

# The South Asian Second Generation in the USA: Representation on Identity

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## Abstract

Cultural representation and preventing stereotyping are major areas of importance for modern American society. Immigration from the South Asian ethnic community has contributed to a higher regard for the accuracies in media and social representation of South Asian culture and people in the ethnic minority. While the definition of misrepresentation is subjective, common examples include the model minority, sexualization, Islamophobia, and cultural appropriation. A lack of proper representation has the potential to harm second generation adolescents who may participate both ethnic and popular culture. A qualitative survey gathered detailed information through open-ended responses, and multiple choice questions were qualitatively analyzed to find patterns within the sample and characterize them using the South Asian Identity Development Model (Ibrahim et al., 1997). The purpose of the results is to garner for improved representation and action against cultural stereotyping. The goal of the current study is to further research on ensuring adequate cultural representation to protect the psychological development of second generation South Asian American adolescents and other ethnic groups.

*Keywords: Cultural Representation, South Asian, Model Minority, Stereotyping, Psychology, Identity*

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## 1. Introduction

Within the United States having a diverse population, the extent and importance of cultural representation of minorities and immigrants have been contested. Regarding South Asian migration, the US experienced a rise in immigrants following President Lyndon Johnson's signing of the INS Act of 1965, replacing per-country quotas on immigrants with prioritizing skilled and educated immigrants (Jha, 2001); such immigration led to the creation of the Asian American identity. Generations of Asians have grown up surrounded by American popular culture and their ethnic culture, and as mixed cultural interactions occur, the way cultures are represented comes to importance to prevent generalizations.

While misrepresentation is harmful to minorities in general and poses a challenge to the formation of ethnic identity, second generation immigrants may react in different ways.

Second generation South Asian Americans refers to children of immigrant(s) from South Asia; second generation immigrants have not internationally migrated themselves. The model minority is a representative stereotype where an intellectual minority within a racial group is idealized. Cultural assimilation is the process of completely absorbing the dominant culture and leaving traditional practices of one's ethnic culture. Panethnicity is a term used to group various ethnic groups together based on related characteristics; for the purpose of this study, the term groups the diverse Asian cultures together based on

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geography under the “Asian American” label.

To understand the position of South Asians in American society, the tendency of South Asians to be marginalized within American society and also Asian American society is relevant. For instance:

[They] have the dubious distinction of being Caucasian, and yet not white...in a country where race has crucially assigned the immigrant's place in the nation...Perceived as being outside the histories of racial struggle in the United States, South Asian Americans have remained largely invisible in mobilizations of the Asian American community (Menon, 2006, p. 349).

Therefore, as the South Asian American identity is heavily marginalized and encompassed with external influences, misrepresentation, possibly presenting itself with the model minority (Ng et al., 2007), sexualization (Lee & Vaught, 2003), and Islamophobia (Singh, 2017), further harms the hierarchical standing of second generation immigrants. In modern society, the issue of misrepresentation increased following September 11, 2001 as “there have been incidents of discrimination against Pakistanis, and occasionally Indians have been attacked in mistake for Pakistanis” (Jha, 2001, p. 321-322). Essentially, the South Asian American community is subject to generalizing, which has the potential to spread and result in hate crimes; perspectives, harmful and positive, can easily be spread in current society, demonstrating the reach of representation.

My research addresses the responses of second generation adolescents to misrepresentation. Adolescence is remarked as a time of identity construction; analyzing misrepresentation and its correlation, if any, with ethnic identity is critical in conserving ethnic identities in American multicultural society and validating marginalized ethnic minorities.

The expected outcome is that harmful representation of South Asian culture in American society can negatively impact an individual's confidence in their ethnicity, possibly shown in participants exhibiting a desire to assimilate. In a larger context, the results can show how proper representation of ethnic cultures is vital in

maintaining a multicultural society. These results may support in advocating for diverse and accurate representation of minority cultures, specifically South Asian.

