project, interviews were conducted with individuals from the British Sikh community. The overall approach taken was interpretivist, and data collection followed a multi-method design, which was a combination of netnography (i.e., online interviews; Kozinets 2002), with

offline semistructured interviews. In keeping with a netnographic research approach, one of the researchers was actively immersed in the research process and acted as both an observer and participator in the study. She herself is a third-generation British Sikh, and as such she belonged to the particular interpretive community being studied. She engaged and interacted with other members of the Sikh dating community via a Sikh dating website called Shaadi.com for a two-and-half-year period (see Kozinets 1997, 2002; Maclaran and Catterall 2002). In accordance with the recommended research ethics for online research (Sharf 1999) and the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) code of conduct, this researcher announced her presence prior to any direct interaction with informants and she assured them of the anonymity of all informants' disclosures to her. Given this multi-method approach, the netnography produced substantial fieldnotes, which documented the researcher's observations on the interactions between members on the site, as well as the researcher's own thoughts and feelings about the research process taking place and her personal reflections and experiences on Shaadi.com (2010). This approach conformed to Charmaz's (2000) advocacy of a deep understanding of the situation that influences respondents. The first Sikh families (i.e., first and second generation) came to Britain in the 1950s from India, and the key informants for this current research are the sons and daughters (third generation) of the second generation.

The study was carried out longitudinally over a period of two and a half years, and the final data set included transcripts from fifteen online interviews, fifteen offline interviews, and copious fieldnotes from participant observations. It adopted a theoretical sampling approach, which requires continual comparisons being made as the data are collected, and seeking informants on the basis of emergent constructs (Cresswell 2007). To illustrate this process, several young British Sikh users were interviewed online, and subsequently in-depth interviews were conducted with them offline, in order to explore in detail their "live" experience of using the site, their perceptions of its role in their lives, and their interpretation of Sikh courtship. A key issue that was explored in the interviews was the influence of the Bollywood medium, and informants were encouraged to explore how the consumption of Bollywood films influenced, impacted, and implicated their hybrid identity projects as third-generation young British Sikhs with an Indian heritage, as they searched for marital partners. Given that the emphasis was on considering the influence of these forces in the context of informants' day-to-day lives, an interactive approach to interviews was adopted, in order to facilitate a more authentic conversation between informant and researcher, as recommended by Maxwell (2005). The informants for the online interviews were recruited through the Shaadi.com website's online community. The informants for the offline interviews were recruited through interaction within the Sikh community and through networking at the Sikh temple (Gurdwara), which enabled the researcher to identify users of Shaadi.com. The third-generation participants were all single and aged twenty-two to thirty-five, as this was the age group

that had been identified as experiencing particular tensions between parental values and those of their British non-Sikh contemporaries as they approached the milestone of marriage.

Data collection was conducted in several phases, as befitted the nature of the sampling method. The data collection, analysis, and interpretation progressed in an iterative and interrelated manner as the researcher moved between the online and offline environments. This data analysis process was in keeping with the principles for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data recommended by Spiggle (1994) and others (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

A key factor to emerge early on in the interviews was the influence of Bollywood as an important cultural reference point for enabling them to understand more about their Indian roots and gain a sense of “Indian-ness” and belonging. Although actors in Bollywood films largely speak Hindi and perform Hindu traditions, there is a perceived affinity with Sikh culture due to the fact that Sikhism emerged from the Hindu religion and culture. Bollywood was thus seen as exposing informants to distinctive Indian courtship rituals that had been lost in their adopted country of residence. The focus on Bollywood increased in the later phases of data collection, as it emerged as a key area for discussion during researcher probing. This is in accordance with the interpretive stance and its emphasis on respecting the emergent patterns of qualitative data (Van Maanen 1983). Much of these data emerged from the interactive phases of data collection. Such was the richness and depth of informants’ discussions on the consumption and interpretation of Bollywood films that it warranted further development and explication, and this rich seam of data came to form the basis for this present article. The core research questions are: how do cultural values embedded in the Bollywood genre influence young British Sikhs’ perception of courtship and marriage; and how does the consumption of Bollywood films mediate tensions they are experiencing at this important time in their lives? In the next section, the authors present around the three key themes that emerged in answer to these questions: (1) reaffirming pride in Indian heritage; (2) evoking romance and longing; and (3) reinforcing family values and a sense of kinship.

