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REPRESENTING INDIAN-AMERICAN FEMALE TEENAGE IDENTITY: DEVI VISHWAKUMAR IN THE NETFLIX SERIES *NEVER HAVE I EVER*

Ni Kadek Wina Candani[1], Putu Nur Ayomi[2]*
[1,2]*English Studies Program, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Indonesia*
candaniwina@gmail.com[1], putu.nur.a@unmas.ac.id[2]

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Abstract: The media plays a large role in influencing the masses in the understanding of culture, gender, ethnicity, and social experiences. Contemporary television programs are more likely to exhibit multicultural identities, including the ethnic minority woman. The studies done so far on *Never Have I Ever* concentrated primarily on cultural identity, biculturalism, stereotypes, or intergenerational conflict, but it has rarely been done in terms of their relationship in building the identity of the protagonist. The suggested study will delve into the identity of Devi Vishwakumar in *Never Have I Ever* Season 1, manifested in the hybrid cultural, social, family, and academic expectations. This paper has utilized a qualitative research design based on qualitative media analysis and this was analyzed with the theory of representation as proposed by Stuart Hall with the support of the theory of characterization as well as the theory of intersectionality proposed by Murphy and Crenshaw, respectively. The information was based on the chosen dialogues and visual sequences of the first season of the show. This indicates that the perfection of Devi's identity is a multidimensional and dynamic process that is culturally negotiated, based on social experiences, gender, ethnicity, family, and academic expectations. The article can be valuable to the study of media representations since it demonstrates that the identity of an Indian-American teenage girl is constructed on the layers of multiple different social and cultural dimensions, and is not defined by a single dimension of identity.
Keywords: *Representation; characterization; intersectionality; identity*

INTRODUCTION

Popular media plays a central role in shaping how audiences understand gender, ethnicity, culture, and social class (Kellner, 1995). Television series and films are not only entertainment but also cultural texts that shape how particular groups are perceived. (Hall, 1997). Through repeated portrayals, the media may either reinforce or challenge stereotypes about minority groups and thereby influence how society views them (Siddiqui, 2025). For this reason, analyzing media representation is important because it reveals how identities are constructed and negotiated within specific social and cultural contexts (Hall, 1997).

The expansion of streaming platforms has made ethnic minority characters more visible and more varied on screen (Daalmans et al., 2024). Although Western media, particularly in the United States, has long portrayed minority characters through stereotypes or marginal roles, recent productions have begun to depict immigrant experiences with greater depth (Nurjannah, 2024). One example is the Netflix original series *Never Have I Ever* (2020), created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher, which follows Devi Vishwakumar, an Indian-American teenager in California who struggles to balance cultural values, relationships, and gender roles (Ivanka, 2022). Devi's identity is shaped not only by her position between Indian and American cultures but also by her gender, her family's expectations, her academic ambitions, and her peer environment. Recent studies emphasize that the identity of ethnic minority adolescents is formed through the interaction of several social and cultural dimensions rather than a single factor (Ajith, 2025; Ivanka, 2022; Shafi, 2023). Devi's character therefore offers a relevant case for examining how contemporary multicultural media constructs the identity of an ethnic minority teenage girl.

*Corresponding Author:
putu.nur.a@unmas.ac.id

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To examine these interrelated dimensions, this study draws on three perspectives, each serving a distinct function. Hall's (1997) theory of representation is used to explain how meanings about Devi's identity are produced through language, dialogue, and visual images. Murphy's (1972) theory of characterization is used to identify how these meanings are revealed through Devi's speech, actions, thoughts, and relationships with other characters. Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality is used to interpret how ethnicity, gender, family expectations, and cultural identity operate together rather than separately in shaping her position.

