Cultural Transmission: Influence of Contextual Factors in Asian Indian Immigrant Parents’ Experiences

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Sixteen 1st-generation Asian Indian mothers and fathers were interviewed about the influence of immigration on retention of their own ethnic identity and their ability to promote a sense of ethnic identity in their 2nd-generation children. Data were analyzed with the consensual qualitative research methodology (C. E. Hill et al., 2005) and revealed ethnic identity retention to be influenced by engagement in cultural celebrations and activities, a need to hold onto tradition and upbringing, family ties, social support, and a rejection of perceived Western values. Ethnic identity retention was challenged by environmental obstacles and barriers within American society, loss of familial support, lack of cultural continuity, and an inability to have the “best of both worlds.” Furthermore, participants identified specific values and strategies relevant to transmitting an ethnic identity to their children as well as specific challenges to this process, including limited familial and communal guidance and modeling, obstacles from Western culture, an inability to apply their own experience or upbringing, a lack of cultural knowledge, and the potential for intermarriage. Implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: transmission of cultural values, Asian Indians, ethnic identity, parenting

Immigration poses significant pressures for immigrant parents. In addition to retaining their own cultural identity, parents are often faced with the complex task of parenting their children within a culture that is notably dissimilar from their culture of origin. Within this context, parenting becomes a complicated interplay between enculturation (e.g., socialization within one’s own ethnic culture) and acculturation (e.g., socialization to the dominant culture). Given the increase in immigrant families in the United States, understanding immigrant parents’ specific experiences in socializing their children has significant clinical implications for counseling immigrant families. This study examines the experiences of Asian Indian parents who immigrated to the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Although they were part of the second wave of Asian Indian immigrants (after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act), these parents had to raise their children within a predominantly non-Asian Indian society, with limited social supports and cultural structures. This study explores similarities and differences in the influence of immigration on first-generation Asian Indian mothers’ and fathers’ own ethnic identity retention and their subsequent ability to transmit cultural values to their second-generation children. The terms first-generation and second-generation are used in this study to refer to these immigrant parents and their children, respectively.

Asian Indian Immigrant Cultural Identity

Literature (Dasgupta, 1986) suggests that Asian Indian immigrants have brought with them a strong sense of their native culture and its customs. In keeping with this, researchers (Sodowsky & Carey, 1988) have shown that first-generation Asian Indian ethnic identity development has tended to adhere to the alternation model of acculturation (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). In particular, this group has been noted to selectively acculturate by holding onto core values (e.g., family, food preferences, and religion) at home while easily adapting to interactions and dress etiquette in the workplace (Wakil, Siddique, & Wakil, 1981). Prathikanti (1997) suggested that for men, this bicultural functioning might have developed primarily as a result of the initial reasons for immigration: to optimize educational and economic opportunities. Conversely, for women, it might have been a function of their transactional gendered socialization, whereby women are expected to sense and adapt to the changing environments (Jayakar, 1994).

Literature also suggests that ethnic group approval plays a significant role in Asian Indian families preserving their cultural identity (Inman, Constantine, & Ladany, 1999). In their interviews with second-generation women (whose parents had immigrated in the 1960s and 1970s), Inman et al. (1999) noted gender pressures experienced by these women in preserving their cultural identities. For instance, being perceived as credible within the community was associated with maintaining and perpetuating traditional behaviors. The women felt that engaging in these behaviors would prevent “others [in the community] from pointing a finger at my family” (p. 36). Additionally, the message “You lose it if you don’t
use it” was often heard by these women as they grew up in a bicultural society with few cultural supports.

Portes and Rumbaut (1996) have noted that communities with selective acculturation patterns and in-group support tend to have higher ethnic identity retention than communities without such patterns and support. Given the unique acculturation experiences of Asian Indians, the presence of a small Asian Indian population, and limited cultural structures in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, our first purpose was to investigate how immigrational experiences might have influenced first-generation Asian Indian mothers’ and fathers’ own ethnic identification and retention of cultural identities. We believed that understanding the factors that influenced these individuals’ cultural retention would allow us greater insight into their parenting experiences. A second purpose of our study was to examine how Asian Indian mothers’ and fathers’ ability to retain their own ethnic identity influenced their parenting practices and the resultant ethnic identity in their second-generation children.