Findings

Reaffirming Pride in Indian Heritage

In accordance with Dudrah’s (2006) study of the effects of the Bollywood film medium on the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom and the United States, Bollywood emerged as a key medium through which pride in Indian heritage is reaffirmed and transferred intergenerationally. Immigrant Sikh parents used Bollywood as a favored means of entertainment (and, we might add, education) in order to give their children a sense of “Indian-ness.” Pritam, a third-generation male, describes how his family encouraged him to watch Bollywood movies from a young age:

We (the family) grew up watching Hindi (Bollywood) films and we learnt a lot from them, but I think that’s why my parents

used to make me watch them because they made us think about being an Indian. Actually that’s probably why they used to make us go to family events too! Lol. (Pritam, Sikh Male, Online)

Pritam is aware that his parents used Bollywood movies to maintain links with their homeland culture, and he associates it with other taken-for-granted influences in his childhood such as family events. For Pritam and other young Sikhs like him who have grown up in the United Kingdom, Bollywood is a tool that teaches him about his ethnic identity. While Bollywood is a film medium with the values of the Indian nation state deeply embedded in its ideologies (Mehta 2005), it affects the Indian diaspora in very individual and local ways, according to their specific interpretive frameworks. Through consumption of Bollywood films, young British Sikhs can identify with “both a homeland and current conditions of residence” (Koppedrayar 2005), or what Clifford (1991) describes as “discrepant cosmopolitanism” (p. 312), whereby individuals experience existential presence and participation here (United Kingdom) as well as there (India). Thus, the third generation of the British Sikh community may draw on Bollywood movies to learn about Indian culture and integrate it into their identity projects (Ustuner and Holt 2007). Exposure to Bollywood enables young Sikhs like Pritam to self-monitor their own behaviors (Harnish and Bridges 2006), as well as enabling them to ensure they are conforming to traditional Indian values when necessary. Informants frequently mentioned that they found it easy to identify with Bollywood actors and actresses, because they had the same skin color as them, as Pip explains:

I could say Bollywood doesn’t influence me, but it does! And they’re [Bollywood actors and actresses] like us and look like us, well no I wish we looked like that, but you know what I mean? They’re Indian too and look like us, like skin wise and speak like us. (Pip, Sikh Male, Online)

Pip is constructing “collective social meanings” (Dudrah 2006, p. 18) from his identification with Bollywood actors and actresses. It is evident, exposure to Bollywood is encouraging him to reflect on his Indian identity and to attempt to conform to these idealistic images of what being Indian means. This is an imagined sense of “Indian-ness,” one that is constructed by Bollywood and bought into by its viewers, who interpret these constructions in relation to their specific circumstances. Indeed, an onus to conform to the mother country’s values is conveyed in the Bollywood genre by representing India as “the exotic other,” in marked opposition to the values of a British, Western society. These themes were recurrent throughout interviews, with other informants referring enthusiastically to Bollywood both as a mechanism to keep them “in touch with their culture” and to “learn how to be” in terms of behavior and the various role enactments that their (perceived) Indian culture dictates. This resonates with Mankekar’s (1999) observation on the significance of television production and “its conscious deployment .. to construct a pan-Indian culture based

on hegemonic ideologies of community and identity” (p. 113). Jaya is conforming to such ideologies when she explains how she learnt about gender-based roles and the appropriate courtship behavior and rituals:

Well I learnt how to be in certain situations, like when the boy’s family comes to see the girl and then I watch that and think, OK maybe that’s how I should be. And it keeps me in touch with who I am. (Jaya, Sikh Female, Offline)

Through her consumption of Bollywood movies, the reader can see how Jaya is going through a reflexive questioning of both her behaviors and her identity, and this reflexive process is triggered by the values embedded in the genre. Although this may seem naive, it should be remembered that the informants are engaged in a search for marriage partners and at an especially vulnerable and receptive stage in their lives. For Jaya and the other young British Sikh informants, the traditional and idealized scenes portraying Indian customs and tradition within Bollywood movies evoke a longing to search for this sense of Indian-ness. However, her consumption of Bollywood films, while offering her a template on which to model her behavior and expectations, also serves to unsettle her, as she knows it is an idealistic representation of courtship. Thus Jaya suspends her disbelief as she consumes Bollywood films, but she does not totally accept the gender-based differences that she is exposed to either, and acknowledges the ambivalence she feels, while ultimately accepting the double standards that exist:

My grandmother never tells my brother, right go and take care of this or go and do this. It was always my responsibility and that’s purely because I’m a girl and nothing else and it’s kind of accepted in our families and if the girl doesn’t do it, it’s kind of like oh gosh, she’s rebelling, there’s something wrong with her. There’s a lot of pressure on the girl and I think because of that we tend to rebel against our parents and I guess these films don’t always help, but at the same time I do think a girl suits being in the kitchen more so than a boy and I do kind of shoot myself in the foot! (Jaya, Sikh Female, Offline)

As young Sikhs such as Jaya negotiate the competing pressures in their lives, the diasporic consciousness emerges as a way to resolve cultural tensions and create a hybridized culture. Bollywood films are influential from early childhood for these young British Sikhs as a favored means of entertainment. This intergenerational transference of “Indian-ness” represents what Vertovic (2000) describes as “diaspora as a mode of cultural production” (p. 153), whereby a form of diasporic consciousness emerges in the next generation members of diasporic communities. This is clearly the case with third generation British Sikhs whose grandparents emigrated from India.

