



## ***MEET THE PATELS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES TIPSHEET***

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## FILMMAKERS STATEMENT

RP (Ravi Patel): We made *Meet the Patels* as a coping mechanism for something every human being suffers from: Family.

GP (Geeta Patel): Whereas I tend to cry and sort of curl up into a ball and call friends with my problems, Ravi has always joked about his. This film started with that.

RP: I was working in comedy and doing a hosting gig at an Indian Lawyers Convention. I ran out of material, so I started talking about my mom trying to set me up with Indian girls with the same last name as me: Patel. Patels marry Patels in our culture. It's so weird, and yet so normal in my world.

GP: And mine. The point is, the crowd was laughing like CRAZY...

RP: I had made people laugh before, but this was different. I had never seen an audience so emotional and engaged in a way that was deeply personal. This was a cathartic laugh that reached down deep into parts of their body they hadn't even hear of.

GP: Afterwards, people came up to Ravi and asked him to write a book, do a comedy tour, anything.

RP: And then I was like, wait a minute! When doe any Indian Lawyer need another Indian Lawyer? Like, you're sitting in court and you're like, "Excuse my judge, I need to get another Indian Lawyer on this case, I'll be right back..." No! This convention was a total façade. I asked the crowd, "Who here is single?" They all raised their hands.

GP: A few months later, we were in India on vacation and Ravi was babbling about making some kind of Morgan Spurlock-documentary about the internal pressure of first-generation Indians to marry within their own culture. I was like NO WAY IN HELL! I had just spent 7 years making a documentary about a war zone and I had no car, no money, and no bowel movements.

RP: Geeta was trying to teach herself how to use a camera (which she never learned, as you can see in the film) and so she was filming our family trip. I had just broken up with my "secret white girlfriend" that Mom and Dad knew nothing about. They were trying to set me up with Patel girls in India...

GP: As we made the film and tested it with audiences, we knew this film was not about the "Indian Issue" - It was about family. About relationships, the moment when you think your relations with your spouse, your mom, your dad, your friend,



sister, brother - you think that relationship is never going to get better, that person is never going to understand me... This film is about getting to the other side of that. About trying so hard and realizing that people do change, and relationships are the most magical and important parts of life.

RP: We kept testing the film and Americans of all backgrounds - whether Jewish, Christian, first-generation Vietnamese, etc., all responded with intensity.

GP: We made this film about family because there are not enough films out there about this amazing and challenging experience we all share. We made this film about relationships because having a great one with your brother, parents, kids, friends - it's the most important thing in life!

RP: We all want to give love, be loved, and remain in love. This film is also about transcending the lines of race and color and culture in all our relationships - something this country seems to slowly be learning. However, this film takes it to audiences through the most intimate and telling test in all our lives: who we choose to love and bring into our families.

GP: I will never forget the day we finished the film for good, and Ravi said to me, "Geeta, I don't know if this film will see the light of day, but it was worth it because of my relationship with you and Mom and Dad." Awww.

RP: I still feel that way... But um... it really would be awesome to crush it in the theaters!

Love,  
Ravi and Geeta

## **POTENTIAL PARTNERS AND/OR SPEAKERS TO CONSIDER**

Partners are invaluable allies in helping you find expert speakers, bring in an audience for your event, or design engagement activities. Look to your community for the people and organizations that will help your audience stay connected long after the event.

Below are examples of individuals, groups, and organizations in your area to assess as potential partners and/or speakers:

- Local comedians and/or improv groups, and comedy clubs as venues or partners
- Intercultural couples who can speak about their own experiences dating each other, parent/family dynamics, etc.