For the purpose of this study, the assumption was made that participants have an influence from their ethnic culture. If individuals' ethnic culture is not relevant to their daily life, representation in society may not be as much of a concern compared to an individual that is more connected to their homeland. Therefore, this study assumes that participants experience their ethnic culture at home and popular culture in American society.

Ergo, the research question follows: In the United States, to what extent does stereotypical misrepresentation of South Asian culture in society impact second generation South Asian American adolescents' self-assessment of their ethnicity? The scope of this study is national but seeks to extrapolate a connection within second generation South Asian Americans between the ages 13-20.

## **2. Literature Review**

Previous literature serves to address the inquiry regarding the extent to which stereotypical misrepresentation of South Asian culture in American society impacts second generation South Asian American adolescents' self-assessment of their ethnicity. Intense sociocultural and scientific analysis is required to delve into an anthropological study of South Asian Americans, cultural representation, and associated psychological effects.

### **2.1 Social Attitudes on Asian Americans**

Despite the progress that society has made, stereotypes still lead to the misrepresentation of Asian Americans in the United States. Dr. Jennifer Ng and colleagues report that “Contemporary characterizations of Asian Americans reveal the persistence of the foreigner and model minority stereotypes in mainstream culture” (Ng et al., 2007, p.197). Similarly, society commonly embodies a sexualized perception of Asian American women. Anthropologist Stacey Lee and her colleague concur with Ng et al. on the presence of misrepresentation as they display that Asian Americans become fetishized

and labeled as “exotic” (Lee & Vaught, 2003); this elucidates that misrepresentation in American society that allows for the existence of the model minority and sexualization of Asian women inhibits multiculturalism as individuals are perceived as foreign or exotic.

Furthermore, Professor of Philosophy Erich Matthes presents that the prevalence of cultural appropriation in society is harmful as the dominant culture benefits from aspects of an ethnic culture that causes minorities to be marginalized (Matthes, 2019). Members of minority groups, such as Asian Americans, are witness to the misrepresentation, exploitation, and manipulation of their own culture; it is hypocritical for society to alienate minorities and simultaneously selectively choose which aspects of ethnic cultures are acceptable. Thus, Ng et al., Lee and Vaught, and Matthes establish the presence of negative stereotypes from the dominant culture in American society towards Asian Americans.

#### Religious Misrepresentation

However, in addition to facing general Asian stereotypes, South Asians are susceptible to Islamophobia. Jasleen Singh elaborates that while post-9/11 society can misrepresent Islamic culture and depict Muslim Americans as terrorists, society generalizes all South Asian Americans to where even Sikhs and Hindus may be subject to stereotypical religious misrepresentation (Singh, 2017). Ultimately, Singh contributes to the discussion regarding Asian misrepresentation by highlighting an additional negative factor South Asian Americans have to overcome in society, bringing attention to the possibility of negative implications faced by this community.

#### 2.2 Second Generation Immigrant Responses

Analyzing negative implications of misrepresentation should consider the responses of second generation immigrants to cultural misrepresentation as second generation immigrants simultaneously deal with ethnic pressures to maintain cultural loyalty and pressures of the dominant society to participate in popular culture. Sociologists Portes and Hao quantitatively demonstrated in a study with

5,000 second generation immigrants that second generation immigrants enter a process of losing ethnic culture, proven by an increase in English monolingualism in the second generation (Portes & Hao, 1998). While Portes and Hao analyzed the overall trend of decreasing bilingualism and the likelihood of passing culture through generations, their perspective fails to consider the detriments of cultural bereavement on personal identity formation.