Thus, third-generation British Sikhs, through their consumption of Bollywood, buy into a “transnational imagined community” (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008, p. 216). As previously noted, Anderson’s (1991) concept of nationality in terms of imagined communities is highly pertinent in relation to Bollywood. Drawing on his work (1983), this article suggests that the

world portrayed by Bollywood can be envisaged as a social and cultural construct that enables its audience to connect with the India of their collective imagination, a connection that replaces actually living in India. Anderson’s concept of “print capitalism” is also relevant here, because he emphasizes the power of the media in creating a common forum or discourse that ensures maximum coverage and exposure for a particular media text. The massive scale of Bollywood is an excellent illustration of this power.

Fish’s (1976) concept of interpretive communities is also very relevant in this context. Readers learn how to read and interpret the values and meanings of a particular text according to a common sense of identity. They are informed readers who possess both the linguistic competence and the semantic knowledge to interpret a text in the required (socially constructed) way (Fish 1976). Bollywood can therefore be envisaged as a textual construct that upholds and reinforces the cultural values of the Indian homeland. Thus, young British Sikhs form both an imagined community and an interpretive community; they are a social group united in their search for a Sikh marriage in the Bollywood-style, despite the fact that they live in a Western, British culture that contrasts with the “imagined homeland” of India and the interpretive community they belong to (Djelic and Quack 2010).

Kuldip, a second-generation British Sikh parent, analyses Bollywood’s cultural role in her children’s lives:

I think they learn something good from every film and it’s their culture and they can identify with that. I think it also helps them in how they decide on their own identity.

They can relate to Bollywood films more than they can relate to Hollywood films. I would die for my religion and culture, just like our gurus did, I love it that much.

(Kuldip, Sikh Female, Parent, Offline)

Kuldip clearly uses Bollywood as a socialization mechanism and a reinforcement tool for her children. Through the family scenes portrayed in Bollywood films, second-generation British Sikhs hope to evoke a desire for kinship and family values in their offspring. The certainty in Kuldip’s tone as she describes how her children can relate to “Bollywood films more than they can relate to Hollywood films” demonstrates the way in which she uses Bollywood movies to influence them to adopt Indian values. Kuldip’s behavior is representative of collectivist behavior (Capozza, Voci, and Licciardello 2000), reinforcing values that the older generation try to feed down to the third generation through their own teachings and Bollywood movies. Educating “Indian nationals, both at home and abroad, in Indian traditions” (Mehta 2005, p. 145), the Bollywood film industry invokes, celebrates, and propagates the “Indian imaginary,” ensuring its audiences retain their “Indian-ness” (Rajadhyaksha 2003, p. 32), regardless of geographic location and dispersal. With happy endings that continually reinforce the Indian joint family system, the process that underpins this imaginary can be seen as one that erases any factors that may undermine this idealized picture, such as

intergenerational dissension or external cultural influences (Uberoi 2001). Although sometimes informants like Jaya experienced dissonance with this idealization in the light of their everyday realities, by and large the informants, like those in Uberoi's (2001) study, believed that the ideal was possible and worth striving for.

Evoking Romance and Longing

Bollywood narratives revolve around a love story, and it was evident during the interviews that informants' imaginations were fired by Bollywood's highly wrought stories of love and romance, reinforcing Derne's (2008) suggestion that the primary influencing factor on younger viewers is the concept of love. The centrality of an ideology of romantic love clearly resonated with informants, despite this being at odds with other cultural values that are valorized in Indian culture, such as collective, familial responsibility and duty. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, although Bollywood celebrates Indian culture and conveys a deep sense of pride in being Indian, the Bollywood film genre challenges and even undermines traditional Indian views of courtship and love, namely that love comes after marriage. Showing a marked similarity to the Hollywood musical genre, the love story has always been prominent in Bollywood films (Mehta 2005), and over the last decade the focus on idealized love has become increasingly appealing to Bollywood audiences (Punathambekar 2005), striking a particular chord with third-generation British Sikhs in search of a marital partner. Indeed, informants showed a willingness to suspend their disbelief, to paraphrase the romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge's phrase, in order to embrace the romanticized discourse embedded in Bollywood films, a willingness that is well illustrated by Kulsum, a young Sikh female:

Bollywood, that's perfect isn't it? It's perfect people, perfect situation, true love constantly. That would be perfect and good. It influences you to seek a guy that would do that, but then you look at these mere mortals sitting in front of you and think. I mean obviously what they do in films encourages you to seek a person like that. I think subconsciously we are programmed to seek this film star guy, you know this Mr. Dynamic, fighting man, who is so loving, so caring, self-sacrificing. So yes it does influence me and that's why I'm probably not actually happy with a mere mortal. (Kulsum, Sikh Female, Offline)

As the above quote so aptly highlights, Bollywood love and romance is being idealized in Kulsum's eyes. She begins by uncritically reflecting on the perfection of the Bollywood world and how "good" it is, demonstrating a very positive attitude to the love story and admitting that she is influenced by these plots to search for a perfect man in the real world. She then takes a step back, however, acknowledging that she is aware, as a young Indian Sikh female, that she is "programmed" to respond in this way, to go along with the storyline and knowingly believe in it. In fact, while she demonstrates that she is

aware that she is being manipulated by the Bollywood film factory, nevertheless she acknowledges that the idealistic world of Bollywood spills over into her real world and makes her resist accepting a man who is "a mere mortal."