- Intergenerational family members, for example parents who grew up in a culture different from the one their children were raised in who can speak about their own experiences navigating romantic relationships and other elements of life
- Cultural based organizations, especially South Asian based organizations, for example:
  - Find a local organization part of the National Coalition of South Asian Organizations: <http://saalt.org/the-coalition/meet-the-ncso/>
  - Find a local chapter of the Saurashtra Patel Cultural Samaj: <http://spcsusa.org/info/welcome.html>
  - Find a local chapter of OCA National Center: [http://www.oceanational.org/?page=AboutUs\\_Chapters](http://www.oceanational.org/?page=AboutUs_Chapters)
- Organizations that serve immigrants and immigrant families, especially around cultural support, for example:
  - Find a partner of the New Americans Campaign near you: <http://newamericanscampaign.org/partners#LocalOrganizations>
  - The US Citizenship and Immigration Services has a state-based list of organizations that offer free or low cost services to immigrants: <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/find-help-your-community>
- Local matchingmaking or speed dating organizations or services to help with promotion – they can market the screening to their network as a fun, and free, date night activity!
- Invite representatives from local couples counseling services to discuss working with topics of love, relationships, and family
- Young professional groups, including South Asian professional groups
- Campus student life groups, especially South Asian, Asian American, International Students, etc. The themes in the film around “coming into one’s own” away from their parents could likely resonate widely with a college-aged audience
- Ethnic Studies, Psychology, Sociology and Religion professors, scholars, or departments to invite their network and/or speak to the issues of interracial, bi-cultural, and interfaith relationships and the opportunities and challenges these relationships can surface
- GuideStar has a robust catalogue of contact information for non-profit organizations across the country, searchable by keyword, city, and/or state. Find relevant local non-profit organizations near you by searching for “immigrant” “South Asian” “Indian” “intercultural” “multicultural” or other keywords: <http://www.guidestar.org/AdvancedSearch.aspx>

## ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES

The suggested objectives for the *Meet the Patels* engagement campaign are quite unique. As we see in this film, love, relationships, family, identity, culture, and tradition come together with a fair dose of humor. In this spirit, the engagement



objectives reflect the tenor of the film and are for communities to come together to better understand themselves, their relationships with spouses/partners/parents, and explore in community how love - loving one's family, one's culture, and one's spouse or partner - reflect our identity and our values. Specifically, the objectives include:

- Celebrating love – how we define it, how we find it, how we choose it, and how we keep it.
- Sparking conversations about how culture and intergenerational traditions affect love, marriage, and family bonds.
- Increasing awareness, understanding, and acceptance around intercultural and interfaith relationships and the challenges and opportunities they present.
- Exploring humor and empathy as a way to bridge conflict and find common ground within relationships and family.

## **TOPICS & ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE FILM**

The following topics and issues can help facilitate discussions, bridge community partnerships, and open up cross-cultural dialogue:

- First Generation Immigrant Experiences
- Pressures Immigrants Face Around Assimilation
- Maintaining Cultural Traditions
- Intergenerational Family Relationships
- Bicultural and Interracial Relationships
- Interfaith Relationships
- Cultural Traditions and Marriage
- Gender Roles and Expectations
- Cultural Norms for Marriage
- Online Dating
- Tradition versus Modernity

## **FRAMING THE CONVERSATION**

Discussing something as personal and intimate as love in a public setting may not be comfortable for all participants. Yet some of the most meaningful film experiences occur once the credits roll and participants begin to reflect on the film's connections to themselves, their community, and society. It is important to create a space that is open, inclusive, and respectful of all points of view for this



reason. When framing your conversation, be mindful to ensure that opinions and experiences discussed are not passing judgment on any form or method of pursuing love or marriage (e.g., semi-arranged marriage, arranged marriage, online dating, etc.), or people who are not inclined to get married. Additionally, as the film touches upon intercultural relationships, it is important to not make generalizations that all people of a certain culture share the same beliefs, participate in the same practices, or have had the same experiences.

Post-screening conversations are initiated to allow a plurality of voices to be heard and respected. These events are not intended to solve a problem in real time but to spark civil dialogue, forge connections, and learn together in community. Discussing and negotiating terms to use and frameworks to follow with community partners and fellow facilitators prior to any event is always recommended.

*Meet the Patels* offers an insightful yet humorous take on the relationship between love, culture, and family and asks us all to consider these questions:

- What is love? How do we find it? How do we keep it?
- How do we choose who to love?
- How do we balance our cultural and family expectations when it comes to love, relationships, and marriage?
- How does popular culture (e.g. Hollywood movies and television) contribute to shaping our ideas about love?

Topics implicit in these questions are:

- Navigating our parents' expectations of who we love and how we live our lives.
- The internal pressure within some first generation immigrant families to marry within the same culture.
- Exploring our own identity and our relationship to our culture separate from our parents' expectations.
- Preserving one's cultural and religious traditions.
- The value of intergenerational family relationships and traditions.
- The challenges and opportunities for learning and love in bicultural and interracial relationships.
- Learning about the role of compromise in all relationships.