#### Personal Responses to Misrepresentation

Assimilation is an evident response among second generation immigrants that poses a threat to respective ethnic cultures. Psychologist Derek Iwamoto and colleagues qualitatively researched 12 Asian Indian Americans and discovered that “Many participants relayed their realization of being physically or culturally different from Whites. Most reported hiding their cultural self because of a desire to fit in...” (Iwamoto et al., 2013, p. 230). On the other hand, South Asian Americans may also respond to assimilation pressures and stereotypical cultural misrepresentation with increased ethnic nationalism. Sociologist Prema Kurien counters Iwamoto et al., stating that “Multiculturalism leads to the institutionalization of ethnicity and to ethnic formation among immigrant groups as individuals face pressure... to organize into groups,” and post 9/11 racism has led to Muslim Americans and South Asian Americans as a whole congregating to oppose racist public perceptions (Kurien, 2007, p. 763). This perspective is evident with the formation of cultural societies and religious groups, which is made feasible if an individual contains a strong intrinsic motivation to preserve their culture or lives in an ethnic enclave where their culture is predominant. Thus, as Iwamoto et al. and Kurien display two differing results of individual responses of second generation South Asian Americans, the possible reactions of individuals require deeper insight.

#### Panethnicity

However, within the two extremes, an individual can also integrate into society under a panethnic label that allows for embracing one’s ethnicity and social inclusion. According to Erika Lee, the problem with panethnicity is that “despite their diverse origins,

Asian Americans have been consistently lumped together and treated as one monolithic group” (Lee, 2015, p. 136). The adoption of a label that does not entirely represent one’s core ethnicity has potential for creating a conflict between one’s private and public cultural identity as members of the same Asian American racial minority can have different beliefs. Lee, Iwamoto et al., and Kurien would acknowledge the personal challenges that come with the responses they analyzed; a person can develop a conflict if they feel underrepresented with panethnicity, pressures to assimilate, or discrimination for embracing their culture respectively.

### 2.3 Psychological Review

Therefore, members of an ethnic minority in the United States can develop conflicts in one’s concept of identity. As such, Sociologist Krysia Mossakowski elaborates that ethnic identity can fluctuate with external influences, commonly creating a weakened sense of identity in minority groups that can catalyze mental health issues (Mossakowski, 2003). However, it is critical to understand how external factors can impact adolescents in their process of identity formation. Therefore, Psychologist Lisa Kiang and colleagues report that adolescent development is heavily influenced by intercultural interactions (Kiang et al., 2019). While members of minority groups can suffer from self-concept issues as a result of social pressures, adolescents in specific are at risk due to their presence in initial stages of development. Consequently, second generation South Asian adolescents may react differently to misrepresentation compared to their adult counterparts evaluated in previous literature.

### 2.4 Research Implementation

Ultimately, preserving the identity and ethnic self-concept of South Asian Americans should be a priority for society as second generation immigrants contain the potential to contribute to society. While holistic studies on Asian American identity exist that connect misrepresentation to various individual responses of ethnic-identification, it is necessary to contribute a study in specific of second generation adolescents in the South Asian ethnic community to

analyze whether the implications of their responses follow the same pattern, if not more dramatic, due to the prevalence of the additional Islamophobic misrepresentation, disparities between social and ethnic pressures, and fragility of self-concept faced by this cohort.

### 3. Method

This section proposes a mixed study that will compare the impacts of stereotypical misrepresentation of South Asian culture in American society on the ethnic self-assessment of second generation South Asian American adolescents. In this section, the format and the composition of the survey are described, along with the procedure for the study.

The dependent variable is the impact misrepresentation has on an individual’s identity. Therefore, this approach is non-experimental, seeking to characterize the responses of second generation South Asian American adolescents to misrepresentation and the resulting impacts on their ethnic self-concept. Participants are presented with a survey with open and closed ended questions to allow for participants to express complete thoughts and reflect on how society has impacted their understanding of their ethnicity. Flexibility in open ended responses allows for evaluation of how cultural misrepresentation can impact individuals in specific as participants can share their personal experiences. Qualitative analysis of personal experiences and in-depth responses is required to evaluate the extent to which second generation South Asian American adolescents are impacted by misrepresentation. However, quantitative analysis of results is also vital to report the general patterns among the responses of participants; data can depict the proportion of the study population that feels negatively impacted by stereotypical misrepresentation, embodies a negative perception of their ethnicity, exhibits conflict in their own ethnic label, etc.

Participants involved in this study are second generation South Asian American adolescents, meaning participants are American-born citizens with parent(s) who have immigrated from a South Asian country. Common characteristics in this cohort

include education level (secondary education or undergraduate studies) and religious affiliation (examples include Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism or Sikhism).

All ages between 13-20 were represented in the study, with 16 year-olds (21.9%) and 15 year-olds (18.8%) making up most of the 32 respondents. The gender demographics are as reported: 50% female, 46.9% male, and 3.1% genderfluid. 75% of participants were in secondary education and 25% in undergraduate programs. Represented states include Texas, California, and Georgia, with Texans being the large majority. Participants were predominantly Hindu (78.1%), but individuals were also Muslim, Jain, Sikh, or not religious. Additionally, respondents were mostly of Indian origin, with Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin having one participant each. 68.8% of participants had an *Indian American* ethnic label, with the next common label being *Asian American* (9.4%).

The survey mostly takes the form of multiple choice questions to allow for empirical conversion. Initial questions seek characterizing information about the participant: age, education, gender, parents' country of origin, religious affiliation, and ethnic label. The participants are also encouraged to respond to short answer questions asking about possible instances of stereotypical misrepresentation, other personal experiences, the confidence level one has in their identity, and how one assesses their ethnicity. The remainder of the multiple choice questions reflect the South Asian Identity Development Model (Ibrahim et al., 1997); each involves a statement regarding American portrayal of South Asian culture, second generation cultural pressures, ethnic cultural expectations, the possible presence of an ethnic identity conflict, or the extent one embraces their ethnic culture. Participants must indicate whether they *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, *strongly disagree*, or remain *neutral*.

All data was stored electronically in a private file accessible only to the researchers to protect participants' confidentiality.

### 3.1 Procedure

Institutional Review Board approval is obtained

prior to data collection. To achieve variance in the sample population, the survey is distributed on nationally accessible digital platforms. Following the completion of receiving parental and informed consent from participants, the survey is administered. A phenomenological approach is taken where significant responses from individuals are identified, and participants' multiple choice responses are numericized in relation to the participant's information: age, ethnic label, etc. Patterns will be visible from the way the majority of participants respond to questions regarding their relationship with their ethnic culture. Correlations can be determined between misrepresentation and adolescent responses if the majority of the participants align themselves towards *agree* or *disagree*. Responses will be determined as significant if they elaborate on misrepresentation and ethnic identity; the significance of a response is not determined by the opinion of the researcher.

The South Asian Development Model by Ibrahim et. al (1997) involves the Acceptance Stage (individuals have ethnic pride and believe that hard work will overcome sociocultural differences), Dissonance Stage (individuals realize that sociocultural differences with American society cannot be overcome), Resistance and Immersion Stage (individuals reject mainstream cultural values and stereotypes), and the Synergistic Articulation and Awareness Stage (individuals reject popular and ethnic culture values for individuality) (pg. 42-43). The stages will be used to measure the level of ethnic security that participants have and possibly the change in ethnic security, if any, with misrepresentation.

## 4. Results

A holistic perspective to the multiple choice questions are as follows in Appendix 1.

Additionally, all participants, when rating their satisfaction with their ethnic label scaled with 10 being completely satisfied, answered between 6 and 10; the mean is 8.97, median is 9, and mode is 9.

However, open-ended questions showed diversity in responses. Regarding examples of positive South Asian representation, opinions of participants include

portrayals in “Quantico” and “Never Have I Ever,” representations of Hijabi women, Hasan Minhaj, Vice President Kamala Harris, Google and Microsoft CEOs, and cultural appreciation. Participant A recorded that “some media portrayals normalize Indians being average, which is sometimes a good thing, because of this overwhelming stereotype that [Indians] are all smarter than the average person.” On the other hand, people believed that negative examples of South Asian representation include cultural appropriation, “mocking” religious symbols, and depictions of South Asians as “the typical nerdy kid.” Participant A remarked that “[o]utward racism or xenophobic rhetoric is a pretty big red flag in all cases... For all means and purposes, Raj from Big Bang Theory... fit a stereotype as an immensely nerdy, not very attractive, and awkward guy who had a terrible fashion sense and couldn’t talk to girls sober.”