Previous studies on *Never Have I Ever* have mainly examined the cultural dimension of the series. Jessica and Pratama (2021) identified biculturalism and xenocentrism in Devi's preference for American culture, Shanti and Hapsari (2021) highlighted generational conflict between first- and second-generation Indian immigrants, and Nurjannah (2024) showed how Indian and American cultural values coexist in the series. Other studies have addressed ethnic identity and stereotypes of South Asians (Dutta, 2024) and the construction of teenage identity through romance and social conventions (Viswanath & Sivashankar, 2025). Although these studies differ in focus, they share a common tendency: each treats one dimension of Devi's identity, such as culture, generation, ethnicity, or romance, as the main lens of analysis. As a result, they do not adequately explain how Devi's hybrid cultural identity, race, and gender interact with the family and academic expectations placed on her, nor how this interaction is revealed through her characterization across the narrative. This study addresses that gap by analyzing Devi's identity as an intersectional construction in which cultural, social, familial, and academic dimensions shape one another. Its novelty lies in showing how these dimensions are connected through specific representational and characterization strategies in the series, rather than in examining any of them in isolation.

This study aims to analyze how Devi Vishwakumar's identity is represented in *Never Have I Ever Season 1* in terms of (1) hybrid cultural identity; (2) race, gender, and social identity; and (3) women, family, and academic expectations, and to explain how these dimensions intersect in her characterization. The study contributes to media representation research by demonstrating how contemporary multicultural television constructs the identity of an ethnic minority teenage girl through intersecting cultural, social, and familial factors.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using qualitative media analysis. A qualitative design was considered suitable because it allows in-depth interpretation of meaning in media texts, including dialogues, visual images, and character interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative media analysis was chosen because it enables researchers to examine media content systematically by interpreting texts, images, and narratives within their social and cultural contexts (Altheide, 1996).

As a media-text study, it involved no human respondents. The data source was the Netflix original series *Never Have I Ever Season* 1 (Kaling & Fisher, 2020), which consists of 10 episodes with a duration of approximately 25–30 minutes each. All 10 episodes were examined because the season presents the major cultural, social, familial, and academic issues experienced by the protagonist and provides the narrative context needed to trace the development of Devi Vishwakumar's identity. The data were dialogues, monologues, narrator commentary, and visual scenes that contribute to the construction of Devi's identity. The unit of analysis was a scene, defined as a continuous segment in one

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setting that contains a dialogue, monologue, narration, or visual element relevant to Devi's identity. A scene was selected as data when it met three criteria: (1) Devi is the speaker, the actor, or the subject being discussed by other characters or by the narrator; (2) it contains a verbal or visual signifier of culture, ethnicity, gender, family, or academic expectations; and (3) the signifier is explicit enough to be documented through a quotation, a described action, or a screenshot.

The researchers served as the key instrument, assisted by a data sheet. The series was watched repeatedly: first to understand the plot and characters, then to record each selected scene with its episode and timestamp, its dialogue or narration, and its visual elements. Screenshots were taken of visually significant scenes, and all records were rechecked against the episodes for accuracy.

The analysis followed five steps. First, each scene was coded according to Murphy's (1972) characterization methods, such as speech, thoughts, reactions, the conversation of others, and the narrator's direct comment. Second, the coded data were grouped into three dimensions corresponding to the research objectives: hybrid cultural identity; race, gender, and social identity; and women, family, and academic expectations. Third, Hall's (1997) theory of representation was applied to interpret how the verbal and visual signifiers in each dimension construct Devi as an Indian-American teenage girl. Fourth, Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality was used to examine how these dimensions overlap within the same scene, for instance, how ethnicity and gender jointly shape the family and academic expectations placed on her. Fifth, the findings were compared with previous studies to determine whether they confirm, extend, or differ from earlier research, and the most representative data were selected for presentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Never Have I Ever represents Devi Vishwakumar's identity through several overlapping aspects of her life as an Indian-American teenager. Notably, her story is narrated not by Devi herself but by John McEnroe, a white American former tennis player, an adult man who differs from her in race, gender, and age. Since representation involves the power to give meaning to others (Hall, 1997), this choice means that Devi's experiences are framed for the audience through a white male voice. His narration both exposes and softens the stereotyping she faces, as when he describes her group's nickname as "gently racist" (00:09:04 E1). Devi's identity is therefore constructed not only through her own words and actions but also through an external voice that frames and judges her. The findings are presented in three parts: (1) representation of hybrid cultural identity, (2) representation of race, gender, and social identity, and (3) representation of women, family, and academic expectations, followed by a discussion of how the three dimensions are interrelated. Together, they show that Devi's identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed throughout the first season, with each dimension shaping the others.

Representation of Hybrid Cultural Identity

Individuals raised in a bicultural environment rarely identify with a single culture; instead, they negotiate different cultural values and practices in an ongoing process shaped by everyday social experience (Hall, 1997). Such multicultural experiences also affect how individuals view themselves and incorporate different cultural perspectives into their daily lives (Hong et al., 2026). *Never Have I Ever* constructs Devi's hybrid cultural identity in this way, through her negotiation between Indian traditions on the one hand and American teenage ideals on the other. This negotiation is revealed in her

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speech, her daily behavior, her aspirations, and her interactions with other characters. In the first season, American culture is generally associated with freedom, individuality, comfort, and self-determination, while Indian culture is associated with family, religion, and shared values, which serve as cultural signs through which Devi recognizes her ethnicity (Dutta, 2024). Rather than presenting the two cultures as separate entities, the series positions Devi in a continuous process of negotiating and redefining both.

This negotiation is introduced in the very first scene, in which Devi prays: *"Hey, gods. It's Devi Vishwakumar, your favorite Hindu girl in the San Fernando Valley"* (00:00:15 E1). The sentence contains two signifiers of identity. The phrase *"Hindu girl"* signals her religious and cultural background, while *"San Fernando Valley"* places her firmly in a suburban American context. By combining both in a single self-introduction, the series establishes from the outset that the two cultures coexist in Devi's daily life rather than belonging to separate spheres. The scene's form is also significant: Devi performs a Hindu prayer ritual, yet she speaks to the gods in the casual tone of an American teenager. The prayer thus becomes a hybrid practice in itself. This supports Hall's (1997) argument that representation does not simply reflect reality but constructs meaning through language, since Devi's identity is produced in the very way she names herself.



Figure 1. *Devi Introduces Herself While Praying to the Gods*

The tension between the two cultures becomes clearer in Devi's daily behavior. In one scene, the narrator contrasts Devi with her parents: "*And while he and her mother stayed true to their Indian roots... Devi was all-American"* (00:02:01 E1), while Devi is shown eating meat as her parents keep to their vegetarian practice. Food here becomes a marker of cultural distance: Devi adopts an American lifestyle while remaining part of an Indian family.



Figure 2. *A Scene Showing Devi Eating Meat*

A similar tension appears during Ganesh Puja, a Hindu festival symbolizing religious devotion and cultural continuity (Nurjannah, 2024). Devi complains, *"Mom, this sari is so uncomfortable. Why does it itch so much?"* (00:02:45 E4), and Nalini replies, *"Itchiness of saris is a rite of passage for Indian women. Deal with it."* (00:02:49 E4). The sari functions as a signifier of Indian, religious, and female identity, particularly in religious and ceremonial contexts (Karupiah, 2025). Following Murphy (1972), Devi's reaction reveals her character: her discomfort expresses an internal struggle between inherited cultural demands and the American values of comfort and choice she has grown up with. This finding confirms Shanti and Hapsari (2021) who attribute the cultural conflict of second-generation Indian immigrants to differing values between parents and children. However, it extends their finding by showing that the conflict is also gendered, since the sari is framed specifically as a "rite of passage for Indian

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women."



Figure 3. *A scene Showing Devi's Discomfort in Wearing a Sari*

Devi's attraction to American culture is most explicit in her argument with Harish, an Indian family friend, during the same festival: *"When I get into Princeton, I'm never coming back. I'm gonna be an atheist, who eats cheeseburgers every day."* (00:07:39 E4). In this statement, Devi imagines her future through symbols commonly associated with American life. Princeton is presented less as an academic goal than as an escape from the cultural expectations of her family and community. Becoming an atheist signals freedom from religious obligations, and eating cheeseburgers signals freedom from the food restrictions observed by her family. The statement is also ironic, since Devi's ambition to enter an elite university is itself shaped by her family's emphasis on academic achievement; the very goal she imagines as an escape is one her Indian upbringing has prepared her for. Her preference for American culture confirms the xenocentrism identified by Jessica and Pratama (2021), in which Devi values American culture above her own.