Asian Indian Parenting and Immigration

Traditionally, Indian families have been greatly influenced by a patriarchal, joint family system, with mothers, grandparents, and other elders playing a significant role in socializing young children into culturally expected behaviors. Asian Indian parenting practices typically include authoritarian parenting styles (Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002) and emphasize academic achievement (Tewari, Inman, & Sandhu, 2003) and familial bonds and solidarity (e.g., importance of family and respect for elders; Jambunathan, Burts, & Pierce, 2000). Because of the history of a caste system in the Asian Indian culture, marriage within the same community and religion is encouraged (Prathikanti, 1997). Dating is expected only as a step toward marriage, and premarital sexual relations are generally considered unacceptable (e.g., Dhruvarajan, 1993). Finally, because religion is a means of transmitting cultural values, religious beliefs and activities play an important role in parenting practices (Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002). These values and beliefs are often acquired implicitly rather than explicitly through culturally determined learning processes (Arendell, 1997).

Literature suggests that, similar to other immigrant parents, Asian Indian immigrants continue to emphasize specific values and goals for their second-generation children—values that were instilled during their own upbringing (e.g., pride in cultural heritage, familial interdependence). However, through the process of immigration, Asian Indians can experience a sense of displacement when the prescriptive parameters of their original environment no longer function within the new environment (Hedge, 1998). Asian Indian parents who immigrated during the 1960s and 1970s might have been particularly susceptible to these dilemmas.

Living in a culturally incongruent community, first-generation parents perceive themselves as having the sole responsibility of imparting cultural values to their children, which results in restrictive behaviors by the parents (Sadowsky & Carey, 1988). Within this context, actively reproducing the traditional culture and establishing a cultural identity in their children become important parenting goals for these immigrants (Dhruvarajan, 1993). Relatively, research has highlighted experiences of cultural and inter-generational conflicts, with special emphasis on second-generation Asian Indians (e.g., Inman, 2006). However, these second-generation experiences cannot be understood in isolation. Dynamics surrounding immigration and family experiences can significantly influence how parents socialize their children. Thus, understanding Asian Indian parents’ immigration experiences becomes imperative in contextualizing second-generation experiences.

Although limited, some studies have examined Asian Indian parental attitudes and practices. In particular, Jambunathan et al. (2000) found that Asian Indian mothers in the United States emphasized extended family and role reversals (e.g., children caring for aging parents) and had higher expectations of achieving developmental tasks compared with other ethnic groups (e.g., Asian American and Hispanic American mothers) in the United States. In contrast, Jambunathan and Counselman (2002) found that compared with mothers in India, Asian Indian mothers in the United States had more age-appropriate developmental expectations (e.g., age-appropriate verbal expression). Although these studies provide some cross-cultural data regarding mothers’ attitudes, findings need to be considered with caution, because developmental tasks at a particular age may neither be universal nor transcend cultures. Conversely, Patel, Power, and Bhavnagri (1996) examined values (e.g., competence, politeness) and practices (e.g., psychological control, persuasion) considered important by U.S.-based Asian Indian mothers and fathers in socializing their adolescent children. Findings revealed that, irrespective of their children’s gender, the longer the mothers stayed in the United States, the more they valued North American characteristics in their children. However, irrespective of their length of stay in the United States, fathers who scored low on modernity and high on acculturation seemed to hold onto certain Indian traditional values (e.g., deference to authority) for their daughters but not for their sons. Thus, it appears that despite the Indian patriarchal structure, women were more adaptive in their parenting practices than were fathers in this study. Although the study provides some information on Asian Indian gendered parenting attitudes and practices within an acculturative context, it fails to capture parenting practices endorsed by both mothers and fathers in transmitting cultural values to their children and the specific challenges they may encounter in this process.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore similarities and differences in how immigration experiences might have impacted first-generation Asian Indian mothers’ and fathers’ own ethnic identity retention and how these experiences might have influenced parenting practices and the abilities of the parents to transmit a sense of cultural identity to their second-generation children. Because of our desire to capture the subjective experiences of Asian Indian parents, we used a qualitative approach based in consensual qualitative research (COR; Hill et al., 2005). This methodology is based within a postpositivist–constructivist paradigm, in which investigators use semistructured interviews to assess consistencies and commonalities across participant experiences. Data are analyzed by multiple judges who engage in a consensual agreement about themes that evolve across cases (Hill et al., 2005). The research team was female and consisted of a first-generation Asian Indian doctoral-level counseling psychologist and two advanced doctoral students in counseling psychology, one who identified as third-generation Irish and a second who identified as third-generation German–Irish. The auditor was a first-year postdoctorate counseling psychologist who was fourth-
generation Scottish–English. Additionally, none of the researchers was a parent at the time that the research was completed. All research team members, including the auditor, had been trained in CQR or had engaged in qualitative research that included the use of the CQR methodology.