The ability to willingly suspend disbelief is particularly crucial when readers are consuming texts that have strong fantasy elements, as readers are required to go with the emotional flow of the narrative and suspend any skepticism or cynicism they might have for such fantastic and implausible tales. This recalls Parameswaran's (2001) study of Indian women's reading of Mills & Boon romances. They took from the genre what they wanted, namely a romantic plot, virginal heroines, and sexual tension, but recognized that this genre bore little resemblance to their everyday lives. Kulsum also underlines the conundrum posed by such genres, as an interpretive community negotiates the commonalities and contrasts with their own lives.

Other informants wax lyrical about the perfect love portrayed in Bollywood films. Saira, a young Sikh female, describes the kind of love she longs for:

I just love it when we watch these (Bollywood) films and they have the couples and the love they have is so perfect and wins against all odds. It's so intense and so romantic, especially with the love songs that they have in the films, they are so perfect. I just watch these films and they kinda make me yearn for the guys in the film. It's a bit weird, but I really do just love them and want that kind of love. (Saira, Sikh Female, Offline)

Saira also shows awareness that this is an idealized world that is different from the real world, but nevertheless, like Kulsum, she finds herself being both absorbed by and unsettled by this "perfect," imaginary world, entangled in the irresistible fabric of the Bollywood cinematic experience, and yearning to be the heroine who is loved by the kinds of men portrayed in the films. She acknowledges that it is somewhat weird for her to allow her two worlds to collide, so that she contemplates having such expectations, but once again it is evident that a willing suspension of disbelief is a key part of the consumption experience of such films. This response is consistent with the consumption of other forms of media consumption too, such as books and magazines (Belk 1987, 1989; Hirschman and Holbrook 1992; Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Parameswaran 2001).

Similar to Kulsum, Saira's notion of a "perfect" Bollywood love represents the "good life" (Belk and Pollay 1985) to Saira, and influences her expectations of her marital partner. Saira constructs her longings for love and romance around the idealized fantasy-based images that she sees in Bollywood movies. Descriptions of Bollywood movies or scenes consistently accompanied her references to love and romance, demonstrating the significance of love, romance, and Bollywood to the construction of her own identity as a young Sikh female on a quest for love, and to her understanding of herself as she envisages the milestone of marriage. Likewise, other informants admitted to living in their own "little Heer Ranjha (Indian Romeo and Juliet) fairytale," reflecting Kozinets' (2008)

observation that “ideologies influence consumers’ thoughts, narratives, and actions” (p. 865). Here it is apparent how the fantasies and ideologies surrounding love and romance portrayed through Bollywood films influence the thoughts and actions of third-generation British Sikhs at an intensely personal level. One particular young male, revealingly naming himself “loveonmoon4u,” clearly underlines a willingness to identify himself with love and romance Bollywood-style. He describes the intense love and romance that he longs for as a result of watching Bollywood movies and the associated suspension of disbelief that he engages in:

Watching Hindi films, I think what I want from marriage is this. We shall meet as true friends, true lovers forever and always [marriage]. Love is a unique feeling and this is what I’m looking for. Love, trust and commitment can conquer the longest distance. I want love, life and happiness. Love that knows no barriers. (Loveonmoon4u, Sikh Male, Online)

As loveonmoon4u describes his longings, he adopts the melodramatic tone and style of the Bollywood film genre, showing how personally involved he is, and acknowledging that Bollywood influences his notions of love and romance, exemplifying the impact this medium and its attendant ideologies have on him (Kozinets 2008). His own description of love is intense and passionate, recalling a love scene from a Bollywood movie. The Bollywood love that young British Sikhs from the Indian diaspora long for conforms to the beliefs of romantic love mythology embedded in the Bollywood genre, whereby love conquers all and individuals only attain completeness by choosing a partner who is their soul mate (Harrington and Bielby 1991).

Young British Sikhs described being “mad about Bollywood,” and third-generation females such as Shabs frequently said things such as:

I am mad about Bollywood. It’s all about romance and happiness. People in them have struggles, but believe in love and romance. That helps them get through everything. Bollywood films get me through. I just pray my prince would come and save me! (Shabs, Sikh Female, Offline)

Suspending their disbelief, young British Sikh females similar to Shabs, consistently referred to searching for the love of this “prince,” paralleling the plots of so many Bollywood movies, and often they are immersed in the Bollywood world to such an extent that they see themselves in the narratives, playing the roles of the heroes and heroines. Shabs conveys her absorption in and enthusiasm for the Bollywood genre, acknowledging that the genre gives her a belief in romantic love, and she hopes that someday her prince will come. Interestingly, the reference to the “prince” demonstrates the Western influence in the lives of third-generation British Sikhs, as typically the notion of being rescued by a handsome prince is a tradition that derives from European fairytales, romances, and chivalric adventures dating back to the seventeenth century. Clearly, the plot of a

prince rescuing a damsel in distress resonates across cultures and through time, and often finds its way into both Bollywood and Hollywood films.