## AUDIENCE CONVERSATION STARTER



*Meet the Patels* explores both the fun and complexity of the question: How open would you be to your parents playing matchmaker for you?

This question is built into the menu screen of your *Meet the Patels* DVD. As audience members enter the theater or venue, have this question projected on the screen before the film begins. Ask participants to discuss and explore this question with a person sitting next to them or to reflect upon the question on their own. Open the discussion up and invite anyone to share their thoughts with the group if time permits.

## SPARKING DISCUSSION

*Meet the Patels* is an opportunity to explore some of the most essential and important parts of our lives - family, relationships, love, and how the ties and bonds to our culture and heritage shape our lives. Following your screening, and depending upon your engagement activity, these questions can be used in a variety of ways. If you have invited a panel of speakers, share questions with your moderator to help shape the panel discussion. You can also pose these questions to your audience if you decide to organize a large group, town-hall style discussion.

- During their annual visit to India, what did you learn about Ravi's nuclear Patel family (Vasant, Champa, Geeta, and Ravi)? What are their family values and priorities? How do they spend time together and communicate? What did you notice about their family dynamics?
- Discuss the cultural, religious, and family expectations that Ravi (and Geeta) navigate as first generation immigrants born and raised in America but very tied to their Indian cultural heritage. What do Geeta and Ravi share with their family? What are the differences they experience across these two cultures?
- Ravi explores different parts of his identity during the film. When does he feel Indian? When does he feel American? When is he a dutiful son? Rebellious child? What other identities do you see in him? Ask the audience to consider what changes in how Ravi's mother expresses her identity from the beginning of the film through the end.
- "My happiness is your happiness," Vasant Patel declares in the film. Explore the many interpretations of this statement in relationship to the documentary. What does this statement imply in the parent-child relationship? What do children "owe" their parents?

- Ravi's mother, Champa says "I'm not giving up my culture that easily" in response to discussing whether Ravi will marry an Indian woman or not. What assumptions are implicit in this statement?
- What is love? What words would you imagine Vasant and Champ would use to describe and define love? What about Ravi and Geeta?
- What different kinds of love does this film explore?
- According to Ravi's upbringing, Indians marry Indians and specifically, Patels marry Patels. These family bonds are very strong. Think about the scenes in the film where these values were raised and/or questioned. By the end of the film, how did you understand what it means to be a Patel? What details informed your conclusions?
- Vasant tells his son, "Not getting married and staying single is the biggest loser you can be." How do you understand Vasant's statement to his son? Why is marriage such a focus for Ravi's parents?
- According to the Pew Research Center (2010, see "Resources" on page 13), young people today (millennials) overwhelmingly accept interracial dating and marriage. Yet a turning point in the film, and in the relationships within the family, occurs when Ravi tells his parents about Audrey, a "redhead from Connecticut" he had dated for two years but kept secret from his parents. What are possible reasons Ravi kept Audrey a secret? What about why he finally decided to disclose his relationship?
- Over the course of the film, Ravi explores many ways to meet a potential spouse through online dating sites, conventions, BioData, and more. Through these very extensive efforts, what does Ravi learn about love, relationships, his family, and himself?

In the last scenes of the film, Audrey and Ravi's mom Champa are cooking together in the kitchen. Food is a powerful way many people connect to their own culture and share with others. What is a food that feels representative of "home" to you? When was it served? What does it mean to you? Why does food have so much meaning for us? In this story what role does food play in building relationship between Audrey and Ravi's family?

## ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES BEYOND A PANEL

While panel discussions are always a great resource at events, the spirit of *Meet the Patels* offers a unique opportunity for the audience to engage with the film's themes in creative, thoughtful, and fun ways. For example, consider the activities below for ideas to build upon:

### Improv and Comedy Shows

Consider hosting a comedy show featuring local comedians to discuss their own experiences with the main themes in the film of love, family, and intercultural experiences. Explore if there is a comedy club in your community that could be a potential venue for the screening and comedy show!

Think about collaborating with improv groups, who can play out scenarios around love and family that the audience poses to them. There may also be opportunities for the audience to participate in the improv! One idea might be to ask for volunteers from the audience to come up to take part in an improv dating game, which would include five participants (including improv actors mixed with audience volunteers). Three “daters” cover their ears while the “kid” tells their “parent” what they want in their partner. Then have the “parent” ask the daters questions to try and pick the right dater for their “kid.” This should feel funny and light, and like a game. If it gets off track, end it and either ask for more volunteers or go to the discussion questions. The game can last 3-4 minutes, or, if it’s going very well and providing good fodder for discussion, 5-6 minutes. At the end, have the “parent” and the “kid” reveal which dater they would choose as the best candidate.