Method

Participants

Sixteen first-generation Asian Indian parents—8 mothers and 8 fathers—were recruited for the study. We defined 1st-generation Asian Indians as those who immigrated to the United States after age 20. All participants were born in India and immigrated between the late 1960s and the 1970s. Age at immigration ranged from 21 to 35 years for the mothers (M = 25.50, SD = 3.85) and from 25 to 35 years for the fathers (M = 28.50, SD = 3.85). At the time of the interviews, mothers ranged in age from 44 to 63 years (M = 54.38, SD = 7.09), and fathers ranged in age from 56 to 71 years (M = 62.38, SD = 5.55). Of the 16 participants, 3 mothers and 3 fathers had daughters, and 5 mothers and 5 fathers had both a son and a daughter, whose ages ranged from 16 to 38 years (M = 25.63, SD = 6.13). All participants were Hindus from the state of Karnataka in India. Although the majority of the participants spoke an Indian first language (Kannada), they reported being comfortable speaking English. By profession, 7 participants were engineers, 2 were medical doctors, 2 were pharmacists, 2 were housewives, 1 was a retired librarian, 1 was a medical scientist, and 1 was a speech pathologist. Five mothers and 5 fathers identified as middle class, and 3 mothers and 3 fathers identified as upper middle class.

Measures

Demographic form. Information was obtained related to each participant’s age, gender, age at immigration, education, occupation, socioeconomic status, number and gender of children, and religious affiliation. Additionally, participants were asked to classify themselves into one of five mutually exclusive categories that defined their ethnicity: very Indian, somewhat Indian, bicultural, somewhat American, or very American. This item was primarily used as a primer in our study. Participants were initially asked to self-identify with one of the mutually exclusive categories and then were asked to elaborate on this definition during the actual interview.

Semistructured interviews. On the basis of a literature review of studies of Asian Indian immigrants and cultural identity (e.g., Prathikanti, 1997), immigrant parenting, and Asian Indian parenting (e.g., Jambunathan et al., 2000), we constructed a semistructured interview consisting of a standard set of open-ended questions as a method of inquiry. An initial set of warm-up questions focused on parents’ experiences in the process of immigration (e.g., factors influencing immigration, impact of immigration on self and family of origin). Subsequent to these questions, participants were asked specifically about the impact of immigration on their own ethnic identity. For instance, they were asked to expand on their initial identification (e.g., very Indian, somewhat Indian) on the demographic form. Participants were then asked about factors that helped retain or challenge aspects of their ethnic identity; finally, they were asked about their experience of parenting within an immigrant context, the processes they had engaged in, and the challenges in transmitting an ethnic identity to their children.

Recruitment and Interviewing

Participants were solicited through a reputational sampling method, which entailed selecting the starting point (i.e., a couple known to Arpana G. Inman) and then asking the starting point participants to recommend other suitable respondents. Because these first participants were Hindus and from the state of Karnataka in southern India, we chose to maintain consistency (in language, religion, and cultural practices) by interviewing participants from Karnataka. Additionally, we used a purposeful sampling strategy because we were interested in interviewing first-generation Asian Indians who had immigrated in the late 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, although couples were recruited, we were interested in the subjective and separate experiences of mothers and fathers. After informed consent was obtained, a tape-recorded telephone interview ranging from 90 to 180 min was conducted with each parent by Arpana G. Inman, who was also familiar with participants’ nonethnic first language (e.g., Kannada).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed via CQR (Hill et al., 2005). Coding of the data involved three steps: developing domains (identifying broad topic areas), constructing core ideas (summarizing statements to capture main ideas in each domain), and cross-analyzing (assessing consistency of themes across cases). Each step was conducted independently, followed by a consensus of results across team members. Consistent with CQR, an external auditor served as a validity check. To assess validity, we added data from 2 participants that had been withheld from initial analysis to the data set. The new data did not alter the results substantially, and findings were deemed stable.

