Affect and sport in South Asian American advertising

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In this article I consider how sport and celebrity athletes are strategically used in advertising tailored toward South Asians in the diaspora, what I refer to as ‘South Asian American advertising’. I discuss how ad executives construct and deploy affect in advertisements to resignify meanings linked to particular sports and analyze the significance of celebrity athletes in creating new diasporic affiliations and identities. Although sport and affect are not generally considered together, in advertising, they can converge to create particular types of brand identities and messaging that appeal to South Asian Americans. Through analysis of affect in ethnographic data collected in Asian American ad agencies in New York City, and in advertisements, I discuss how these ads not only nurture a sense of diasporic collectivity, but also contribute to the construction of South Asian Americans as what I call ‘model consumers’ in a neoliberal era of consumption, and thus contribute to the reformulation of race for Asian Americans.

What do Shoaib Malik, Sachin Tendulkar, and Sania Mirza, have in common? Besides being top athletes in cricket and tennis, they are also widely known and wildly popular athletes in the South Asian diaspora. Their images are not only coveted for commercial endorsements, but their popularity bolsters South Asian American interest in and affinity toward these sports more broadly. In this article I consider how sport and celebrity athletes are strategically used in advertising tailored toward South Asians in the diaspora, what I here refer to as ‘South Asian American advertising’. I discuss how ad executives construct and deploy affect in advertisements to resignify meanings linked to particular sports and analyze the significance of celebrity athletes in creating new diasporic affiliations and identities. Although sport and affect are not generally considered together, in advertising, they can converge to create particular types of brand identities and messaging to appeal to South Asian Americans. By distinguishing cricket, and to a lesser extent, tennis and yoga, as appropriate South Asian American preoccupations, ad executives create a divide between these sports and popular ones like American football, basketball, and baseball. The significance of performances of affect, I argue, is the role it plays in defining South Asian Americans as refined and sophisticated individuals, both compared to celebrity athletes in South Asian ads and to the average American sports fan. Through analysis of affect in ethnographic data and advertisements, I discuss how ad executives transform the boisterous comportment generally linked to sport spectatorship into refined and orderly citizenry. These ads not only nurture a sense of diasporic collectivity, but also contribute to the construction of South Asian Americans as what I call ‘model consumers’ in a neoliberal era of consumption and contribute to the reformulation of race for Asian Americans.

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Asian American advertising and affect

Since the category of Asian American was introduced in the 1980 US Census, executives and marketers have strategized to align it with their capitalistic endeavors. Although rapidly growing, the category is still significantly smaller than ‘Latino’ and ‘African American’, the first and second largest minority ethnic groups, respectively. Agencies that cater exclusively to the Asian American market emerged in the mid-1980s and are concentrated in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco (all cities with large Asian American communities). These 10 or so major firms offer a range of services that include producing advertisements for print, television, and the Internet, placing ads in ethnic media, and doing direct marketing, community-level events, public relations, and reconnaissance on emerging ethnic markets. Corporations that produce goods and services such as automobiles, telecommunications, liquor, insurance, banking, casinos, and fast food have been especially invested in targeting Asian American consumers by focusing on the five most rapidly growing Asian ethnic groups – Americans of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, South Asian, and Vietnamese descent. In their dealings with clients (the corporate entities that commission advertising), Asian American ad executives use census and market research data to make the claim that ethnic groups like South Asian Americans have a very high per capita income and are willing spenders, despite the Asian American market comprising a mere 5% of the overall US population.1