### Sample discussion questions:

- How well was the “kid” able to articulate what they wanted in a partner?
- How well did the “parent” represent the “kid’s” interest as they questioned the daters?
- Did the “parent” and “kid” arrive at the same conclusion for the best dating candidate?
- How did the daters respond to being questioned by parents?
- How did having a parent involved change the conversation from what it might have been without the parent?
- In your culture, when do your parents enter into the conversation about a particular relationship? What does that mean to them, to you, and to your romantic partner?

### Newlywed Game

Invite couples in the audience who are willing participants to play the Newlywed Game! Consider opening the game up to all couples, regardless if they are married or not. This website offers 150 sample questions that can be used, organized into



categories such as dating, firsts, friends and family, and more:

<http://icebreakerideas.com/newlywed-game-questions/>. Consider choosing questions that most people would be comfortable sharing their answers to in front of an audience.

There are multiple ways you can structure the Newlywed Game, and feel free to be flexible based on what works best for your event and audience. One example is having both members of the couple answer the set of questions *individually* on a handout that is completed before the game starts, and give the answer sheet to the moderator/host. Take turns asking one person a question, and have them respond with what they think their spouse answered. Share the correct answer with the group, and see how many questions they get right! Try to keep the energy high and the tone light and fun, as this is an opportunity for couples and the community to get to know each other better.

#### Community “Speed Dating”

Speed dating is an organized social activity in which people seeking romantic relationships have a series of short conversations with multiple potential partners to determine whether there is mutual interest. The below engagement strategy allows the audience to try out a friendly version of speed dating that has a goal of participants getting to know their community members better, rather than having any romantic overtones.

There are multiple ways you could structure a community speed dating activity, depending on your venue and audience. Consider the suggestions below:

Step 1: Have a set of questions developed in advance and projected on screen or available as handouts that can serve as conversation prompts. Ideally the questions should be short and applicable to a general audience, and lend themselves to being answered in about 3 minutes. Some ideas include:

- Where did you grow up? What is one favorite memory from your childhood?
- Where did your parents grow up? Is there a memory from their childhood they shared with you that stands out?
- Do you have any siblings or cousins? If so, how would you describe your relationship with them?
- What is your cultural background?
- What is your favorite holiday that you celebrate? Why? What does it mean to you?
- What is a food that feels representative of “home” to you? When was it served? What does it mean to you?



- What is your favorite documentary? Why?

An alternative option to providing questions as conversation starters is to consider having participants fill out a BioData form, see Appendix A at the last page of this guide for a sample. If you chose the BioData route instead, ask participants to circle the 2-3 items which they feel best reflect who they are in preparation for a community speed dating format.

Step 2: If your venue and audience size permits, have participants self-organize into two lines facing each other. The person they are directly facing is their partner. Alternatively, if you have tables available you can have participants sit on two sides of the table so they are directly facing one other person who is their partner. You would ideally be using long tables, or have shorter tables close enough to each other that it would be easy for participants to move to another table when it comes time to rotate partners.

- Each person will have 3 minutes to share a response to one of the questions of their choice that you provided as conversation prompts, or if you chose to instead use BioData forms they should share information from that sheet. Once the 3 minutes is up, the event organizer should ring a bell or make an announcement that it's time to switch which partner is sharing.
- The other partner now has 3 minutes to share.
- After the next 3 minutes is up and both partners have shared, the event organizer should ring a bell or make an announcement that participants should move to the left (or right) to rotate to the next partner. Start the process again with this new partner pairing!
- Allow at least 3 to 4 rounds of rotations.

Step 3: Bring the group back together and debrief about the activity. Below are suggested prompts to help guide discussion.

If you used questions as conversation prompts:

- How did sharing this information about yourself with a stranger make you feel? How do you think it made your partners feel?
- What's one thing that stands out to you the most that you learned from someone else?
- Did anything surprise you about what you learned from someone else?
- Did you learn anything new about yourself in sharing a response?



- How do you think we can find more opportunities in daily life to learn more about our fellow community members? Or share our own background and experiences with others?

