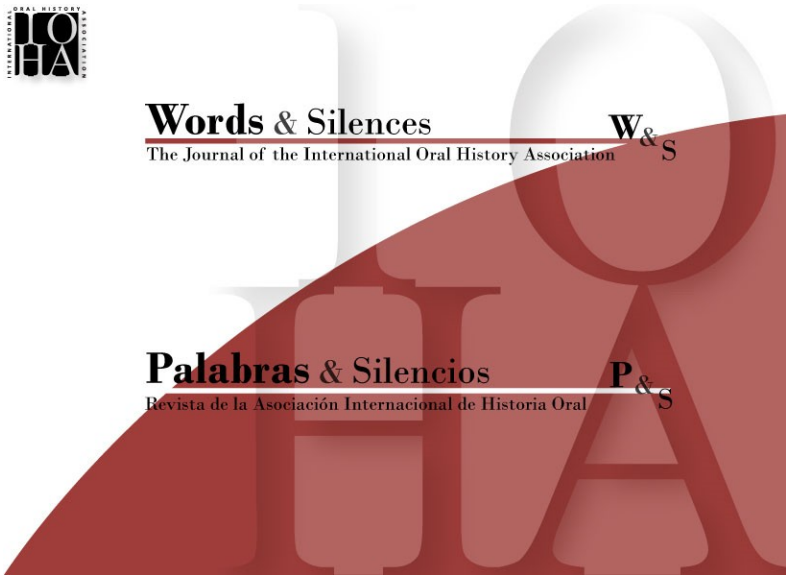


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# 'American friends are for school … Indian friends are for everything else': Developmental Characteristics of Asian Indian Children in the United States

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Asian Indians are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States today. Between 1990 and 2000 the U.S. Asian Indian population more than doubled, totaling almost two million by the end of the twentieth century and 2.4 million by 2010 (U.S. Census, 2010). Most Asian Indians residing in the United States are English language proficient, have a high socioeconomic status and more advanced education than the general populace. In spite of their strong social and economic presence, little research has been published on the family lives and everyday experiences of Asian Indians in the United States (Graf, Mullis, and Mullis, 2008). This article explores the everyday experiences of Asian Indian families in the United States, with a special emphasis on child rearing practices and family traditions.[1]

Exploring the degree of discrepancy between culture of origin and predominant culture in the resettlement country is an accepted model for conducting research on specific immigrant communities (Sam, 2000). Social behavior, and the related constructs represented by values, belief systems, gender and familial roles, differ significantly between collectivistic cultures of the East, such as the Indian subcontinent, and individualistic cultures of the West, such as the United States (Berry, 1997).

Recent research on models of immigrant resettlement demonstrates consensus regarding four major domains: (1) distinction between pre- and post-migration variables; (2) distinction between refugees, immigrants,[2] and sojourners; (3) distinction between individual and group variables; and (4) degree of discrepancy between culture of origin and predominant culture in the resettlement country (Sam, 2000). It is the fourth of these domains, degree of discrepancy between culture of origin and predominant culture in the resettlement country (Berry, 1997; Liebkind, 1996), which serves as a foundation for this study. Additionally, contextualist frameworks

1 In this study, the term "Asian Indian" represents the people or culture of the Indian subcontinent, which includes Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka as well as the present-day political India. While several cultural differentiations unique to each of these groups have emerged over the centuries, the larger, shared Indian ethos has survived (Bhola, 1996).

2 Ogbu's (1991) definition of immigrant was used to identify potential oral history informants: immigrant refers not only to those who are actual immigrants, but also to those whose parents were immigrants and who continue to maintain a separate group identity. Children of immigrants, both 1.5 and second generation, are among participants in this study. Factors relating to intergenerational issues among immigrants have been taken into account during interpretation of data.

such as Rogler's (1994) triadic framework for directing research on international migrations and Birman's (1994) expanded typology of acculturation provide a theoretical structure for data gathering and analysis.

Acculturation is defined as "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original pattern of either or both groups" (Birman, 1994, p. 261). Acculturation describes the ways immigrants' cultural values and beliefs move toward the mainstream values and beliefs of the host society (Rogler, 1994). Individual immigrants may differ from other members of the immigrant group with respect to the "extent and type of their acculturation" (Chung and Kagawa-Singer, 1993, p. 631).

Birman's (1994) acculturation framework permits researchers to "capture [the] diversity of experiences of acculturation" present in a multicultural host society such as the United States (p. 275). The acculturative process itself is represented as occurring in stages in Birman's model. As the individual experiences cultural change over a period of time, he or she may become more or less positively attuned to the host society. In this respect, Birman's acculturation model differs from earlier research which held that the more years an immigrant resided in the host society, the more likely his or her values and belief systems would reflect those of the host society (Gordon, 1964; Handlin, 1951).