However, the series does not treat this preference as the final stage of Devi's identity formation. In the same conversation, Harish tells Devi that he was once ashamed of being Indian and believed he had to forget his roots to become more American, until he met a Native American roommate who was deeply proud of his culture. Hearing this, Devi responds, *"Well, that's definitely not my identity. I love being Indian."* (00:08:25 E4). Her response is defensive, yet it reveals that her Indian heritage matters to her more than her earlier statement suggested. At this point, the finding departs from Jessica and Pratama (2021): Devi's xenocentrism is shown to be temporary and open to revision rather than a fixed attitude. Hybridity is thus represented not as a choice between two cultures but as their coexistence, in which Devi remains Indian while living like other American teenagers. This is in line with Viswanath and Sivashankar (2025), who view adolescence in the series as a negotiation of cultural identity rather than the rejection of one culture in favor of another.

These findings are significant because they show that Devi's hybridity is not only a matter of personal choice but also of how others define her. The narrator calls her *"all-American,"* while Devi herself later declares, *"I love being Indian."* The gap between these two statements shows that her cultural identity is contested between an external label and her own self-definition. This confirms Nurjannah (2024), who shows that Indian and American values coexist in the series, but it adds that this coexistence is not harmonious from the start; it is reached through conflict, rejection, and reconsideration. The finding also resonates with Ivanka (2022), who reads the series through the diasporic double consciousness of Indian women, as Devi sees herself both through her own eyes and through the eyes of the American society around her. What the present analysis adds is that the moments of negotiation discussed above, namely the sari, the festival, and the Princeton dream, are consistently linked to gender, religion, and education. Hybridity in the series therefore cannot be separated from the other dimensions of Devi's identity.

Overall, Devi's hybrid cultural identity is represented as an ongoing negotiation between Indian and American values rather than a fixed state. It is revealed

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through her speech, behavior, aspirations, and interactions, which, following Murphy (1972), are the means through which a character's identity becomes visible. This supports Hall's (1997) view of identity as continuously constructed through cultural meanings. The analysis also shows that this negotiation is never purely cultural: the sari is tied to womanhood, the festival to religion, and Princeton to academic expectations. These links are developed in the following sections.

Representation of Race, Gender, and Social Identity

The series represents Devi's race, gender, and social identity through racialized physical appearance, social stereotypes, and self-representation in her high school environment. These categories are not depicted separately; they intertwine to shape Devi's experiences as a teenage Indian-American girl, as she is labelled by others and attempts to redefine herself. This illustrates Hall's (1997) view of representation as the production of meaning through language and social practice, as well as Crenshaw's (1989) argument that intersecting identities produce distinct experiences of marginalization that cannot be explained by race or gender alone.

The intersection of race and gender first appears in how Devi perceives her own body. While praying, she says, *"I'd love for my arm hair to thin out. I know it's an Indian thing, but my forearms look like the frigging floor of a barber shop."* (00:00:42 E4). By calling it *"an Indian thing,"* she recognizes body hair as an ethnic feature, while her wish to reduce it reflects feminine beauty standards that favor smooth, hairless skin. Her body thus becomes a site where ethnicity and femininity cannot be separated (Crenshaw, 1989): her ethnic features are experienced as a problem precisely because they do not meet the dominant standard of how a girl should look. The humorous tone of the line does not diminish its significance; rather, it shows how ordinary such self-scrutiny has become for her. This is in line with Azmitia et al. (2023), who argue that social identities are formed through the interaction of social categories in specific contexts, and it shows that racial identity is experienced not only through cultural practice but also through physical appearance (Hall, 1997).