The romance has historically been at odds with marriage, as romantic love is perceived as emotive and passionate, whereas married love is perceived as more companionable and pragmatic. Its importance in Bollywood films thus underlines a fundamental tension experienced by young Sikhs in search of a marriage partner. The Bollywood love that third-generation British Sikhs seem to be searching for is compatible with Illouz’s (1997) notions of romantic love, whereby “romantic love is irrational rather than rational, gratuitous rather than profit-orientated, organic rather than utilitarian, private rather than public” (p. 272). Through the consumption of Bollywood movies, young informants seemingly embed themselves within this compelling reading community (Parameswaran, 2001), aspiring to be the heroes and heroines of their own romantic narratives, recreating and reenacting the search for true love and the eventual completion of that search in marriage with the man or woman of their dreams.

Reinforcing Family Values and a Sense of Kinship

In contrast to Hollywood’s more individualized notion of love and romance that often focuses on a romantic hero and heroine, Bollywood love stories are always embedded within a wider context that maintains Indian social values, particularly the role of the extended family, its hierarchy, and the collective responsibility for family members. This system ensures that individual wants are subordinated to the greater interests of the family collectivity (Das 1976). Indeed, Mehta (2005) describes these films as “family love stories” (p. 136), reflecting the Bombay film industry’s long history of producing “family films which wove a happy marriage between Indian traditions and the global market,” according to Mehta (2005, p. 136). Moorti (2003) observes that the Bollywood film medium is exemplary of the ways in which “transnational media practices facilitate such longings and desires” (p. 358). Bollywood films are “ideological fields” (Kozinets 2008, p. 865), where the ideology of romantic love intermingles with a traditional ideology of family-centric values. As Saira rationalizes the role of the Bollywood film genre in her life, she negotiates tensions between her desire for romantic Bollywood love, and her desire to display parental respect, arguably the most important value in Indian culture. The following extract also shows the importance in this interpretive community of differentiating themselves from the undesirable aspects of “the other,” in this case British culture. This recalls the elitism and oppositional discourse noted in other studies of Indian culture, such as Parameswaran’s study of women readers of romance fiction in India, who upheld traditional Hindu values of ideal femininity in preference to contemporary Western women’s perceived values. Saira observes:

Bollywood is always all about love and I love that about Bollywood films. It’s so nice to see these perfect love stories and the

happy ever after, it makes me feel warm inside watching that. Yet I also kind of learn about the Indian culture and think about how I should behave as a young Sikh girl and keep my parents respect in the community and can't really be running around with loads of boys like I'm white. (Saira, Sikh Female, Offline)

Although seeking out love or finding your own marital partner is not always readily accepted in her community, where arranged marriages are still common, Saira certainly values the fact that Bollywood goes against such traditions and celebrates the pursuit of love and romance. In tandem, however, she equally treasures the familial Indian values that are portrayed. Again, there are obvious self-monitoring processes taking place, as she is encouraged to reflect on her own behaviors and actions as she seeks a marital partner. Interestingly, it is important for her to distinguish herself from "white" courtship behaviors, which are perceived as being too individualistic and possibly promiscuous, and disrespectful to one's parents and community.

The familial ideologies displayed relating to family and kinship within Bollywood films influence young British Sikhs at an individual and collective level, affecting both their own identity construction and that of their family (Price and Epp 2005). Like Saira, Jas also discusses how Bollywood has played a primary role in maintaining Indian familial values.

I've learnt loads from Bollywood films about our culture and how to behave. I learnt what's important and what's not. Especially from the older films, that we used to watch together. And now going through the whole marriage thing, I honestly have to say I realise the importance of tradition and stuff that much more and think I've learnt through Bollywood. I know I need to respect my parents and behave in a certain Indian kinda way! Especially as I've got older. (Jas, Sikh Female, Online)

In these ways, Saira and Jas exemplify Shukla's (1999) point that the "Indian-ness" that is learnt and adopted through Bollywood films is "at once a language of locality, of serving to articulate migrants place in society, and of (inter-) nationality, to shore up their position in a particular notion (and materiality) of India" (p. 21). As such they embrace the "Indian imaginary" that Bollywood celebrates.