Culture is no longer perceived as a static property shared by all members of a given society, but as a dynamic process co-constructed by each individual (Bruner, 1996). The ways we think and act are governed largely by early socialization experiences, and these experiences happen within the context of culturally-determined boundaries. "Culturally learned assumptions control our life with or without our permission [and even] our perception of reality is culturally learned" (Bierbrauer and Pedersen, 1996, p. 401). Social behavior, and the related constructs represented by values, belief systems, gender and family roles, differ significantly between collectivistic cultures of the East such as the Indian subcontinent, and individualistic cultures of the West such as the United States (Berry, 1997; Triandis, 1989). Discrepancies between the ways cultures value autonomy versus interdependence are reflected in specific cultural socialization goals, and ultimately, in parents' child rearing practices (Kagiticibasi, 1996; Rao, McHale & Pearson, 2003).

Migration as "a long-term if not life-long process of negotiating identity, difference, and the right to fully exist and flourish in the new context" (Benmayor & Skotnes, 1994, p. 8). The social and psychological dynamics of immigration are extremely complex and not well understood. Rogler's (1994) and Birman's (1994) acculturative models permit exploration of issues surrounding normative development of Asian Indian children in the U.S., as described through ninety oral history narratives by Asian Indian immigrants. The study yields important data about how immigrant families and individuals accommodate to changes in their adopted environments, and about how the host society affects or influences such changes (Bierbrauer & Pedersen, 1996).

*Family/hierarchical relationships*

Asian Indians, as do many Asian subgroups, define family differently from most Western societies. South Asian subgroups envision family as an extensive network of relationships which normally includes several households (Inman et al., 2001), and as a large, extended, interdependent unit with an "inherent code of conduct" including gender- and age-hierarchies (Sinha 1995, p. 107), shared property, and income. In North America, family usually is defined as a nuclear unit containing parents and children, each of whom is considered an individual with individual rights and responsibilities. In India, family dynamics extend beyond the parent/child relationship and interdependence, rather than independence, is emphasized. Pramod reflects that, while he was growing up in India, "Joint family was everything — everything else was below that. You have to stay together in thick and thin."

Understanding the hierarchical nature of Asian

Indian families is essential to understanding family roles and behavior norms. Indian family hierarchy and role expectations are closely tied to patriarchal belief structures, in which the eldest male, usually the grandfather, has control over the rest of the family. Thus, an adult male may have teenage or adult children of his own but, if his father is still alive, the grandfather figure makes major decisions for both his own children and their children (Roland, 1988). Sharmilla and Shree explain:

> My father has four brothers. When I grew up all the four brothers used to live in the same house, with my grandfather being the patriarch of the family. (Sharmilla)

> In India, by rule, the oldest [male] person is always the person everyone has to defer to. My father was the major income bringer [in the extended family] ... he was the "in charge" person. People would expect that whatever my father said, it's going to be fair. So there was just not that big of a deal as to somebody deferring to somebody, because everybody deferred to somebody. (Shree)

Hierarchy also applies to gender. Devi's (1998) U.S. Asian Indian graduate students note the prevailing attitude toward women in India is that no woman has status until she has given birth to a child. Becoming the mother of sons also brings women into a position of power within the family, as they may one day demand large dowries of the parents of brides (Bhopal, 1997, pp. 97-99). Bumiller (1990, ii) notes a common blessing given women in India upon the occasion of their marriage is 'May you be the mother of a hundred sons.'

A good number of newly married couples in urban areas of India now prefer to live in their own homes, although the joint family system has been retained in a broad sense (Jain, 1994). Joint or extended family roles continue to flourish due to Asian Indian family relations being based "more on bonds between adult males than on conjugal ones" and as a result of strong patriarchal cultural foundations (Kapur, 1999, p. 26). Participants in this study agree that Asian Indian nuclear households continue to support the joint family system, whether the family's separation involves a few streets or an ocean. When Meera's parents decided to move their family of six into a separate household in India, for example, community members said they were:

> ...exceptional, because it was not a joint family. It was just our family…. We had relatives living in the same city. They would pop in — they could just come in any time. My grandparents were in the same city and they would come in any time.

Koruna's parents also established a separate household in India. She explains:

> ...extended family means a lot to us ... uncles, aunts, cousins [around] all the time.... We all lived by ourselves except, when we had to do things, we were always doing things together. It was just family all the time. Everybody got together all the time.

Emotional dependency is fostered within the Asian Indian family throughout one's lifetime. Females are expected to depend on male family members, and children remain deferential to parents long after marriage, beginning a career, and leaving the natal home (Sodowsky et al., 1995). Unmarried adult children are referred to as "boys" and "girls", even after the age of 30:

> There is no concept of staying away from your parents, excepting if you do your education [in] some other state. Apart from that, you'd never think of staying away from your parents.

First-generation Asian Indian participants tend to remember an India where extended or joint family structures are the norm. Research documents U.S. first-generation Asian Indian immigrants are strongly attached to their extended family in South Asia (Helweg & Helweg, 1990; Sodowsky & Carey, 1987; Dhruvarajan, 1993). Study findings show first-generation U.S. Asian Indians hold onto certain core values, including joint family structure and its concomitant hierarchical roles, gender role expectations, traditions surrounding marriage and dating, and religion, while at the same time adapting to the host

society through language use, clothing style, discipline practices, and division of household duties. The current study supports previous findings, and provides a foundation for exploring U.S. Asian Indian child rearing preferences and practices.

*Child rearing practices*

Children and adolescents in India "breathe in the values of Hindu life" (Fenton, 1988, p. 127) learning the social and cultural belief systems defining "Indian" through their everyday existence. Asian Indian immigrant families in the U.S., however, must transmit cultural traditions and socio-religious mores in a more explicit fashion (Kurien, 1999). Asian Indian women in the U.S. educate children in ethnic culture and tradition, assisted by language classes or traditional music and dance classes (Rayaprol, 1997).

Infants and young children enjoy a unique status in Indian society. Youngsters are pampered and indulged by adults, both within the natal family and throughout the community (Pattnaik, 1996). The entire community celebrates significant developmental events, such as birth, the naming ceremony, first solid food intake, first day of formal schooling. Informal learning plays an important part in a youngster's development; older children (particularly siblings and cousins) as well as adults teach youngsters about their culture through song, dance, play and conversation.

Mainstream U.S. child rearing practices encourage early independence from parents. Western Euro-American scholarship depicts older children's psychological dependence upon adults negatively. Formal schooling years provide opportunities for U.S. children to experiment with career options, make friends, and explore romantic relationships. These opportunities are part of the mainstream American cultural model, and represent part of the developmental process of understanding oneself and one's identity (Ahmed, 1999).

Indian child rearing practices, on the other hand, foster dependence upon parents and extended family elders (Sinha, 1995). There are no negative connotations toward dependence in Indian culture (Neki, 1976). Asian Indian parents residing in the United States, then, are confronted by a juxtaposition of dependence/independence in the host society. U.S. Asian Indian parents who value unquestioning obedience, deferral to parental or elders' wishes, and conferring parental authority on such matters as selecting friends and determining career paths find their children are expected to make such decisions for themselves. The values children learn in U.S. schools, and through the larger mainstream society, then, are not always the values Asian Indian parents prefer for their children.

Participants frequently mention their concerns about differences between values taught at home and in school. Once Divia's young children begin school in the U.S., she believes, they will lose sight of their Indian values and upbringing:

> I didn't give my parents a rough time or anything. I will try to tell [my children] right from wrong, if they listen.... You never know what goes on [outside the home]. Here you can lose control of your kids, because the kids see the parents [as upholding] the traditional things, then there's the school and college. Things are so different over here.

Other Asian Indian parents express anxiety over adolescent behavior:

> Here, the teenager can do what they want. There is no one to hold them back — even the parents don't have a hold on them. They have strong minds and are very independent.

> I understand my children have a hard life here. When they go out there to mingle with their friends and go to school, they are to live in American society. Then [they] come home to us, where we try to instill them with Indian culture and Indian heritage. It's a confusing life for them.

At the same time, participants like Zohra express confidence in the strength of their family's Indian values, and in their children's abilities to withstand opposing U.S. influences:

> I am very proud of [my children]. Although they have come here at a very young age,

> they still like the company of Indian friends. They have American friends, but they know the limits they can go. We both have taught them the values. I think these values were instilled [through visits] back home: They have learned a lot [about respect for elders]; the teenagers are more obedient there. They know what their obligations are, and [Indian] society does not take them on any other path. Our children follow our rules. They try very hard to please us, even if they don't want to do it.

Many U.S. Asian Indian families are very close-knit, basing most if not all social activities around the family itself, or around the local Indian cultural community. Parents may insist on using native language at home, maintaining ethnic dress and diet within the home setting, and retaining traditional Indian religious practices (Mehra, 1997). These strategies bode well for the health of the family unit: divorces are rare, and the proportion of single-parent households is lower for Asian Indians than for any other group (Gardner, Robey, & Smith, 1989). Within U.S. society, however, especially for immigrant families with school-aged children, Asian Indian traditions may cause confusion or difficulties for individual family members. Participants especially are concerned about their children's interacting with friends who are not from an Asian Indian family. While Aliyah describes her relationship with her parents as "pretty cool," they do question her extensively before she participates in any activity with non-Indian friends:

> When I do things with American friends, we usually just stay at my house. I don't go to their house.... My parents like it better when people are [at our home], rather than we go out. If I'm with [Indian friends], my parents don't mind so much.

A graduate student recalls a similar experience:

> The kids who came to play at our house and stuff, they were always Indian. We had, like, a set of Indian friends and a set of American friends. The American friends were for school, and the Indian friends were for everything else.

Nida is very aware of the differences between her U.S. friends' social lives and her own:

> My friends' parents are more outgoing. [Mine] are more strict. I guess they just want to keep the culture in me. I really can't go out with my friends. My friends can go out, can have boyfriends.... My parents aren't as trusting of me. I always have to stay home and do work.

Participants describe their families as socially active. Socialization, however, mainly occurs as a family unit, and usually takes place with or among other Asian Indian families. When first generation immigrants lived in India, most teenagers avoided unchaperoned circumstances requiring them to interact with persons of the opposite gender. Asian Indian teenagers currently living in the U.S. have similar restrictions on their social lives. Acceptable social activities for participants in this study include family outings, Indian community events, or having friends visit their home under the watchful eye of an Asian Indian adult. Frequently, two or more Asian Indian families gather in one family's home to share a meal and view an Asian Indian family video together.

As is noted in the previous section on family and hierarchy, Asian Indian parents encourage dependency in their children, expect their children to remain in the parental home until after they marry, and support traditional patriarchal practices regarding mate selection. Western adolescent rites of passage, such as mixed gender socialization and unchaperoned dating, are forbidden or frowned upon by many Asian Indian parents in the U.S. Dating behaviors (as defined from the Western perspective) are acceptable in traditional Asian Indian culture only within the context of marriage (Dhruvarajan, 1993; Segal, 1991). Moreover, because individuals — especially females — are expected to remain chaste prior to marriage, premarital sexual relations threaten the family's honor as well as that of the ethnic community (Saran, 1985). An individual who engages in dating or premarital relations betrays their ethnic heritage, and is said to be "Americanized" (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996).

Asian Indian adolescents living in the U.S. may experience guilt when thrust into ordinary social situations outside the home environment (Ahmed, 1999; Inman et al., 2001).

It appears, then, the Western concept of adolescence —with its emphasis on individual identity development, opportunities to try out different personas, consideration of possible career choices, and informal socialization with multiple potential marriage partners— is not an integral part of the Indian worldview. Shweta muses:

> In India we don't have what you call a teenage year. In India, even at eighteen years you are still a kid in the house ... you always do what your parents want you to do, you listen to them, you respect them. So as far as life goes in India for a teenager and a young man or woman, it's totally different than what they have in life here. But I have to respect the young people here because they have their life very hard way. In India parents take responsibility. Here they have to take care of themselves by themselves.

An Asian Indian tradition strongly supported by participants in this study is the dating taboo: Young men and women from many Asian Indian families do not date prior to marriage (Mehra, 1997; Yao, 1989). Asian Indian culture stigmatizes unsupervised mixing of males and females as "improper and promiscuous" (Dasgupta, 1997, p. 590). Mehjabeen elaborates:

> Over there, everything revolves around the family. Over here, there is a lot more freedom. Dating is one big difference [between U.S. and Indian culture].We were not allowed to do it. Sometimes I had a problem with that [as a young adult in the U.S.], because a whole group of friends were going out to dinner. That was not really a big thing [to them], but that is forbidden in our religion. So, it was very difficult.... At home, it was always emphasized 'this is who you are, and this is how you behave.'

It is of interest to note that many participants allow their sons considerable latitude in their social interactions, while restricting their daughters' social lives. Females within the Asian Indian family context are ostracized, even disinherited for behaving in "Americanized" fashion (Dasgupta, 1997; Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996), yet participants sometimes associated Westernizing influences positively with males' behaviors. Ilora wants her son to "be Americanized... in the mainstream," and explains: "He dated in high school. Actually, he's living with his girlfriend right now. I don't mind that. It's OK with me."

The importance of maintaining native language was discussed by nearly all participants. India is a nation of diverse languages —the India Constitution recognizes 16 languages and 700 dialects (Helweg, 2002). English is the preferred language of business, which is why Indian schools teach English along with students' native languages. Because most Asian Indians who come to the U.S. are well educated, they speak English fluently (Yao, 1989). First generation participants in this study tend to speak English outside the home, and their native language or dialect within the home environment. Those participants with children enrolled in U.S. schools say their children speak English within the home as well as at school (even answering their parents in English when addressed in the native Asian Indian language):

> I didn't [speak English to my son at home]. I spoke in Tamil, but he always answered in English. At home... my parents will usually speak Malayalam to us, but we speak English right back to them.

Asian Indian parents especially are concerned about maintaining an Indian identity and bringing up their children "in the Indian way." First and second generation Asian Indians in the current study regularly maintain connections with the extended family in India through letters, telephone calls, visits and, more recently, e-mail. Throughout their immigration history in the United States, Asian Indians also have maintained cultural identity by establishing and supporting Indian cultural organizations within the larger metropolitan areas (Bhola, 1996). Girls from middle class Asian Indian immigrant families and, in some cases boys, are encouraged by

their parents to participate in music and dance lessons taught through the local Indian organization. Group participation in ethnic music and dance lessons links the second generation to the classical artistic and religious traditions of India. One participant teaches classical Indian dance and music to children:

> For all my life in here I've been teaching Indian classical dance, the North Indian style, Tatuk.... I go to different schools, and I take things from India and talk about where India is. I talk about music and dance, and about a little bit about religion, and perform in front of them and share about my culture.

Shari recalls the times she and her sisters participated in classes intended to broaden their appreciation for classical Indian culture:

> When we girls were growing up, we were expected to learn some kind of Rabindranath Tagore songs, or dancing ... participate in dramas ... read [Indian] literature. Our parents put a lot of emphasis that you have to be well versed and knowledgeable [about our Indian culture].

Indian organizations and the cultural and/or religious events sponsored by these organizations assist U.S. Asian Indian families in their efforts to maintain traditional Indian culture and traditions. Such organizations often take the place of the informal training provided by extended family, as well as the language/religious group left behind. Beenu describes the importance Indian cultural organizations hold for her family and for the local Asian Indian population:

> We have an Indian Association over here, and everybody's a member of that association. That association does like twelve events a year, so everybody, they go there. We have our own community center there. And then every weekend one or the other Indian [family], they have the party, so they invite like forty, fifty families.

Shari reflects on the time her family's need for community was filled through the local Indian organization:

> We had only ten or fifteen Indian families there, but we had an Indian association and we got very much involved in that association.

Asian Indian parents in this study believe their families' participation in the cultural, social, and education events sponsored by the community Indian association help safeguard their children from the harmful effects of Western culture. In general, participants express more favorable opinions toward Asian Indian values and institutions (such as the joint family and its emphasis on hierarchical relationships) than toward mainstream U.S. values. Family allegiance and respect for authority play a significant role in the Asian Indian child's development. Age, gender, and generational status are primary determinants of role behavior (Johnson et al., 1999; Mehra, 1998).

Other researchers note Asian Indians frequently lament the permissiveness of Western society and the lack of respect toward elders (e.g., Mehra, 1998; Saran, 1985). Analysis of interview transcripts in the present study confirm this finding. Jay, a physician, believes major differences between values and behavior in India and the U.S. are communicated in children's and young adults' attitudes toward age consciousness, and the propriety one shows to those in superior positions:

> Respect for age [is important]. I should not be called by my first name by anyone other than my elders or people of my own age. In most [Asian Indian] families, you don't even call [your] brothers and sisters by their first names. It's Brother or Sister So-and-So, especially if they are older than you. There's a word for elder sister and elder brother, and you use that. A lot of things relating to propriety are adhered to very strongly [in my culture].

Beenu feels the lack of respect for elders in the U.S. goes further than verbal acknowledgment of rank. Children's lack of respect for their parents is shown when they compromise family honor:

> I think in India, parenting is very easy be-

> cause whatever they say, we used to do. But over here like... that Olympic star, she sued her parents because they were using her money.... I mean, that kind of thing you cannot see in India. Your parents will just die. But over here, kids are more independent and free, and they tend to do these kinds of things.

Many participants believe one shows respect for one's parents by remaining in their home and deferring to their wishes. This show of respect reaches past the age when most non-Asian Indians in the U.S. have left their parents' homes. Beenu, for example, reports, "I was twenty one, after marriage, the first time I left my parents' home." And Manjula recalls when she and her siblings were eighteen,

> We could not leave the house. It's still old appearance ... respect. I saw here, after eighteen, children can say 'We are leaving the house,' and parents say, 'OK.'"

Vel describes U.S. teenagers' attitudes toward their parents and teachers as "daringly different" from behavior expected in India. Saman notices

> ...children over here are more forward. Teenagers here don't have respect and don't show it to authority. There's a whole lot of respect for elders there.

Shehan concurs with Vel:

> If my dad said that wall is black [indicating a white wall], I agreed. I never said no.... But I respect him more than anything in the world. I am who I am because of him. I would support my parents when they grow old. That's things that were taught to us as kids, which people here have no clue about. It's part of culture, part of the heritage. It's come down thousand of years. It's what I grew up with. It's a part of life.

Three second-generation participants discuss their experiences and perspectives on maintaining ethnic culture while interacting with ethnically different peers in social settings. Aliyah, for example, believes there are advantages to biculturalism. She reports she and her Asian Indian friends have the advantage of their birth culture combined with *the American touch*:

> I learned a lot of things here, when I go back [to visit] I see how they are, and I feel privileged. You become a little more polished. The schooling is better here. I think you have to adapt to wherever you are.

Nida "most definitely" wants to keep her ethnic culture, especially where behavior toward one's elders is concerned:

> I think I would keep the culture in me even if I could go out more. There is more respect [for parents and elders] there. Like here, [children and their parents] are more like friends. If [anyone above you in the social hierarchy] comes over to your house there, you should always ask them if they need something or want something. You have to be very formal. You always have to be more conscious about what you are saying over there.

Mehjabeen declares she never wants to forget her ethnic identity or cultural roots:

> Being in this culture [American], you forget who you are, and you get too wrapped up in society. Sometimes you shouldn't be doing things you are doing. Going [to India] and seeing my family, seeing the girls and all the things that they do, just basically hit home: 'Hey, this is something that I should be doing.' The sense of family is so strong. Religion is such an important part of your life, yet it is so easy to go astray. It is so easy to do the wrong thing. It may be right for people here, but it is wrong for us.

Child rearing practices also include gender role socialization. An ancient Indian proverb states "A person has to have sinned in his past life to be born a woman" (Agarwal, 1991). Almost all participants emphasize differences in women's roles between Indian and mainstream North American cultures. Sociologists studying immigrant adjustment factors conclude gender differences between U.S. and immigrant's birth culture may be as great or greater than interethnic differences (Barringer, Takeuchi, & Xenos, 1990; Yao, 1989; Sodowsky & Carey, 1987).

Female participants frequently mention greater

independence of movement and decision making experienced by women in U.S. society, noting women in the U.S. tend to seek and maintain employment outside the home. Tahira observes: Women [in the U.S.] are very independent; they get to go out and do things on their own. They take their children places. Over there, women don't get to do this.

Mehjabeen agrees with Tahira':

> The culture over there is so different from over here. Here, basically, whatever you want to do, you can go and do it.... Here, I think you can be more independent.

In Asian Indian culture, a woman's behavior is viewed as a reflection of her family's izzat, or honor, at each stage in her life (Mandelbaum, 1988). Community and religious expectations reinforce adherence to accepted standards of behavior for women and girls. While a woman's family members may not object individually to her working outside the home, for instance, a woman who takes a job while male family members are able to support her brings dishonor upon the entire family. Mehjabeen discusses family izzat from the perspective of Asian Indian women's roles as wife and mother:

> I think ladies in India want to go out and get into the careers, but I still see them more at home, the caring and nurturing.... Where I am from, I saw a lot of women at home. It is a career in itself, running a household, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the kids, the husband. That is a full time job.

Advanced education is among the most desired characteristics for young Asian Indian brides (Helweg & Helweg, 1990). Once the marriage occurs, however, the new wife may not be permitted to work outside the home. Each married female participant in the current study who was not employed outside the home at the time of her interview had received at least two years of advanced education, but did not take a job after marriage. One participant, recently returned from a visit to India, tells the following story about her cousin in India:

> She has a degree in Economics. She is very intelligent. If she is allowed to, she will have a job. Over there, it is still not her decision. Her relatives, her husband, will have a lot to say in it. Over here, if [an American] woman has a job, she doesn't care what others say. She is a lot more aggressive about what she wants.

Asian Indian men usually do not consult their wives or children when an important family decision must be made. Zohra speaks about her husband's decision to leave India and resettle the family in the U.S. Like Mehjabeen, Zohra believes Asian Indian women must adhere to specific codes of behavior, and that doing so confers izzat on everyone concerned:

> My husband was the one who made the decision. In India, and in my village, women don't make such decisions.... Women don't go outside to work. They just basically stay at home and take care of the family.... I prefer to stay home and take care of the household. I think it is important for the mother to take care of the kids. If the mother is not home, who will instill the values and culture? The mother is a very important person in the child's life.

Shahnaz notices a difference in women's social mobility between the U.S. and her birth culture. While Shahnaz is more mobile since arriving in the U.S. she is careful to be accompanied by her husband whenever she goes out, as a way of maintaining respect for religious beliefs and family honor:

> I never used to go anywhere by myself. Even here my husband goes with me everywhere. Only job I go by myself. Even shopping, [my husband] goes with me.

Although many female participants appreciate the increased mobility available to Asian Indian women in the United States, they find it difficult to adapt to the Western concept of equality between the sexes. In most of the Indian subcontinent, with the exception of villages, women do not perform laborious tasks or take jobs to support their families. Females in Asian-Indian families are expected to maintain a subordinate role,

not assume decision-making power, and refrain from taking on financial responsibilities (Bhattacharya, 1998; Helweg & Helweg, 1990). Shahnaz explains this gender-based expectation from her own perspective:

> Here in America, woman stands next to man in the factory and works at the machine. I never saw that.... Woman here does the same job that man does. Women are really hard working here. Men anywhere in the world are hardworking, but they have no choice.

Female role models such as those represented in these interview excerpts surely affect young Asian Indian women's perspectives about their own future roles in North American society. Asked if she will work outside the home after marriage, Mehjabeen, a graduate student, answers firmly:

> I want to have a career and be successful in whatever career I go into, but I will hold my [family's wishes] important. That has come from my background in India — there is a set way for ladies to be doing things. I'm sorry if I offend people, but [women] are in charge of the house and have a lot to do with taking care of the kids and the husband. That is my priority; I will always do that.

*Emphasis placed on education*

When participants speak of differences in family life between India and the U.S., they often mention parental emphasis on education, especially higher education. Shweta says: "College is a must in India. Education does not stop at the high school level." Divia agrees:

> If you are out of high school [there], you can not get a job. You have to have a college degree.

Asian Indian immigrants arrive in the U.S. with more years of education than any immigrant group studied (Barringer et al., 1990). Asian Indian immigrants also represent the largest percentage of professionals among ethnic groups arriving in the U.S. (Sodowsky & Carey, 1987). While researchers agree that Asian Indians are one of four Asian subgroups in the U.S. which place great emphasis on educational achievement (including Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Asian Indian), the factors listed above may help to explain the nature of Asian Indian parents' attitudes toward their children's education.

Asian Indian parents in this study not only stress getting a good education, they also stress the attitudes and behavior needed to make getting a good education a reality. Shweta explains:

> In India, when you are a child ... the only thing you are to do is go to school, get your education." Sue recalls that when she was going to school in the U.S., her parents "were very, very strict. Grades were very, very important — which you probably hear every Indian person [interviewed] say — to the point where homework always came first before anything else.

Preema's aunt saw to it that she and the other children in the joint household always did their homework. "We had a tutor," Preema confirms. Shree describes how these practices work when describing her own childhood in a joint Indian family:

> Schools in India don't start as early as they do here, so after we got up, in our house every day [the] tutor was there for all of us.... There was a spot where [the children from three families] all went and the tutor would be there making sure we were studying. Right after breakfast we'd go there, we'd spend an hour trying ... he'd make sure our homework was done and everything.

Shree reveals that through everyday experiences, she became convinced of her family's strong emphasis on the importance of getting a good education:

> [We] children didn't have too many chores. Learning was the most important thing. You had to do your homework. It was believed that, if they did chores when they were this young, then they would have no time to be children. All I remember is trying to get my homework done so fast that I could just go play!

Some participants feel Asian Indian parents pressure their children to achieve in U.S. schools as a result of the parents' own memories of schooling in India. Competition for university admission is fierce in India, and competition for entrance into certain degree programs (such as medicine or engineering) is even greater. Divia remembers the difficulty her husband faced getting into a preferred degree program in India:

> The population is so large it's hard to get into the education [program] you have to have. My husband [scored] 95% in chemistry and math, but you have to have 99% to get into engineering. You have a lot of people competing to get into the professional school.

Asian Indian parents in the U.S. emphasize the importance of education in general and, along with other adults in the extended family, guide children toward specific training befitting the family's social group back in India. Bhola (1996) found that Asian Indian immigrants in North America value educational achievement and advanced educational training for the honor it brings to the larger family group. When their children perform well in school, the Asian Indian family's prestige and status, or izzat, is enhanced within the local village or community (Ahmed, 1999; Gibson, 1988; Mehra, 1998; Segal, 1991). Gently guiding children toward preferred occupations, such as becoming a doctor or an engineer, helps the student eventually bring honor to the entire extended family. Many examples from participants' interviews reflect these findings. Ilora reports:

> My grandfather always wanted me to be a doctor, and it's very common in Indian family, you know, just to guide the children to a certain profession.

Shari adds:

> Most of my uncles and my father and all his brothers and sisters, they studied hard and finally everyone became a doctor or engineer.

Amy's parents and family elders also urged her to become a physician.

> The first time it was mentioned that I would be a doctor," she remembers, "is when I was in middle school. I just don't think I even considered alternatives. I just —right from middle school — I kept thinking I was going to be the doctor in the house.

Nina discusses her parents' degree of influence over her education, career choice, and extracurricular activities:

> I was always very obedient. So basically, if my dad said, 'This is a waste of your time,' I'd think 'Well, OK. I'll try to find something else.' Yes, my parents had a lot of influence over what I did. I mean ninety nine percent.... Any major decision I made my parents gave me their input, and I pretty much did what they thought was the best. I've noticed if you ask Indian kids in med school 'Well, why did you go into medicine?' they'll say, 'My parents wanted me to.' [If you ask me] 'Nina, why did you go into medicine?' I'll say, 'Well, my parents wanted me to.'

Puja, a medical student, talks about her parents' influence over her career choice:

> When I was little did they encourage me to become a doctor? Yes, [and] it must have worked. They always thought it has to be in the science field. Really, the only three options were medicine, business, and law. Those were the only three options for us. Everything else wasn't, I guess, as secure for them.

Thara's father expected all of his children to have a career in the sciences:

> There has definitely always been the understanding that my father would be happiest if we all went hard science, and went into something that has a solid future.... I think that was a very real concern [of my father's].

When Thara grew up and decided to study the social sciences, her father's early convictions about career choice caused friction between them. As Thara recalls it, her father felt a career in the social sciences would be an unwise choice:

> I remember when I first was telling my par-

> ents that I was declaring psychology as my major, my dad said, 'What can you do with that degree when you get out of school? How much can you make, and what are the typical jobs of the psychologist? What does this mean?' He just forced me to think about what the end result would be. I remember I was like, 'All right, I'll find out.' So, I went to some book and found out what the average psychologist makes and what your job choices are, and knew even at that point that you can't really do anything with a BA in psychology. You have to get a Ph.D. if you want to do anything.

As a result of her father's influence, Thara changed her major. Parents not only pressure children to pursue specific careers, they also apply pressure to perform well academically. Thara recalls her parents were:

> ...extremely involved in my education from every aspect. Yes, definitely our parents pushed us academically. [Education] has always been the number one priority in my father's mind. I think that is very clearly related to how he got to be where he is — how he got his ticket out of India. Number one for my dad was that we do well in school.

Ilora wonders whether her son's reluctance to follow his parents' career choice had something to do with his having grown up in the U.S. Noting her son dropped out of chemistry and physics courses to pursue an interest in music, she adds:

> When I raised my son here, I think he got more independence in this country. [My husband and I] were completely engineered, or steered, by our parents. We didn't have any option of our own. So that was the main difference. Children here get a lot more independence.

*Conclusion*

In an increasingly diverse society such as the United States, research exploring parenting patterns of specific ethnic groups can yield valuable information about children's processes of identity formation. Identity development for children in Asian Indian immigrant families in the United States is affected by family and gender role expectations, child rearing practices, patriarchal belief structures and traditions of socialization. Decisions concerning almost every aspect of Asian Indian individual's normative developmment are impacted by cultural issues such as intragroup and/or family considerations.

First generation Asian Indians in the U.S. — particularly those who arrived in the decade spanning the late 1960s through the late 1970s — hold strongly to traditional ethnic values and belief systems. These highly educated immigrants attempt to reconstruct the India of their youth within the host society through maintenance of extended family structure, family and gender roles, hierarchical relationships, language, and religious beliefs, especially in the home environment.

Asian Indian children born and schooled in the U.S. experience conflicting perspectives of reality: at home, interdependence, deferral to authority, and hierarchy-based interactions are valued; while at school and in North American society in general, personal independence, autonomy, and equitable relationships are valued. As Asian Indian children in the U.S. reach pubescence, conflicting values and belief systems in Indian and North American culture may perpetuate additional challenges to development: in traditional Asian Indian society, one remains chaste until marriage, and defers to parental authority concerning major life decisions such as mate selection and career choice; at the same time, one's non-Indian peers are dating, trying out a variety of career options, and generally breaking away from parental authority.

Young females in U.S. Asian Indian families especially encounter conflicting value systems. Asian Indian parents tend to actively restrict their daughter's social lives to events involving the family or other Asian Indian families. Males occupy a higher status in the family hierarchy than females, and young Asian Indian males may be granted greater social freedoms than their sisters.

Asian Indians value education, educational

achievement, and higher education. Children in U.S. Asian Indian families tend to obtain more years of formal education than the average, and tend to major in the sciences (e.g., medicine, engineering, technology). Asian Indian children are supported and encouraged during the formal schooling years, including post-graduate study. Parental authority is evident in this area, as well. Asian Indian parents and adults in the extended family guide children toward curricular areas and/or college majors likely to bring honor to the larger family, and children tend to defer to older adults' stated preferences.

Probably the most consistent findings concern differences in gender roles and children's continued deference to elders' authority. Limitations of the study may be connected to the strength of these findings. Some researchers in geographic areas with large concentrations of Asian Indian population (e.g., New York City) note that young Asian Indian's behaviors are affected by the non-Indian peer group (Lessinger, 1995). This study focused on Asian Indians in a Midwestern state with a growing, but still relatively small, Asian Indian population. Future research exploring acculturative experiences of Asian Indians in suburban areas or smaller cities could illuminate our understandings of collectivistic family dynamics in a strongly individualist society. More information about the evereyday lives of Asian Indian immigrants in the U.S. is needed. Only with more information on this recent but highly visible contemporary immigrant group can the complex and often conflicting process of Asian Indian identity development in the U.S. be understood.

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