Results

Although we recognize that parenting experiences are not independent of each other, we were interested in the unique experiences of each parent within the context of immigration. Thus, findings are presented separately for the fathers and the mothers in our sample (Table 1). For the two samples, each consisting of 8 participants, categories were considered general if applicable to all 8 cases, typical if applicable to 5–7 cases, and variant if applicable to 2–4 cases. Categories representing only 1 case were considered rare and dropped from reporting. Although categories were consistent across the two groups, meaningful variations highlighted by members of each group are articulated under each domain.

Defining Aspects of One’s Own Ethnic Identity

This domain pertained to the role that Indian and American cultures played in participants’ definitions of their ethnic identity. Two categories, inner core as Indian and self as bicultural, emerged as variant for the fathers and typical for the mothers. For both sets of parents, having an Indian inner core was often associated with being born into the Indian culture and having pride in being Indian. As one father shared, “Ninety percent of the time I feel the same as I was raised when I was a young boy back in India. . . . It [Indian identity] was ingrained in my self; that’s how I was built.” Having an Indian core was also represented through ascribing to cultural values (e.g., intracultural marriages, being family oriented, and maintaining vegetarianism) and adhering to cultural activities. For instance, a mother stated, “Having close family ties, you know, having my in-laws over, my brothers-in-law, living with them, making sacrifices here and there for them, that’s very Indian.”

Conversely, the designation of the self as bicultural for both sets of parents was associated with an Indian sense of self with regard to one’s personal life and an American sense of self with regard to one’s professional life. However, mothers uniquely tended to...
explain their bicultural identity in terms of a cognitive approach. As one mother stated:

I belong in both places for different reasons, and that is also what I meant by being bicultural. Identity for me . . . is not just the looks or what I eat that makes me either Indian or American. [It’s] the way of thinking. I have [a] very Indian way of thinking and [a] very American way of thinking.

Factors Contributing to Ethnic Identity Retention

Ethnic identity retention seemed to be closely tied to participants’ psychological and behavioral sense of belonging to the ethnic group. Within this domain, four typical categories and one variant category emerged. Engagement in cultural celebrations and activities was a typical factor in both mothers’ and fathers’ ability to retain their ethnic identity. These included religious (e.g., observing Indian festivals; participating in pujas, or religious services) and cultural activities (e.g., music, dance, movies). In particular, one participant stated, “I go back to the same cultural activities—that makes me Indian. If I don’t do all those things, I don’t consider myself Indian.” Fathers essentially saw engagement in such activities as “a crutch . . . that gives us that mental satisfaction of belonging.” Additionally, fathers noted an internal motivation, a need for self-discipline with regard to these activities: “As a human being, you have to obey certain social, religious, and moral rules. It’s all part of personal discipline. . . . Without this kind of discipline you would not be successful in life.”

A second typical category that emerged for both sets of participants was maintaining traditional values and upbringing (i.e., respecting the wishes of parents and family, maintaining vegetarianism, speaking the Indian language, and continuing the tradition of intraethnic marriage). Although both sets of parents felt that “these are the values that we have been brought up with,” there were some distinct differences between the mothers and fathers in their reasons for their investment in these values. For instance, one father stated his feelings about intraethnic marriage as follows:

I wanted to continue the same way my parents did. I didn’t want to get married to anybody here. Once I do that, then there is no continuity. It would change a lot. . . . My thought was always to get married to the same kind of people, that way [one] keeps the same identity.

Conversely, for the mothers, there seemed to be a cognitive emphasis. One mother explained:

I feel that because I felt so strongly, I didn’t have any doubt; that is what has made me hold on to things. . . . In many ways, [it is] neither the availability nor the closeness of places that you can go to, or the Indian people. . . . For me it is . . . the way you think.