Most individuals exhibit pride in embracing their ethnicity in public as “there’s nothing embarrassing about being prideful,” (Participant G) and “[p]eople are usually welcoming of diversity and seem more interested in learning...” (Participant H). Others expressed ethnic confidence over time; Participants A and B’s responses, respectively, include “I used to not be, but as a college student, I’ve grown more comfortable with it...because I’ve been given the space and support to feel proud,” and “I used to not be because American society is largely ignorant and intolerant. With age, I have come to embrace and stand up for it.” However, while no participants stated a complete lack of ethnic confidence, responses did include a sense of discomfort in public: “I don’t like speaking anything other than English outside,” (Participant C) and “if I know that there will be other people expressing their ethnic identity I feel comfortable but otherwise I feel uncomfortable,” (Participant D).

Moreover, Participant B chose a pan-ethnic label since “government documentation only has an option for Asian American.” As participant E explained, “[m]any of my friends are Asian, but not Indian, and share many of the same sociocultural experiences as I do...”

When comparing ethnic and popular American culture, while one response stated that no difference

exists, others referenced differing lifestyles, religions, languages, and cultural values. Participant F explained that “American society is far more individualistic and focuses on the value of a person [while] Indian identity is rooted in collectivism.”

Lastly, when asked about the impact of misrepresentation on their view of their ethnicity, participants expressed: “I subconsciously ignore the stereotypes and perspectives and continue to have pride in my culture,” (Participant F) and “[t]here is no single portrayal or what an Asian person is like,” (Participant A). There were outliers that explained that the way South Asians are represented in society is “degrading” and have caused “shame in [youth].”

## **5. Discussion**

Ultimately, representation of South Asian culture in American society needs to improve to prevent stereotyping and offensive connotations. As participants documented instances of negative and inaccurate representation, even though there was no particular mention of sexualization or Islamophobia, the model minority was mentioned by Participant A (see page 7). While representation of South Asians as overly intelligent is not inherently offensive, the connotation upholds the stereotype that South Asians are antisocial, smart students; the model minority originates as ethnic parents teach their children that working harder in comparison the majority is required to have equal opportunities (Ng et al., 2007, pg. 117). Therefore, the model minority essentially represents the efforts marginalized groups have to achieve in a competing society and should not be idealized and misrepresented. Portrayals that contribute to the belief that all or most people of South Asian descent are highly intellectual take away from the marginalization of the South Asian community and create pressure for young individuals to aspire to social expectations or contest misrepresentation. Ergo, positive representation in media and popular culture would prevent the proliferation of the ‘nerdy’ stereotype. Correspondingly, Matthes (2019) claims that ethnic minorities are subject to a vulnerability clause where social oppression causes cultural groups to be vulnerable to further exploitation (pg. 1006). The

vulnerability clause can be seen as participants referenced cultural appropriation and the “mocking” of ethnic culture (see page 7); the proliferation of cultural appropriation and misrepresentation of South Asian culture will only further marginalize the ethnic minority. Inhibiting stereotyping and employing accurate cultural representations can serve to protect marginalized groups that are already socially threatened. Regardless of the various extent of impacts misrepresentation may have on individuals, as the United States is a multicultural society, the country has an ethical obligation to improve social representation to hinder stereotypical misrepresentation.

Such action is required as self-concept issues can arise as a result of cultural misrepresentation. The observation that the majority of participants reported cultural representation having minimal impact on their view of identity was contrasted as a few individuals felt degraded by misrepresentation and most participants expressed some degree of care over South Asian representation (Appendix 1). Such juxtaposition can be reasoned as Kiang et al. (2019) state that “ethnic identity itself has a strong association with fewer depressive symptoms,” (pg. 325); as poor representation harms the relationship an individual can have with their ethnicity or make them feel excluded, a threat to ethnic identity is formulated, which can bring poor health consequences depending on the individual. However, since there were people who had experienced ethnic conflicts before and settled on a South Asian ethnic label or people that grew confident with their identity over time, second generation South Asian adolescents adapted to their environment (Appendix 1). Individuals have mostly grown accustomed to the influences in American popular culture, but some people may carry a degree of vulnerability to misrepresentation. Essentially, cultural misrepresentation can be harmful to individuals who are young and learning their way in a multicultural society. Especially since “perceived discrimination and stereotyping experiences outside of the home can come together and subsequently predict adolescents’ identity and outcomes,” maintaining proper representation in society is vital in allowing individuals to increase their comfort with their

ethnicity (Mossakowki, 2003, pg. 533). The impacts of cultural misrepresentation vary from each person, but with the potential to hinder even a minority of second generation South Asian adolescents, stereotypical misrepresentation contributes to the ethnic groups’ marginal status or possible self-esteem issues and therefore must be reformed with accurate and culturally appropriate portrayals.

On the other hand, the majority of second generation South Asian adolescents exhibit confidence in their ethnicity. Since most participants responded as having ethnic pride, associating within ethnic groups, and being raised with cultural values, they express an influential presence by their ethnic culture (Appendix 1); the average ethnic confidence level among participants was also very high (see page 7). Conversely, an examination of immigrant families by Portes and Hao (1998) that showed a common loss of culture is supported through current research as 62.6% of participants stated that they were more connected American culture than their parents, and only 12.5% of participants felt that they were closer to their ethnic culture as compared to their parents (Appendix 1). Essentially, second generation South Asian Americans find themselves with ethnic ties, but unable to be as connected to ethnic culture as their parents. These sentiments manifest themselves through assimilation tendencies as 40.6% of participants expressed a desire to assimilate, and a minority stated a history with determining their ethnic identity (Appendix 1). Having results that show second generation immigrants as having ethnic pride but also assimilation tendencies is reported as a common phenomenon as Iwamoto et al. (2013) and Kurien (2007), respectively, state that people can either assimilate or embrace their identity when marginalized in society. Assimilating into American society or embracing a full sense of ethnic nationalism both exist more as a spectrum of responses where individuals can tend towards one side over the other. Ultimately, cultural misrepresentation and stereotyping creates a sense of ethnic frustration among second generation South Asian American adolescents and possible assimilation desires but not to the extent where people give up their culture; personal connections to ethnic culture ultimately result in ethnic pride.

Therefore, wanting to assimilate due to the desirability of American culture or misrepresentation of ethnic culture and expressing confidence in an ethnic identity can occur simultaneously.

Also, the adoption of a pan-ethnic label does not have a personal significance to second generation South Asian American adolescents. With the aspect of transnationalism, identities extending borders and connections being forged with homeland affairs, many differences exist between Asian cultures, and embodying a general ethnic label fosters distance from unique aspects of one's ethnic culture (Lee, 2015). Choosing a pan-ethnic label over a more specific ethnic label may render itself as an individual not fully embracing their identity; however, participants did not mention any shame of guilt regarding a specific ethnic label, elucidating an extent of personal pride or acceptance of ethnicity despite external pressures (see page 7). While South Asian Americans may have frustrations regarding their ethnicity and cultural representation in society, ethnic pride protects against internalizing misrepresentation into possible identity conflicts.

Ergo, according to the South Asian Identity Development Model by Ibrahim et. al (1997), with most participants exhibiting ethnic pride and self-exclusion from misrepresentation, participants fall into the Resistance and Immersion stage; second generation South Asian American on average hinder desires to assimilate and embrace their ethnic culture. While some participants expressed passing through a Dissonance Stage of ethnic frustration regarding a desire to assimilate, with maturity, ethnic pride was embraced. However, attention should be brought to the potential of misrepresentation to hold individuals in ethnic dissonance. Even though, participants expressed ethnic security over time regardless of stereotypical misrepresentation, second generation immigrants were held to a degree of personal responsibility to eventually restrict the personal impacts of misrepresentation.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has served to expand the knowledge regarding the nature of second generation South Asian Americans responding to cultural