As in the Reaffirming Pride in Indian Heritage subsection and again in Jas's discussions above, an important aspect of the Bollywood genre of "family films" and "family love stories" is that it facilitates family consumption from an early age. In this way, the Bollywood film industry's attempts to "reproduce the Indian nation" (Mehta 2005, p. 137) globally through Bollywood are successful. For young British Sikhs, the role of Bollywood in their lives is not simply about the oppositions between the Western and Indian values, "but rather underscores diasporic identity formation as a negotiation between cultures and epistemes" (Moorti 2003, p. 364). Mehta (2005) suggests that Bollywood's representation of Indian tradition is located within a moral and ethical code, with women playing a fundamental role in maintaining the patriarchal Indian family. Similarly, Punathambekar (2005) describes how it is Indian

mothers who watch Bollywood films with their children and interpret the narratives for them. This was certainly true for the second and third generation of the British Sikh community; the consumption of Bollywood films was a truly collective family time, as Sanya, a second-generation mother, describes:

We call ourselves Sikh and we call ourselves Punjabi. Our culture is the Indian culture and it is according to that, that we live and teach our kids, and Bollywood films show the kids how to behave and how our culture works. Sometimes I have to explain to the kids what is happening when we are watching them and the things that they don't understand, but the kids always watch them with me and we all learn different thing from them about our culture. (Sanya, Sikh Female, Parent, Offline)

In this way, Bollywood establishes its credibility with this diasporic group as the bearer of "Indian-ness." The experiential, collective, and family consumption of Bollywood movies and the "Indian imaginary" work in different ways, depending on levels of acculturation to the Western world. Some second-generation parents such as Sanya endeavor to condition their children to reject Western culture and the individualism associated with it, and Bollywood is a tool that they utilize to assist them in this process. For parents like her, Western media, such as films, music, soaps, and wider sociocultural trends (e.g., dating, divorce, etc.) are all evidence of a corrupting Western influence that threatens familial and traditional values portrayed in a Bollywood movie (Punathambekar 2005). Therefore, Bollywood is a tool that mothers like Sanya use to balance the acculturation of their children to the West (Prasad 2000) and that also serve to ensure that they maintain Indian values. Thus, mothers use Bollywood films as a means of reinforcing long-standing cultural traditions, moral values, and life lessons (Punathambekar 2005). Uberoi (1998) explains, "whether at home or abroad it is the Indian family system that is recognised as the social institution that quintessentially defines being Indian" (p. 308). As such, the idea of the Indian family becomes a trope for identity maintenance and resistance to cultural change. It also recalls Murphy's (1999) observation that the interpretive community of the family serves as both an institutional and a semiotic concept to ensure that social and cultural interests are upheld and disseminated.

According to Mehta (2005), the global recognition of the Bollywood film industry and the way in which it is able to control the contents of its family films enables the Indian state to control the specific messages and ideologies that it wants to transmit. Third-generation British Sikhs repeatedly described a modern Bollywood film that significantly influenced them known as *Kabhi Khush Kabhi Ghum* (Sometimes happiness, Sometimes Sadness/K3G). Simran and Baz in particular seemed to be influenced by this Bollywood family love story and the Indian family values that they portray, as they both felt it was a film that enabled them to reconnect with Indian culture and its collective values:

“*Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Ghum*, that’s the one film that I rate and love, oh and *Dilwale Dulhania*. But K3G, it’s got everything in it. It’s about family, loyalty, understanding, relationships, lots and lots of emotions and love on every level. This is one film that I can watch over and over again. It’s kinda made me think a lot about marriage and what’s important, and you don’t really see what it’s like for your parents either, but from that film I could see, I learnt about how traditions are important.” (Simran, Sikh Female, Online)

Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Ghum is a good film, I love that film, and I never used to watch films that much until that film came out. When I watched that film I realised the importance of my mum and family and how much we should do for each other and sticking together and stuff. But then I also like the love story in it as well and how she is such a nice, sweet, innocent girl. I think watching that film so many times I have taken something new from it every time, and am more sensible and know about more traditions and stuff now. (Baz, Sikh Male, Online)

Both Simran and Baz evidently value the considerable role that Bollywood plays in their lives. The scenes from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Ghum* have evoked a state of self-reflexivity, whereby they reflect on their own lives and identities. They each experienced the consumption of this particular Bollywood movie repetitively, and through this process the importance of family values and family feelings are reaffirmed (Mehta 2005). *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Ghum* is a family love story that is significant in the revival of the Bollywood film industry across the Indian diaspora, as it is located in both India and the United Kingdom. For example, the father of the hero, Mr. Raichand (Amitabh Bachan), consistently conveys the significance of upholding family values at any cost, as well as gaining a good education from a Western institution. This is a good example of the dual pressures that parents exert on their children. In fact, it is “the Indian diaspora aspect of globalisation that has been best expressed in film, and the experiences of Indians in the United States and the United Kingdom dominate” in Bollywood films, according to Singh (2004). Significantly, in *Dilwale Dulhania La Jayenge* (DDLJ), Raj (the hero) living in the United Kingdom repeatedly tells Simran (the heroine) that they cannot elope, but their union must be blessed by their families. This is exemplary of the combination of the Hollywood love ideology with the traditional Indian values that constitute Bollywood movies. While Simran (the heroine) also a nonresident Indian (NRI) based in the United Kingdom conforms to the Hollywood love ideology, Raj the hero conforms to the ideals of the Indian community. Scenes such as these encourage young Sikhs to identify with the tensions that are being negotiated because they are experiencing similar conflicts in their own lives.