Devi's social identity is also constructed through labels given by her peers. The narrator describes Devi and her friends as *"an ethnically diverse group of academically-focused um... I can't think of a better word for 'dorks.' The rest of the school called them the gently racist nickname, the UN. It was widely known to have been created by Ben."* (00:09:04 E1). When Devi protests, *"You shouldn't call us the UN. It's racist, and offensive."* (00:12:14 E1), Ben replies, *"We call you the UN, because you are unfuckable nerds."* (00:12:21 E1). The nickname reduces a multiethnic group to a single *"other,"* defined by its difference from the white majority of the school. Ben's explanation then adds a second layer: *"unfuckable nerds"* combines an academic stereotype with a denial of their desirability as young women. Devi's protest is also important for her characterization (Murphy, 1972): she names the nickname as racist, showing that she recognizes the stereotype, but her objection is dismissed and turned into a further insult. Devi and her friends are thus stereotyped collectively through their ethnicity and gender rather than seen as individuals. This confirms Dutta (2024) on the presence of South Asian stereotypes in the series and supports Hall's (1997) argument that meaning is not given but constructed through representation.

However, the series does not leave Devi within these externally imposed identities. She declares, *"This year, we're rebranding. We are glamorous women of color, who deserve a sexy high school life."* (00:07:21 E1). Notably, she identifies the group as *"women of color"* rather than as Indian, acknowledging her friends' diverse backgrounds and expressing solidarity

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among minority girls rather than emphasizing a single ethnicity. The word *"glamorous"* directly counters the label *"unfuckable nerds,"* replacing the image of minority girls as socially unattractive with one of confident and visible young women. In terms of characterization, this declaration reveals Devi as assertive and determined to control how she is seen (Murphy, 1972). This scene shows that the intersection of race, gender, and social identity produces not only discrimination but also resistance and self-representation (Crenshaw, 1989).

The significance of this finding lies in the way the series uses humor to present racialized and gendered stereotypes. The nickname *"the UN"* and the label *"unfuckable nerds"* are delivered as jokes, and the narrator describes the nickname as only *"gently racist."* Humor makes these stereotypes appear harmless, yet the scenes show that they shape how Devi is seen and how she sees herself. This extends Dutta (2024), who identifies South Asian stereotypes in the series, by showing that stereotypes about South Asian girls are not only ethnic but also gendered, as they concern desirability and femininity. Devi's choice of the term *"women of color"* is also meaningful. Rather than claiming a specifically Indian identity, she builds a broader identity shared with her friends of different backgrounds. This is in line with Shafi (2023), who discusses pan-ethnicity as part of the identity formation of second-generation Indians, and it shows that self-representation can become a collective act. In Crenshaw's (1989) terms, the intersection of race and gender is not only a site of disadvantage but also a position from which minority girls can resist and rename themselves.

Overall, the series represents race, gender, and social identity as socially constructed and negotiated rather than biologically or culturally fixed. Devi's identity is shaped by racialized beauty standards, peer stereotypes, and her own efforts to redefine how she and her friends are seen. Rather than accepting the identities imposed by others, Devi attempts to claim a more confident identity for herself and for other minority girls. Notably, the stereotype of the "academically-focused" minority girl links this dimension to the family and academic expectations discussed in the next section.

Representation of Women, Family, and Academic Expectations

The series shows how female identity is shaped by family relations, cultural norms, and educational goals. After the death of Mohan Vishwakumar, three women of different generations, Nalini, Kamala, and Devi, take on roles and responsibilities in different ways. Through them, the series presents several experiences of being an Indian woman in America and both questions and reaffirms traditional expectations of Indian women.

Womanhood is first represented through Nalini as a widowed single mother. After Devi runs away from home following Nalini's decision to move back to India, Nalini tells Devi's therapist, Dr. Jamie Ryan, *"Devi is out of control. She needs to be in an environment that values discipline."* (00:08:46 E10). Earlier, she admits to Devi, *"I feel like a stranger here, and I don't have a support system, and frankly, without your father around, I just feel like I'm really struggling to raise you."* (00:21:39 E9). These statements show that Nalini's wish to return to India comes not merely from homesickness but from the difficulty of raising a daughter alone in an immigrant society without family support. Her emphasis on discipline reflects her reliance on family and cultural norms in parenting, norms that she believes are better sustained in India than in America. Her concern is also gendered: it is her daughter's behaviour, rather than her own adjustment, that becomes the measure of whether the family has kept its values. In Crenshaw's (1989) terms, Nalini's position as a widow, an immigrant, and a woman

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without community support shapes the expectations she places on Devi, so that Devi's identity is formed partly through her mother's vulnerabilities. Through Nalini, the series represents motherhood as a negotiation between grief, parental responsibility, and the challenge of keeping a family together in a new country.