representation and constructing a suitable ethnic identity. The correlation between stereotypical misrepresentation of South Asian culture and the ethnic identity of second generation South Asian American adolescents varies with each individual. While stereotypical misrepresentation of South Asian culture has the potential to instigate identity conflicts in second generation adolescents, many individuals have successfully separated society's view of their culture from their own view. Representation in society can have the ability to instill assimilation tendencies into modern youth while also creating an opportunity for others to empower themselves and their ethnicity. However, with possibilities that affected persons can suffer with ethnic identity conflicts and younger individuals can be more susceptible to social pressures, American society has the responsibility to maintain accurate cultural representation and prevent stereotyping.

This responsibility, however, is not inherently straightforward. The definition of accurate cultural representation can certainly differ from person to person depending on many factors. A person from the South Asian ethnic group who does not hold their culture to a high level of importance may not regard misrepresentation as much or be less likely to isolate stereotyping compared to someone who is attentive surrounding their culture. As American society becomes increasingly diverse and people get exposed or accustomed to other cultures, people may become increasingly aware as to what is considered "harmful" to ethnic minorities. Ergo, as the definition of misrepresentation and stereotyping can broaden in the future with the expected increasing social awareness, the consensus remains fluid. As of the moment, the instances of misrepresentation within the media that seem agreeable among Ng et al., Lee & Vaught, Matthes, and the study participants include the model minority, sexualization, and cultural appropriation. Nevertheless, maintaining accurate cultural representation via media involves inhibiting listed common forms of misrepresentation and an accommodating awareness to future grievances regarding cultural portrayals at the least.

### **6.1 Limitations**



This study was conducted with mostly Indian Americans who identified themselves as Hindu. Generalizing this study to extend across multiple religious affiliations may not be accurate as Sikhism and Buddhism were not represented in this study.

Additionally, despite gaining participants from the west and east coasts as well, the survey had respondents from mostly Texas; outreach through social media platforms proved unsuccessful. As most surveys, this study may have involved a sense of sampling bias. Systematically, second generation South Asian American adolescents in Texas were more likely to participate in the survey.

Even though participants were encouraged to convey reflections on their identity and express complete opinions regarding cultural representation, such responses were minimal. Open ended questions were not made required in the survey to allow for minimal risk to participants (if a certain question was deemed harmfully intrusive due to past cultural trauma or other reasons, participants could choose to skip that question). However, since questions were optional, not all questions were answered by each participant or participants indicated "N/A". For those who chose to respond, there was no essential motive for detailed responses other than contributing to the body of cultural knowledge.

Furthermore, the researcher is of the South Asian American community, and possibly biased towards the area of research. No personal biases have obscured the results of the study; data from the multiple choice questions were objectively quantified and statements from respondents were quoted. The collected data responses were not modified.

## 6.2 Implications

Despite such relevance to the Muslim community within the United States, the lack of reference of Islamophobia by participants may be attributed to the insufficient number of Muslim American respondents. Likewise, participants being mostly of Indian origin cannot entirely represent South Asia as a whole as individuals with origins of Bhutan, The Maldives, and Sri Lanka went unobserved.

Since participants were from urban areas, rural second generation South Asian Americans were left

as a gap. Urban areas have a higher density of people and can possibly contribute to more interaction between various cultures. As assimilation is connected to the stigma against minorities and a sense of cultural inferiority, living in areas without diversity may foster greater experiences of racial stigma and vulnerability to cultural misrepresentation. However, outreach to nonurban communities may not occur as easily as advertising a study to an urban or suburban population.

## 6.3 Future Directions

The possibility exists that responses to misrepresentation may vary with different countries of origin or religious background. As ethnic enclaves and religious groups contribute to the rise in nationalism amongst immigrants, the demographic of the United States is a significant factor. Ethnic enclaves can form as immigrants interact with others with a similar cultural or religious background; different affiliations within South Asian Americans may be unable to achieve a rise in ethnic acceptance if affiliates are an extremely small minority within the country. As the study primarily showed the impact of second generation Indian Americans, future research can be done to compare how responses of individuals with different backgrounds differ from second generation Hindu Indian Americans.