Drawing on neoliberal ideologies that idealize the notion that individuals can thrive in capitalism without state assistance,2 Asian American executives have the ideal basis on which to construct modern consumers: the model minority stereotype and ‘meritocracy’ foregrounded in sport. Introduced in 1966 by the New York Times and US News and World Report, these early media characterizations portrayed Chinese and Japanese immigrants as self-sufficient, hard-working citizens in opposition to African Americans and Latinos who were depicted as demanding social services. South Asian Americans were quick to be grouped under this racialized banner, and it is a designation that Asian American ad executives proudly draw on to showcase to corporate clients the value of advertising to South Asian American audiences. A more nuanced history of South Asian immigration to the United States, however, exposes the major differences between the largely unskilled South Asian laborers that arrived from the late nineteenth century onward who faced overt racism and discrimination and the highly skilled labor solicited in the civil rights era of the post-1965 immigration. Adding to this diversity are immigrants sponsored in subsequent decades, and those of Indian descent from the Caribbean, Fiji, and other diasporic regions.3 With so much diversity, making the census-derived category South Asian American meaningful to clients and themselves is no simple task. To accomplish this, ad executives utilize affect, both by performing particular kinds of affect to draw corporate clients to advertise to Asian Americans, and by creating consuming subjects that embody a refined, upwardly mobile affect in ads, usually in ways that simplify the heterogeneity of South Asian Americans.

The ‘affective turn’, as Patricia Clough (2008), Brian Massumi (2002), and others have named it, calls attention to bodily modes of knowledge production and experience in response to poststructuralist and deconstructionist approaches that had pulled focus to linguistic and other areas.4 Affect offers a valuable vantage point through which to understand cultural production, and my ethnographically grounded discussion addresses how subjects are conceived of and produced. Richard and Rudnyckyj (2009, 73) characterize affect as a medium of subject formation and self-making, and ‘an intrinsic variable of the late-capitalist system’. Elaborating on their concept ‘economies of affect’,

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they contend, ‘affect is less an object that circulates than a medium through which subjects act on others and are acted upon’ (2009, 62). Working within affective economies, Asian American advertising executives use census categories and marketing data to envision advertising subjects as model consumers. For South Asian American audiences, affect is central to generating identification with a range of brands that may have little presence in their communities. Along with themes such as family, cultural festivals, and Bollywood, advertising executives consider sport to be an especially appealing trope through which to create consumer identification.

The examples I now turn to are drawn from 14 months of non-continuous ethnographic research conducted in Asian American ad agencies in New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco between 2008 and 2012. I observed day to day work at several different Asian American ad agencies, conducted over 60 interviews, and audio recorded more than 100 hours of creative brainstorms, client phone calls, and production activities. Here I include excerpts from discussions in which creative directors explained their ideas and choices to me; observations of campaigns that illustrate the production of affect; and creative discussions that involve sport. The ads I analyze are a combination of works that I viewed with agency personnel who worked on them, as well as ads about which I have no first-hand production knowledge but are nonetheless illustrative of broader trends I observed elsewhere in my ethnographic research. The ads are ‘in-culture’ (containing cultural markers of South Asia) and/or ‘in-language’ (usually in Hindi or accented English). Admittedly, sport is a theme that appears in a relatively small number of ads aimed at South Asian American consumers. Nonetheless, those that feature sport prominently are an illustrative window in South Asian American racial and ethnic representation. Whether the characters in these ads are sports fans or celebrity athletes whose Subcontinental cache spills over in the diaspora, affect is a central way in which mass mediated images of sport and celebrity athletes circulate in the diaspora.

Modeling South Asian American consumers through affect

Affect is rarely uniform across ethnic groups, and cultural and linguistic difference plays an important role in shaping affective performances. In the ads I will turn to shortly, I illustrate how affect is performed by sports fans and celebrity athletes alike, in ways that give form and shape to the category of South Asian American. These characters embody elite citizens’ rarified surroundings, rather than an everyday person to whom the masses can relate. First, however, I closely consider how advertising executives conceive of and attend to affect in their creative work. What I refer to as affect is more or less equivalent to what they call ‘emotional linkages’, or ways of ‘touching’ or ‘reaching’ the consumer, in that both are sensory mediums for subject and value formation, reliant on bodily and linguistic signs. Ad executives must continually convince clients about the value of spending money to target the smallest racial minority group, and want to ensure that their creative work stands apart from general market campaigns. Because clients who advertise to South Asian American audiences not only expect ads to contain individuals of this ethnicity, but also overt markers of culture, ad executives search for diasporic signifiers that will please clients but also appeal to audiences. Account supervisor Steve, at Asian Collaboration in New York City, offered this perspective:

I think it’s been easy, and maybe to an extent cliché to focus on certain themes that revolve around family, and the extended family as this big unit … we all live in this one community and there’s this filial piety. Or in the South Asian space, a lot of people are using Bollywood as a theme. And you can do those things well, but at some point if you cross that line, it becomes
cliché, or it becomes overdone, or it’s just not differentiated from what everyone else is doing ... And so it is this challenge, how can you touch them in this ‘Asian’ way, but be relevant, but not cliché, and not overdone.