Discussion

The findings, have highlighted three key themes around nationality, the love quest, and the family. In reality, however, these themes intertwine and overlap in compelling and powerful

ways, to reconcile the conflicts surrounding Indian-ness for third-generation Indian Sikhs in Britain. Uberoi (2001) writes that Indian popular cinema highlights conflicts between *dharma* (social duty) and desire, and between freedom and destiny, all of which must be reconciled before a happy ending can be attained. This can be seen clearly in the present study. In Bollywood films, the intergenerational conflicts and differing expectations are erased or hidden, subsumed under an overarching narrative strategy that offers a solution to these three aspects for this particular community of sentiment: an idealized view of Indian national identity, the triumph of romantic love, and a celebration of the joint family system, a system that is increasingly challenged by changing social, cultural, and global processes.

This study extends previous research in two ways: first, it demonstrates how the global Bollywood film medium affects the Indian diaspora on a local level and reinforces familial and traditional Indian values. Second, it identifies how this wide reaching and unique genre of cinema has become an important yet overlooked tool in the identity negotiation of a particular interpretive community and Indian diasporic group, namely British Sikhs.

Consuming the Indian Imaginary within the Indian Diaspora

The study extends previous theories relating to the Indian diaspora (Moorti 2003; Punathambekar 2005, Lindridge and Dhillon 2005) by analyzing the local effects of consumption of the globalized Bollywood film medium on young British Sikhs. The research findings elucidate the link between the globalised Bollywood film medium and the quest for love and romance that is evoked within this interpretive community. Whereas previous research has tended to focus on the Indian diaspora in the United States and Canada, this study has focused on the localized effects of Bollywood within an ethnic group in the United Kingdom. The study shows how the “transnational communities imagined within Bollywood films find their locus in private, domestic and intimate spaces” (Moorti 2003, p. 357), and how they influence the third-wave Indian diaspora by invoking the “Indian imaginary” and reinforcing a sense of “Indian-ness” in their audiences. Importantly, third-generation British Sikhs described films by Bollywood producers such as Karan Johar or Yash Chopra, not films with a Sikh or Punjabi context, for example, *Bride and Prejudice* by Gurinder Chadha. Bollywood cinema thus appears to be exporting “Indian nationalism itself a commodified and globalized product” (Rajadhyaksha 2003, p. 37). As such, Bollywood speaks to an imagined community that is simultaneously restricted and sovereign, to draw on Anderson’s (1991) work in relation to national identity creation.

In addition, much of the previous research has tended to focus on the localized affects of the Bollywood film medium on those of the second-wave (second generation) Indian diaspora (Punathambekar 2005; Dudrah 2006). This study has focussed on the localized affects of the global film medium

in relation to the third-generation of British Sikhs. The findings indicate that young third-generation British Sikhs represent a “diaspora as a mode of cultural production” (Vertovic 2000, p. 99), where diasporic communities are placed in a context of transnationalism and globalization and participate in the production and reproduction of social and cultural phenomena. In this respect, it is clear that the Indian diaspora becomes highly self-reflexive through the consumption of Bollywood films, and this process stimulates a path of cultural reinforcement, whereby familial Indian values are strengthened.

By focusing on third-generation young British Sikhs who are experiencing dual cultural influences, it became clear that through the consumption of Bollywood films a desire for a specific type of love and romance emerged, one that defied traditional Sikh notions of courtship and marriage, but also opposed Western notions of love and courtship which is framed within an individualistic discourse. This dualism creates a hybrid ideology of love that is simultaneously romantic and familial. As members of a diasporic community, they are able to “shift between and negotiate among the different domains and conditions that constitute his or her identity” (Koppedrayar 2005, p. 100). Typically, as with any Bollywood love story, the quest for true love does not run smoothly, and as young British Sikhs search for romance, Bollywood helps them negotiate these dualistic tensions by creating “a specific affective mode” to evoke “amatory desires” (Jha 2007, p. 109).

As members of a transnational diasporic community, the consumption of Bollywood films enables them to construct a “community of sentiment that is articulated in the domestic idiom” (Moorti 2003, p. 356), one that emphasizes the significance of pride in their “Indian-ness,” the significance of their familial Indian values, and the longing for a uniquely hybridized kind of love. This community of sentiment provides a constructive and personalized way to conceptualize the longing for a sense of Indian-ness. As members of this transnational diasporic community, they encourage one another to collectively feel a sense of pride in their Indian heritage and culture via Bollywood films, which serves as a normalization discourse to transmit Indian traditions and values (Jha 2007). Given that the consumption of Bollywood films takes place in a family setting, it seems that the Indian family system is a “social institution that quintessentially defines being Indian” (Punathambekar 2005, p. 160), regardless of geographical location.