Gender expectations also differ across the three generations. As discussed earlier, Nalini's response to Devi's complaint about the sari, *"Itchiness of saris is a rite of passage for Indian women. Deal with it."* (00:02:49 E4), implies that becoming an Indian woman means accepting traditions passed down through generations. Kamala faces family pressure to marry. Nalini tells her, *"Kamala, your parents have found you a match…for marriage. His name is Prashant. He's an engineer."* (00:14:25 E1), and later remarks, *"His family wants to see that you can cook, clean, and cater to their son's needs. They basically want him to marry his own mother."* (00:05:37 E2). Although Kamala is a PhD student at Caltech, she is still expected to demonstrate domestic skills, which shows that academic achievement does not free her from traditional gender roles. Devi, in contrast, relates femininity to peer acceptance and romance. In a therapy session, she says, *"I just want to be a normal girl, who isn't called mean names, and could actually have a boyfriend."* (00:23:15 E1). Her wish to be "normal" implies that she perceives herself as outside the norm, a perception that connects directly to the racialized and gendered labels discussed in the previous section. While Nalini's and Kamala's experiences of womanhood are closely tied to family and culture, Devi's are tied to her American peer environment. These contrasting experiences show that womanhood is represented differently across generations, with each character negotiating gender according to her social and cultural circumstances.

Education is another important part of female identity in the series. Rather than being presented as incompatible with traditional roles, academic achievement appears as an intergenerational value. Kamala combines doctoral study with family expectations of marriage, and Nalini, a dermatologist and single mother, challenges the stereotype of the Indian woman as a housewife. Devi shares this priority; in her first prayer she says, *"I was about to ask for good grades."* (00:04:41 E1), even though she later becomes preoccupied with popularity and romance. Academic success is therefore not only a measure of achievement but also part of what it means to be a woman in the Vishwakumar family. At this point, the three dimensions of this study converge. Academic success is at once a family expectation, a cultural marker of Indian identity, and, as the *"UN"* label shows, a source of racialized and gendered stereotyping. Princeton is also Devi's imagined escape from her culture.

These findings show that the family and academic expectations placed on Devi are shaped by both ethnicity and gender. The pressure to excel academically is presented as part of being a good Indian daughter, while expectations of marriage, domestic skill, and appropriate dress are directed specifically at women. Unlike Shanti and Hapsari (2021), who explain intergenerational conflict mainly as a difference in cultural values between immigrant parents and their children, the present analysis shows that this conflict also differs according to gender: Kamala is pressured toward marriage, Nalini toward discipline and sacrifice as a single mother, and Devi toward academic success and cultural propriety. The finding is also consistent with Ajith (2025), who examines how second-generation Indian American youth associate with, assimilate into, and adapt to American society, since Devi's academic ambition functions simultaneously as a family expectation and as her route into American life. In this sense, education in the series is both a source of empowerment and a site where cultural and gendered expectations

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Never Have I Ever thus portrays Indian women whose lives connect family, gender, and education in diverse ways. The series challenges the stereotype of passive Indian women: Nalini is a successful doctor and independent single parent, Kamala is a scientist pursuing her own path, and Devi openly expresses what she wants. At the same time, it reproduces certain stereotypes by continuing to associate Indian women with family responsibility, academic success, and cultural obligation. The series therefore both critiques and reaffirms traditional images of Indian women.