The specific choices that Steve lays out, both thematically as well as affectively, toe the line between redundant, reductive images and those that offer original creative ways of reaching consumers. This can be better seen in the case I now turn to, which is drawn from a series of meetings I recorded in November 2009 at Asian Ads, an agency in which I conducted four months of continuous fieldwork. In it, executives present creative concepts for a new money transfer company campaign for South Asian Americans. Effectively appealing to this group, especially since the product was, as one account executive explained, ‘not the cheapest’, was the challenge at hand. Creative Director An Rong explained that they had already generated several concepts that are logical, but that they ‘lack a feeling, [lack] an emotional approach’. He elaborated by emphasizing the importance of emotional linkages between the United States with home countries, ‘family and home; family and family’. Voicing the consumer, he mused, ‘When I need it, [company] can always help me’, adding ‘it’s a mindset, an emotion’. Elaborating on this point, Andrew the copywriter expanded on how such emotion could be conveyed to their intended viewers through the characters in the ads:

The reason is the immigrant coming here is to look for a better life, and also looking to give his family a better life ... you support your family [back home] to have a better life. So this is just an example of facial expression, it’s not sad but it’s more hard, and you know that face has strain, you know, but a little better than sad. That’s how the facial expression is. So it depends, we can make it hopeful.

Andrew’s attention to affect here is noteworthy. In this print ad, the immigrant’s face had to convey a complex set of affective stances to strike the correct tone. A complex story gets told through the face pictured, a face that is ‘not sad’ but ‘hard’, and conveying ‘strain’, signaling the difficulties this immigrant has suffered but now emerges hopeful and willing to help his family. To augment this male-centered visual depiction of the ideal money-transfer consumer, Andrew launched into an enactment of a script he wrote for the television version of this ad, in which he performed various facial expressions and narrated the indexical value of each – surprise on the part of those receiving the money, thoughtfulness of the sender considering the happiness of others, and the confluence of these in an ad in which affect does the emotionally charged work of selling this money transfer service. His supervisor, however, was less impressed with his complex tableau of affect, and advocated for the simpler affect of people smiling, explaining the viewers won’t be able to track this emotional arc the way Andrew has envisioned it. They both agreed that some kind of emotional, rather than logical (to use their terms), approach is necessary because paying more for a service that can be found more cheaply elsewhere is ‘difficult to explain rationally’, Andrew added.

Especially for characters in non-speaking roles, getting affect right can be the difference between depicting life realistically and falling short on the aspirational element that is so integral to advertising. In the following exchange, copywriter Jayshree presented a critique of Andrew’s approach to An Rong, noting that it seems to convey the incorrect affect for certain segments of the South Asian American audience:

Jayshree I was just wondering if, it seems very realistic, and a little bit, um, dark? The previous campaign we did, it was so positive with the [logo] and the people smiling. Especially for South Asian blue-collar segment, people who are using this [product], they have, the blue-collar people, they have a very, you know, a very teary life. That’s why they tend to go to Bollywood entertainment, they
like the aspiration and they like things very positive. So I was wondering that could we try a little bit more to make it positive

An Rong: Oh absolutely, I think that exactly, this is just a frame of reference, there won’t be those very things and I think it will all be very positive.

Jayshree: If the person is actually working in this environment, you know, he can still be working in that environment, but very positively.

An Rong: Yes, yes... and maybe I didn’t explain it very well. This is a very positive reaction. And so, like, ‘I’m also hard working and yes, my aspirations.’ And it’s got a white-collar tone instead of this blue, kind of depressing [tone], yes.