If you used BioData forms:

- How do you think the BioData form reflects your identity of who you are? Who you will be in 5 years? 25 years?
- What parts of your identity are permanent? What parts change?
- What parts of your parents' biodata were easy to fill out?
- Could you accurately fill out biodata for your parents? Could your parents do it for you?

#### Home is Where the Kitchen Is

Given the central role of food as a family connector in *Meet the Patels*, consider organizing a food festival as an engagement activity. Invite restaurants and/or community organizations that celebrate different cultural heritages to the screening and host a table of food samplings of cultural significance. Allow participants to circulate and taste the cuisine.

#### This American Love Life

Ask your audience to think back over the love stories in their own lives and reflect on what they learned. How was it different than they expected? What part of their story do they share with their friends? Their parents? Their children? Offer the audience some time to write their stories down and/or share them with one another and as a group.

Here are some suggested sentence starters to encourage sharing:

When I was younger, I thought love was: \_\_\_\_\_

Now, I believe love is: \_\_\_\_\_

My first love was: \_\_\_\_\_

I've learned that love means: \_\_\_\_\_



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & ARTICLES

### Discussion Resources

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/soloish/wp/2016/02/15/is-online-dating-the-same-as-arranged-marriage-ravi-patel-thinks-so/> - "Is online dating the same as arranged marriage? Ravi Patel thinks so." is an article for *The Washington Post* which includes an interview with Ravi Patel.

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/16/the-rise-of-intermarriage/> - "The Rise of Intermarriage" is a report by the Pew Research Center that analyzes the demographic and economic characteristics of newlyweds who marry spouses of a different race or ethnicity, and compares the traits of those who "marry out" with those who "marry in."

<http://www.pewresearch.org/2010/02/01/almost-all-millennials-accept-interracial-dating-and-marriage/> - "Almost All Millennials Accept Interracial Dating and Marriage" is a part of a Pew Research Center series of reports exploring behaviors, values, and opinions of the Millennial Generation.

<https://theanatomyoflove.com/> - The Anatomy of Love is a learning website created by scientists that explores the question: What happens to you when you fall in love? Discover new things about attachment to another person, and yourself.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/relationships> - *Psychology Today* offers a collection of articles around areas of relationships, including finding a relationship, building a healthy relationship, and more.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-science-of-love/201208/arranged-vs-love-based-marriages-in-the-us-how-different-are-they> "Arranged vs. Love-Based Marriages in the U.S. - How Different Are They?" is a *Psychology Today* article based on a study aimed to explore if the relationship experiences of people in arranged marriages differed significantly from those of people in non-arranged marriages.

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/india-who-are-patels-why-are-they-demanding-downward-mobility-gujarat-1517365> "Who are the Patels and why are they demanding downward mobility in Gujarat?" is an *International Business Times*



article that provides brief context on the Patel community, and the 2015 unrest led by the Patels in the Indian state of Gujarat.

#### Videos and Podcasts

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/interviews/actor-ravi-patel/> - Tavis Smiley interviews Ravi Patel, including about his experiences with theatrical screenings of *Meet the Patels* and more.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3gByACmbF4&sns=tw> - Ravi Patel gives his best dating tips in this video for *Los Angeles Times*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/marketing/modernlovepodcast/> - "Modern Love: The Podcast" is presented by *The New York Times* and WBUR, and explores the joys and tribulations of intimate relationships in their many forms.

<http://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/301821915/how-we-love> - "How We Love" is a TED Talk where various speakers examine the mystery of connection and relationships.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10184979> "Intercultural Relationships: Can They Work?" is a podcast from *Tell Me More* where a culture coach offers her advice on these issues.

<http://info.umkc.edu/counselingcenter/2012/04/23/celebrating-intercultural-relationships/> - "Celebrating Intercultural Relationships" is a video by the University of Missouri-Kansas City Counseling Center where four intercultural couples share their experiences.



## APPENDIX A: SAMPLE BIODATA FORM

### Personal Details

DOB:  
Gender:  
Height:  
Nationality:  
Horoscope:

### Parents

Resident:  
Name:  
Occupation(s):  
Education:  
Place of Birth:  
Qualities they want for their child's partner:

### Work Experience

### Education

### Languages

### Hobbies

What are your top qualities that would interest a potential partner:

Top qualities you look for in a partner: