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“Gaysi” in the USA: Experiences of South Asian American Queer Youth

Vinita Chaudhry

Washington University in St Louis

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This research explores the activism and community-building efforts of South Asian American queer (LGBTQ, etc.) youth. The central question asks in what ways are organizational efforts for queer South Asian American youth successful (or unsuccessful) in helping them negotiate multiple identities and alleviate both homophobic forces in South Asian American communities and racism in predominantly white queer organizations? What will investigating these efforts illuminate about queer intersectional identities and organizing?

The project is an ethnographic study, focusing on the work of the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) in New York City. Through interviews with youth involved (or intentionally not involved) and various staff members at the organization, I aim to understand exactly how these organizations address issues of intersectional oppressions, and what the work of these organizations says about South Asian American queer youth identity.

The research question is situated at the intersection of a number of issues: globalization, intersections of identity, and ethnic authenticity. As part of an emerging “global queer” movement, where activism for sexual minorities is occurring in various parts of the world, South Asian American queer organizations exist within the larger process of globalization. I seek to understand the effects of globalization on identity, particularly queer identity and intersectional queer identity. The intersection of South Asian American identity and queer identity raises a number of questions about what it means to be “authentically” South Asian, as well as ways in which being of South Asian descent can affect the experiences of being queer in the United States. I hope to understand how these issues are, or are not, navigated through South Asian American queer organizations, and what these organizations can tell us about culturally-specific queer activism, ultimately transforming both queer activism and queer theory.