Here Jayshree underscored the importance of understanding the mindset of a particular subset of South Asian Americans, what she called ‘blue collar’. Elsewhere in market research data they had gathered, they compared the more challenging experiences of this segment to those who are able to find white-collar jobs based on their educational qualifications. The ‘white collar tone’ that An Rong referenced in his second comment, indexes the carefree, upper-middle class lifestyle that they are so accustomed to depicting in South Asian American ads. In an upbeat voice, he voiced the character by saying, ‘I’m also hard working and yes, my aspirations’, reminding everyone of the importance of conveying positive affect. While the blue-collar affect was pensive and thoughtful, the white-collar ad, which they turned to shortly after this one, featured an IT worker who could send a gift to ‘upgrade’ the future of young relatives in South Asia. This play on the commonly used technology term succinctly captured the affective stance of the upwardly mobile South Asian American male – the target consumer of this campaign. Gainfully employed in a prestigious job, he is able to perform an affect far brighter than the day-to-day struggles of the blue-collar worker. His largess is palpable in his relaxed smile and clever word play, in which, as Jayshree elaborated, ‘You are living a good life in the US, so you can send money’. In these and other ways, affect is integral to ad executives’ construction of discourses about South Asian American success and its realization through neoliberal modes of consumption as identity formation. In order for affect to actually be effective, however, the correct tropes must be chosen. I now turn to sport in South Asian American advertising and examine its role in furthering and elaborating on these affective stances. Such stances, I contend, contribute to the racial refashioning of Asian Americans from model citizens to model consumers.

Sport as unifier in South Asian American advertising

Affect is central to imagining a particular type of consumers in South Asian American advertising, and sport, especially cricket, stands out to some ad executives as an ideal unifier of South Asians from different nation states, religions, ethnolinguistic groups, and diasporic histories. Diasporic affiliation to particular sports, both as spectators and as participants, is integral to processes of identity formation, generational shifts, and racialization. For instance, Daniel Burdsey (2011) and Stanley Thangaraj (2012) each look at very different contexts in which participation in and affiliation with particular sports contributes to processes of racialization. Thangaraj’s South Asian young people use basketball to create particular racialized affiliations in the US South while distancing from cricket players whom they envision as immigrants and not American enough. Burdsey contrasts young British South Asians’ views of football to their cricket team allegiances, with the latter aligning with the homeland and the former being more mixed.
Sport as experienced by players and spectators may, however, be different from how audiences connect with and relate to media depictions of sport. Sara Ahmed’s (2010) illustrative analysis of Gurinder Chadha’s diasporic hit film *Bend it Like Beckham* highlights how cinematic depictions of sport create various points of alignment and convergence between characters of different racial backgrounds and in varied immigration trajectories. The film’s title refers to the popular footballer David Beckham and the teenage protagonist Jess’ experiences as an aspiring footballer in a British Punjabi family with alternative notions of what constitutes proper femininity. Ahmed identifies points of alignment between various characters that mediate affect, and analyzes how sport serves as a metonym for negotiating racializing experiences of migration. Diegetic scenes of football practices and matches, as well as an extradiegetic scene of cricket featuring athletes and aunties alike, create points of what Ahmed calls ‘conversion’: characters shift their affective stances to come into alignment with more felicitous outcomes that enable them to overcome racism and find less conflicted identities (2010, 46–48). Such a pantheon of characters and affective trajectories is seldom possible in the compact time frame of advertisements, but affect is nonetheless vital in conveying particular attributes in the context of sport. Although sport can actually be a divisive medium that accentuates national, political, and communal fissures, in diasporic advertising it is used to transcend subcontinental tensions while also creating an inclusive dragnet that pulls in migrants in the UK, Africa, West Indies, and other locales. In my research, I observed cricket to be a signifier of enormous potential. For instance, in creative brainstorms about how to depict the passions and excitement of South Asian Americans, cricket was highly regarded. On more than one occasion, I heard the phrase, ‘Of course, cricket!’ emphatically offered as a viable creative motif.

Unlike other diasporic locations, such as the UK, where sports such as cricket already have a national following, in the US, cricket has a far smaller public presence. For instance, cable sports giant ESPN has only in the last two to three years begun to show highlights from major cricket matches and further coverage on its website. Largely absent from public discourse, cricket is a private pastime that tends to be consumed out of the public view. This is especially evident in the ways in which cricket players and fans, among those of other sports, perform affect in different ads. The four spots I now turn to were created by Asian American advertising agencies as part of a series of ads for Nationwide Insurance and Financial Services in 2007, while the last was released in 2009 for State Farm Insurance. These ads aired on diasporic cable channels as well as during local access Asian American programming. Dudrah (2002) notes the potential of diasporic media, such as Zee TV, for its ability to create certain hegemonies of language and region while also opening up other possibilities of audience identification. What the four spots have in common, but execute in different ways, is that they transform the physicality and commonness of cricket into a refined diasporic South Asian taste.

Rather than intimate that cricket occupies central role in the American psyche, Asian American ad executives exploit its marginal position and frame it as a point of solidarity. During a May 2008 visit to the agency that created the first three ads, I took a seat next to account executive Steve in a modern, bright orange and white pod-like viewing room to watch a show reel consisting of several ‘spots’ or television commercials for Nationwide financial services. He explained that this brand was non-existent in South Asian American households, and he sought to build brand recognition. He had worked with a diverse Asian American team to develop the creative portions in New York but utilized lower production costs and a wider variety of Indian actors to film the dozen or so TV commercials in India. Notably, these choices seem to further aspects of authenticity and appeal to a sense of
nostalgia that might not be possible with the comportment and speech styles of South Asian Americans. In the ads Steve and I watched together, South Asian American ethnicity was constructed through diasporic signifiers, but without the aid of iconic celebrities featured in the general market campaign. Here, cricket provided a way for South Asian American men to identify and connect with a game that has a negligible public following in US. In the first ad,7 we see a solitary male South Asian cricket fan riding the emotional highs and lows of a game that is ‘right down to the wire’. He watches the match alone with an announcer speaking Indian accented English. Unlike other American sports fans or cricket fans elsewhere in the world, this viewer sits in a darkened room with his face illuminated by the television. He cannot bond with other fans of the sport, let alone of his team. Instead, he has to identify with the ad’s audience, who will presumably also care about cricket. He is devastated when his team loses, having expended what appears to be a tremendous amount of energy on cricket. The voiceover cautions, ‘life comes at you fast’ as the screen goes black, followed by two screens of text. The first, ‘Cricket is only a game’ is followed by ‘Plan for more important things in life.’ The voiceover gently but authoritatively reminds this lone cricket fan about the importance of other things in life, such as financial planning.

Cricket further provides a motif for maturity and responsibility in a modern South Asian American marriage. This is an interpellation of masculinity that differs from its meanings when associated with American football or basketball – which are seen as less refined, uncontrolled, and dangerous. The second ad features a similarly solitary cricket viewer, but this time in a more humorous situation.8 Glued to the television, he is oblivious to the advances of his wife who slinks out of the bathroom wearing suggestive red lingerie and turns on mood music. ‘Hi handsome’, she coos, as she stands suggestively in the doorway. Unwilling to miss a second of the sporting action, he gestures her away with ‘The game is almost over, sweetheart!’ She continues her advances, and he begins to sound exasperated as he says, ‘It’s the last over!’ Continuing to watch the game until what appears to be the end, she suddenly croaks ‘Hon-ney!’ from behind him, and he turns to find her transformed into a dramatically older version of her young self – a transformation that suggests that he has completely lost track of time because he was so absorbed with the game. Here the voiceover offers some sage advice after the tagline: ‘Enjoy the game, but don’t miss out on life.’ Even though this spot is primarily aimed at men who might identify with the conundrum of deciding between sport and sex, women who view it might identify with the younger version of the wife, who strives to keep a marriage exciting and intimate. Both characters subtly convey these respective affective stances in enacting this cautionary tale.

While the first two spots emphasize the marginality of the game in American popular culture, the third one uses a live cricket match as the setting.9 It may seem like a stretch to believe that a cricket match would draw such a crowd in the US outside a scant few urban regions with high concentrations of South Asian American or Caribbean populations, but this point recedes into the background as the punch line of the ad emerges. We quickly realize that the cricket stadium forms the backdrop for a story of infidelity about to be discovered. A comical, plump, balding man has brought a younger mistress to a cricket match and lies about being at the game with a friend when his wife calls on his cell phone. The joke here is that unbeknownst to him, his wife has already spotted him and his mistress on television, as they are currently featured on the jumbo-tron. Seeing himself on the huge stadium screen leaves him crestfallen and panicked; he listens mutely as his wife announces her plans to leave him, take all his assets, and their children while his mistress squeals in delight about being on TV, flips her hair, and mouths the words, ‘Hi, mom!’
Here the voiceover advice is ‘Protect yourself from googlies. Help safeguard your assets with sound financial planning.’ In many ways, this ad, like the two prior, reproduces many of the sport’s masculine, sexist associations. Men are the intended target audience, and are appealed to as the fiscally powerful breadwinners of their families. Even so, there are some diasporic twists that can be seen in the affect of various characters. For instance, both the act of surveillance and the act of confrontation give women viewers a powerful entre into this narrative. Unlike parts of South Asia, where confronting infidelity, let alone seizing assets and having custody of children, can be legally and socially challenging for women, here in the diaspora gender is remade to suit modern standards and lifestyles. The man knows he is in a tough spot, and acts the part. Perhaps even more satisfyingly, the mistress seems suitably unintelligent and superficial, oblivious to the predicament in which her lover finds himself.

All three of these spots use affect in creating identification with their intended South Asian American audience. The emotional rollercoaster of the first man, the choice of a cricket game over a romantic interlude with a lover, and the enjoyment of a game with a mistress in what is thought to be a large and unfamiliar crowd all underscore the difference between this sport and popular American ones that would be watched in social groups, broadcast in bars, and generally be a part of public culture. Contrasted with the unrestrained image of American football, the blackness of basketball, and the archetypal American pastime of baseball, cricket has a more exclusive, if even elusive, set of associations in the American imagination. The suggestion of cricket only being a game to those who presumably lived and breathed it in the subcontinent or other regions of the South Asian diaspora, and the use of specialized terms such as ‘overs’ interspersed with the deferred promise of a game finally being ‘over’ rely on insider knowledge. Drawing comparisons between such specialized bowls as ‘googlies’ and the predicament of being taken by surprise and paying the price, are especially effective. Arguably, one would be hard pressed to find average American sports fans that would know the rules, players, or history of the game as they would for baseball or American football. Such rarified status provides a powerful motif for appealing to South Asian Americans and constructing them as ideal consumers.

The final ad I discuss, for State Farm Insurance, is made by a different agency and refreshingly features active young Desi women and a female insurance agent. Unlike the other ads, women are the central characters in the spot and men play supporting roles. Speaking in American accented English, the three women exit a yoga class carrying mats and wearing stylish workout wear. One giggles to the other about how she pushed her during ‘downward dog’, a basic yoga pose. Her friend then notices a major dent in her car. ‘Karma!’ says third woman as the first summons her State Farm agent by uttering the campaign’s catch phrase ‘Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.’ Instantly, like a genie, an attractive Desi woman agent appears wearing a dark suit and holding a perfect yogenic tree pose. She instantly makes the car dent disappear, prompting one of the girls to quip to her, ‘Um, my love life could use a little fixing.’ Behold! Who should appear but the iconic Indian man, a cricket star. At bat and too stunned to speak, he stands silently and handsomely and impresses the women enough for a second one to pipe up, ‘Me too!’ She seems to be less lucky, as another cricketer fails to appear. Instead, a Bollywood ‘hero’ on a motorcycle with an unbuttoned shirt and ample chest hair greets her with a, ‘Hello, gorgeous!’ in a Indian accented English while arranging his voluminous hair. A swift, ‘How about a helmet, stud?’ from the agent makes one appear on his head and cause him to squeal, ‘My hair!’