Interrelation of the Three Dimensions

The three dimensions discussed above do not operate as separate aspects of Devi's identity; they continually shape one another. Her hybrid cultural identity is negotiated through gendered objects and practices, such as the sari that Nalini calls *"a rite of passage for Indian women."* Her racialized social identity is tied to academic stereotypes, as the *"UN"* label combines ethnicity, gender, and the image of the studious minority student. Her family and academic expectations, in turn, are shaped by both her Indian heritage and her position as a daughter, so that Princeton represents at once her family's ambition for her and her own fantasy of escaping that family's culture. This interrelation becomes clear when the same scene is read across the three dimensions. The Ganesh Puja episode, for example, contains a cultural conflict (the sari and the festival), a gendered expectation (womanhood as endurance), and an academic aspiration (Princeton as a way out), all within a single narrative event.

The narrator further connects these dimensions. John McEnroe's commentary appears across all of them: he defines Devi's cultural position by calling her *"all-American,"* reports the racialized nickname given to her group, and explains the arranged marriage expected of Kamala. Through him, the series repeatedly places an external, white, male perspective between Devi and the audience. Her moments of self-definition, such as *"I love being Indian"* and *"We are glamorous women of color,"* gain significance precisely because they answer labels imposed by others, including those voiced or softened by the narrator. Each dimension discussed in this study thus involves an external expectation, whether from family, peers, or the narrator, and Devi's response to it. The continuous construction of her identity lies in this repeated movement between being defined and defining herself.

The way Devi's identity is revealed also differs across the three dimensions. Following Murphy's (1972) methods of characterization, her hybrid cultural identity is revealed largely through her own speech and thoughts, as in her prayers and her declaration of loving being Indian. Her race, gender, and social identity are revealed mainly through the conversation of others and the narrator's comments, as in the *"UN"* label and Ben's insult. Her family and academic expectations are revealed through her interactions with Nalini and Kamala. This pattern suggests that the authority to define Devi is distributed unevenly: she speaks most freely about her culture, while her social identity is largely defined by others and her family role is negotiated with the women around her. Her identity is therefore not only multidimensional but also shaped by who has the power to describe each dimension.

Read in this way, the findings support Crenshaw's (1989) argument that identity categories cannot be understood by examining them one at a time. Previous studies of the series have explained Devi's identity mainly through one lens, whether biculturalism, generational conflict, cultural diversity, or ethnic stereotypes. The present analysis shows that these lenses capture parts of the same process. Devi's struggle is not simply between being Indian and being American; it is a struggle over what kind of Indian-American girl she is allowed to be, under pressure from her family, her peers,

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and even the narrator who tells her story. Following Hall (1997), this identity is not reflected by the series but produced through it, and following Murphy (1972), it is revealed gradually through Devi's speech, reactions, aspirations, and relationships.

These findings also have implications for the study of minority representation in streaming media. Greater visibility of minority characters (Daalmans et al., 2024) does not automatically produce representations free from stereotypes. *Never Have I Ever* places an Indian-American girl at the center of its story and gives her a complex inner life, yet it retains associations between Indian women, academic achievement, and family duty, and it frames her story through a white narrator. The series thus illustrates the double character of contemporary multicultural media: it expands the space for minority self-representation while still negotiating with the expectations of a mainstream audience.

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the representation of Devi Vishwakumar's identity in *Never Have I Ever* Season 1 through the lenses of representation, characterization, and intersectionality. The findings show that Devi's identity is depicted as a dynamic and multidimensional process shaped by the negotiation of hybrid cultural identity; the intersection of race, gender, and social identity; and family and academic expectations. These dimensions do not operate separately: her cultural hybridity is shaped by gendered traditions, her racialized social identity is tied to academic stereotypes, and the expectations placed on her by her family are both ethnic and gendered. The series thus presents identity as an ongoing process continuously produced through cultural practices, social relations, and everyday life.

This study contributes to research on media representation by showing that the identity of an Indian-American teenage girl is constructed through the interaction of cultural, racial, gendered, familial, and academic dimensions rather than through ethnicity or culture alone. Whereas previous studies of the series have examined these dimensions separately, this study demonstrates how they connect through specific representational and characterization strategies, drawing on Hall's (1997) theory of representation, Murphy's (1972) theory of characterization, and Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality. Further research could examine later seasons of *Never Have I Ever* or compare the representation of identity in other multicultural television series to develop broader insights into identity construction in contemporary media.

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