The key part played by the family in the “interpretive community” of Bollywood reminds us that families are institutions which provide “implicit and explicit ‘rules of the game’ that must be observed” (Murphy 1999, p. 12). Murphy’s study of family TV viewing in Mexico and our this study of family viewing of Bollywood in the United Kingdom both highlight this. One is also reminded of Parameswaran’s (2001) study of Indian Hindu women’s reading of Mills & Boon romances. Each of these studies underline the importance of contextualizing readers’ or audiences’ engagement with media by analyzing other activities that surround particular

genres’ consumption, such as social settings and the day-to-day lives of these interpretive communities.

How Bollywood Impacts on British Sikh Identity

It is widely acknowledged that issues relating to belonging and identity are consistently experienced by diasporic communities. According to the former prime minister of India, Atal Behari Vajpayee (2003) “the biggest challenge facing every immigrant community is to integrate harmoniously into the political and social life of the host society, while preserving and cherishing its civilizational heritage.” As third-generation British Sikhs face this challenge they “tap into the warehouse of cultural images” that Bollywood offers, thereby creating “a visual grammar that seeks to capture the dislocation, disruption and ambivalence that characterizes their lives” (Moorti 2003, p. 359). For young British Sikhs, the consumption of Bollywood films is associated with the “cultural survival of self” (Jha 2007, p. 104), as a means to reaffirm the Indian aspects of a hybrid British Sikh identity. As the “unofficial ambassador abroad” (Vajpayee, 2003), Bollywood assists in the maintenance of an Indian identity. Significantly, though, this is a “new Indian” identity (Jha 2007, p. 104), an identity that is hybridized and that challenges both traditional British and Indian national identities. It is created through and for a diasporic consciousness that seeks the best of both worlds.

The filmmaker Subhash Ghai suggests that the reason why the Indian diaspora relate so well to Bollywood films is that they are about “Indian souls dreaming Indian dreams in a vibrant foreign land” (2003). Films such as *K3G* and *DDLJ*, set in both India and the United Kingdom, represent this diasporic community, and the actors and actresses within these films significantly influence the identity construction of third-generation British Sikhs because the romantic identities portrayed are depicted by individuals with similar physical characteristics, and, importantly, they face the same familial challenges. As members of an interpretive community, then, they understand the terms of reference inscribed in the genre. The love and romance portrayed within Bollywood films is manipulated to portray a slightly “feel good version” (Punathambekar 2005, p. 164) of Indian culture, and its notions of courtship and romance, therefore making the love stories in Bollywood films more compelling and emotionally accessible to young third generation British Sikhs. This reinforces the fact that “popular cultural products emerge as a locus for the maintenance and constitution of a shared identity” (Moorti 2003, p. 373). As previously noted, they also serve to enforce particular social and cultural norms and traditions.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the influence of the Bollywood film genre as an important cultural reference point for young third-generation British Sikhs seeking to understand more about their Indian roots and gain a deepened sense of “Indian-ness.” The research has shown how Bollywood films have become an international obsession with the Indian diaspora (Kaskebar

1996), and the British Sikh community in the United Kingdom are no exception, as they simultaneously derive pleasure and instruction from Bollywood films. The consumption of Bollywood films “facilitates and mobilizes the transnational imagination and helps to create new ways for consumers to think of themselves as Asian,” note Cayla and Eckhardt (2008, p. 216), and they also create a new sense of Indian-ness. As well as this, the Bollywood film genre emerges as a key medium through which pride in Indian heritage is reaffirmed and transferred. Immigrant Sikh parents use Bollywood as a favored means of entertainment that also instructs their children on Indian culture and identity, and thus consolidates their children’s sense of “Indian-ness.” Moreover, Bollywood narratives revolve around a love story, and Bollywood offers its audience a hybridized version of love that is simultaneously individualistic and romantic as well as collectivist and familial in nature, a veritable “masala” of flavors that contains a complex, hybridized ideology. Above all, these Bollywood love stories are always framed within a context that reinforces Indian values and therefore amalgamates Indian traditions and the global market. The global Bollywood film medium, therefore, affects the Indian diaspora at a local level and also reinforces collective Indian values.

There are many more fascinating avenues that unfold from this study, such as the role of the Gurdwara in terms of identity construction of young Sikhs, and how food, music, language, clothing, and event politics may input on the “Indian imaginary.” More exploration could also be made of representations of Sikhs in Indian cinema, and the responses of British Sikhs to these often-stereotypical images. Although these did not emerge in the current data, a further study could be built around research questions more focused on these representations. Ultimately, however, what the authors hope they have achieved in this study is to demonstrate the significant part played by this wide reaching and unique genre of film in helping young British Sikhs negotiate the complex terrain of personal and national identity as they engage in quests to find their life partners.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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