The affect performed by the sharply dressed and able cricketer, stands in stark contrast to this hirsute, womanizing Bollywood hero. We are not given a chance to gauge the
women’s reaction, but it appears that the Bollywood hero, here dismissively called ‘stud’, is a foil to the handsome, reserved cricketer. Smartly outfitted and saying nothing to embarrass himself, he is classy and at home anywhere in the world. One executive I spoke with who worked on the spot explained that they were trying to use cultural cues such as Bollywood and cricket, which audiences liked: ‘It tested really well in terms of being breakthrough and entertaining, and funny... the tonality is just totally different.’ The tonality that he mentions is accomplished through the young, hip, affect conveyed through the use of American accented English and young Desi women calling the shots. As fit, trim yoginis, they epitomize a new generation of ideal consumers, ones that speak like the average American, take good care of their bodies, and are responsible enough to have insurance. If the type of affect performed by everyday characters does the work of connecting brands with South Asian American consumers, then celebrity athletes have the potential of increasing brand identity immeasurably.

Celebrity athletes and affective shifts

When analyzing the role of sport in everyday life, one may be able to observe the impact it has on local individuals and communities. With ads, however, such a process can be more difficult to read. Here, looking at affect can be especially useful. As I noted earlier, and elsewhere, advertising executives strive to depict South Asian Americans as upwardly mobile consumers with ample spending power.11 Even the affect of blue-collar characters should be cheerful and happy, as the earlier example illustrates, exuding an affect that may not correlate with lived experience. This is not surprising, given advertising’s role in creating aspirational identities for consumers; it moreover signals the power that recognizable, beloved athletes may have as ambassadors of particular brands. Such an equation is tried and true in South Asia,12 and ad executives I observed also attested to the efficacy of ‘brand ambassadors’, be they from Bollywood, sport, or both (as there are certainly instances of crossover). For instance, Nalapat and Parker (2005, 435) identify cricketer Sachin Tendulkar as ‘the ideal brand ambassador’ due to his perfect fit with a neoliberalizing India that saw an increase in satellite television and consumer culture. Notably, the iconic batsman extended his notoriety and garnered new legions of fans by hitting his 100th test century in March 2012, underscoring the perfect confluence of sport and celebrity. In the South Asian American context, we can expand the scope slightly wider than cricket to also consider world class tennis players, such as Vijay Amritraj, who went on to appear in Bollywood as well as Hollywood films; and more recently, Sania Mirza. The latter has not only popularized the sport to new generations of South Asians at home and abroad, but also endorses products and makes appearances at various society events, including launch parties for major apparel brands like Diesel with her husband, Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Malik.13

The ads in which Mirza appears in India feature her performing a dramatically different affect than diasporic ads to which I will turn shortly. Akin to the commercial high jinx of Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Akhtar, Indian cricketer Rahul Dravid, and numerous others, one Bournvita ad features young Sania Mirza dressing and acting the part of a primary school child.14 Seemingly intended to amuse as well as endear, little girl Sania awakes to be herded by her mother through the usual rituals of teeth brushing, bathing, breakfast, workbook exercises, and the like, and is handed her tennis racket as she heads out the door in a school uniform. Sporting figures are clearly a major selling point in South Asian advertising, and advertising executives believe in recouping the Desi identity by incorporating those figures but reframing their affect for diasporic audiences. While there are fewer celebrity athletes in these ads, those that appear display strikingly similar affect
to one another. For instance, in an ad for Gillette razors, both Dravid and Malik seem reserved and dignified. This popular campaign, in which Gillette filmed identical segments of celebrity athletes strutting in black outfits, shaving, and giving each other knowing glances, presents both Dravid and Malik as antic-free and suave. Alongside tennis star Roger Federer, footballer Thierry Henry, and once shining golfer Tiger Woods, they are as slick as the rest. With no slapstick humor, costumes, or disguises, they exude a cosmopolitanism that puts them in highly rarefied male athletic company. Similarly, Mirza does an affective turnabout in her performance in an Air India ad.16 Dressed in an elegant, form-fitting white sweater and wearing attractive make-up, this Sania is a far cry from the three-year-old that has her teeth brushed and hair combed by her mother. Mirza encounters a friend in an airport gate area who is also ‘going to India’. A sophisticated, if somewhat lifeless, Mirza narrates that she will ‘be home’ as soon as she alights Air India’s pleasurable cabin. The friend flying on a different airline won’t likely receive the superior comfort and service she experiences on Air India. In her posh first class seat, Mirza admires the wedding mehendi (henna) of a fellow passenger, politely acknowledges her food, mildly enjoys video entertainment, and quietly slips into slumber in a fully reclined pod as the Hindi jingle croons, ‘... yeh mere ghar ka kamra vahe’ (“This is like a room in my home”). Reserved and demure, Sania here performs the affect of a well to do diasporic Desi whose home is multiple but singularly classed.

Conclusion
To conclude I briefly survey what types of gains have been accomplished through the leveraging of particular enactments of affect. If, as Patricia Clough (2008, 224) contends, “the political gain expected of the affective turn – its openness, emergence, and creativity – is already the object of capitalist capture, as capital shifts to accumulate in the domain of affect and deploys racism to produce an economy to realize this accumulation,” then what is the net outcome of the affective strategies that position sport, and in turn, South Asian American audiences, as successful sites of brand identification? And, what meanings of race and ethnicity are being created through the recruitment of sport as a motif and celebrity athletes as characters? While advertising rarely features non-normative imagery, pressing questions of how particular versions of race and ethnicity come to be seen as normal, and which sports and celebrity athletes gain prominence and prestige, come to the fore in determining who gets excluded from these newly fashioned media depictions. As Arlene Davila (2001) has deftly illustrated, advertising does not simply reflect preexisting ethnicities, but actively creates racial and ethnic meaning. The selective and favorable depiction of South Asian Americans in these ads depoliticizes important divisions among real life sports fans to create model consumers. Both athletes and fans are depicted as refined, middle class individuals that connote a different set of associations than they do in South Asia, or many other American sports. A fruitful confluence has emerged between sport, celebrity athletes, and diasporic advertising, and here, to paraphrase Mazzarella (2009, 292), these transformations of meaning are effective in large part because they are affective. In the Nationwide ads, several of the characters, as well as the voiceover, use South Asian Received Pronunciation, a highly prestigious language variety that is linked to a post-1965 professional, upwardly mobile immigrant who is fiscally responsible. The use of American accented English by the women in the State Farm Insurance ad underscores their sense of belonging and ease in a society in which yoga is widely commodified, and stands in contrast to the silent cricketer and the Indian accented English of the Bollywood hero. These heteronormative, middle class stances
construct female diasporic subjects in upwardly mobile ways as well. The ongoing semiotic work that must occur to create racial and ethnic meaning, especially in diasporas, is evident in this advertising development and production, and all these choices contribute to the racial refashioning of South Asian Americans in commercial media production.\textsuperscript{17}

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**Notes**

2. Harvey (2005) elaborates on various economic, social and political aspects of this process.
3. For discussion of these shifts and differences among South Asian Americans, see Khandelwal (2002), Shankar (2008), and Shukla (2003). For discussion of these shifts in the context of Asian American populations more broadly, see Lowe (1996).
4. Affect has been especially useful in considering performance in a variety of contexts. See for instance, Berlant (2011), Clough and Halley (2007), Negri (1999), and Sedgwick (2003).
5. All agency and individual names from my research are pseudonyms, but brand names and celebrity names remain unchanged.
6. The prominence of cricket in South Asia and elsewhere has been notably discussed by Appadurai (1995), Corrigan (2001), and Gupta (2004).
7. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfjfaDxWSxQ&feature=BFa&list=PL4CE401DA36726FE6
8. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hv1u-VZhiL0&feature=BFa&list=PL4CE401DA36726FE6
14. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNVtKz7kABY&feature=BFa&list=PL4CE401DA36726FE6
15. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14JgKX29CeU&feature=BFa&list=PL4CE401DA36726FE6
17. For further discussion of this, see Shankar (2013).

**Notes on contributor**

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