Moreover, children who have immigrated into the United States themselves but at a very young age, also experience a similar environment to second generation immigrants. Examining the responses between such first generation South Asian Americans to stereotypical misrepresentation and possibly drawing similarities with second generation immigrants become relevant. As this study showed the different varying responses to cultural misrepresentation, the spectrum of responding with assimilation tendencies or embracing ethnic pride may be attributable to first generation immigrants who lack recollection of their home country.

Age also was a major contributing factor in the study, and since this study showed the pattern appeared to be individuals adapting to misrepresentation over time and accepting their

identity, examining younger adolescents and older adolescents separately may highlight changes in responses to stereotyping through adolescence. The differences in maturity and vulnerability to external influences between young teenagers and young adults might be a significant variable in measuring psychological impacts to identity construct. Younger individuals may be vulnerable to misrepresentation or encompass feelings to integrate into society; aging and gaining additional exposure to other cultures and one's own culture can possibly result in increased ethnic nationalism.

Lastly, as cultural representation had a negative impact on some participants, this study can be used to support the need for inhibiting misrepresentation. The influences of proper representation on the ethnic identity of second generation South Asian adolescents, if researched, can serve to contrast the negative experiences of individuals lacking positive cultural influence. Adolescents who grow in a positive environment depicting their culture in an accurate late may present their relationship with their identity to be more secure. To further research on cultural representation, a larger study should be conducted with more diversity and emphasis on detailed responses.

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Appendix 1. Multiple Choice Question Response

American society (media, pop culture, public perceptions) correctly represents my ethnic label.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6.3%	12.5%	31.3%	50%	0%
I am satisfied with South Asian representation in American society.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6.3%	15.6%	31.3%	43.8%	3.1%
The way my ethnic culture is socioculturally represented in American society matters to me.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21.9%	50%	25%	3.1%	0%
I am socioculturally closer to my South Asian ethnic culture than to American culture.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12.5%	18.8%	34.4%	28.1%	6.3%
I strongly identify with many elements of my South Asian ethnic culture (language, religion, traditions, etc).				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21.9%	53.1%	18.8%	3.1%	3.1%
I associate with others in my ethnic group.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
31.3%	59.4%	9.4%	0%	0%
I believe that I fit into American society.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21.9%	59.4%	18.8%	0%	0%

I have a desire to assimilate into American society.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3.1%	37.5%	43.8%	15.6%	0%
I believe that I fit into my ethnic society.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3.1%	62.5%	18.8%	15.6%	0%
I have strong ethnic pride.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9.4%	59.4%	21.9%	9.4%	0%
I am more connected with American culture and society compared with my South Asian immigrant parent(s).				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
31.3%	31.3%	18.8%	15.6%	3.1%
I am more connected with ethnic culture and society compared with my South Asian immigrant parent(s).				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0%	12.5%	18.8%	43.8%	25%
My South Asian ethnicity is not relevant to my daily life in the United States.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9.4%	12.5%	37.5%	34.4%	6.3%
American society accepts my cultural differences.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3.1%	46.9%	28.1%	18.8%	3.1%
I have never experienced an internal conflict regarding which ethnic group I am a part of.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15.6%	46.9%	6.3%	28.1%	3.1%
I have experienced an internal conflict regarding which ethnic group I am a part of, but I have chosen a South Asian ethnic label.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6.3%	28.1%	21.9%	34.4%	9.4%

I am currently experiencing an internal conflict regarding which ethnic group I am a part of.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0%	3.1%	9.4%	50%	37.5%
I acknowledge the positive aspects of my ethnic culture				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
40.6%	59.4%	0%	0%	0%
I have knowledge regarding the cultural values, expectations, and history associated with my ethnic label.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21.9%	62.5%	15.6%	0%	0%
I have grown up in an ethnic household that emphasizes the following: reputation, respect for age, and respect for community.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
53.1%	40.6%	3.1%	3.1%	0%