Factors Contributing to Ethnic Identity Retention

Transmitting ethnic identity

A third typical category endorsed by both mothers and fathers was maintaining priorities in specific values and behaviors. For instance, one participant stated that “these are the values that we have been brought up [with],” and for the mothers, these included religious (e.g., observing Hindu rituals) and cultural activities (e.g., music, dance, movies). In particular, one participant stated, “I go back to the same cultural activities—that makes me Indian. If I don’t do all those things, I don’t consider myself Indian.”

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A third typical category endorsed by both mothers and fathers was family ties (via letters, phone calls, trips to India) and was exemplified by the following quote: “The thing that has allowed me to hold onto the Indian part is [that] . . . I have very strong ties to people back home and also to my family here.” Similarly, the presence of an aging parent seemed to make it possible to hold...
onto ethnic identity. One mother shared, “The benefit of having my parents here for about 3 years when my children were little was one of the most important aspects.” The need for social support was yet another typical category. Whereas the fathers emphasized behavioral aspects (e.g., engaging in Indian friendships, joining Indian cultural organizations), the mothers’ involvement seemed to come from behavioral and cognitive emphases, for example, “a desire for connections with others who believed in the same things, thought the same way, and engaged in similar activities.” Variantly, for both sets of participants, rejection of perceived Western values (e.g., drinking alcohol, eating junk food, smoking) also allowed them to retain their ethnic identity.

**Challenges in Retention of One’s Own Ethnic Identity**

One typical challenge experienced by both sets of parents was their sense of environmental obstacles and barriers within American society. For instance, fathers described a lack of societal interest in and general support for traditional Indian practices and culture. One father made the following observation:

> Back home, I would be dealing with people who are practicing [cultural traditions], and the society would have [been] directly influencing me. But that influencing part is not there; nobody cares whether I do it or don’t do it. When the society does not put pressure on you, you tend to leave that. . . . The demographics [do] not permit me to do that [here].

The barriers were seen as essentially facilitating the abandonment of traditional Indian customs. As noted by one mother:

> Many of the religious activities, because they need so much time, you have to cut them short; you cannot do the things that you were normally doing. . . . The way one thinks and what it means to be a Hindu—the religious activities and the way you conduct yourself—this is not applicable in this country.

A related challenge that was experienced by all the fathers and typically by the mothers was the loss of familial guidance, resulting in a lack of cultural continuity. As one father shared:

> I don’t have guidance [as to] what to do. When Mom is here, she knows what she does. . . . My father, when he was here, he knew what to do; he used to tell, ‘Do this, do that.’ . . . The continuity of what they were doing is not happening.

In contrast, only the mothers variantly reported feeling unable to fully experience both the Indian and the American cultures: “It is not possible to have the best of both worlds, so I had to sacrifice one thing [home country] rather than have both.”

**Experience as an Immigrant Parent**

As parents thought about their experience of parenting within an immingational context, two categories emerged: reflections on parenting roles and reflections about children’s bicultural experiences. When participants reflected on their roles as parents, four subcategories emerged. A primary difference that evolved between the two sets of parents was in the first subcategory, nongendered parenting. Fathers typically and mothers variantly endorsed nongendered styles of parenting for their male and female children. One father shared, “I do not distinguish between male and female at all. She is a human . . . to me; that’s [the] value that I want to impart [to her].” Conversely, gendered parenting seemed to be typical for mothers and variant for fathers. For instance, mothers spoke about dating restrictions for their daughters but not for their sons.

Fathers and mothers also typically perceived parenting to be different in the United States. In particular, both sets of participants talked about becoming more broad-minded (e.g., considering their children’s point of view) and growing alongside their children. A father shared, “Probably, if I was in India, I would have told her, ‘You have to do this [referring to career choices]. . . . Otherwise you are not my daughter.’” The experience of parenting was seen slightly differently by the mothers, as exemplified in this quote: “The way you enjoy your children here, I don’t think I could have done that there. . . . We have the whole credit of raising our children.” In addition, both fathers and mothers also typically spoke about having limited control in their relationship with their children: “We have to give in, if they are going to live in this country. . . . We did our best to bring them up a certain way; we have no control over them anyway.” Although the response was still typical, when compared with the mothers, fewer fathers spoke about the struggles in parenting on their own, without direct support from family. For instance, one mother shared, “Having to raise a child without grandparents, without family, without extended family is the biggest challenge as an immigrant. . . . It’s extremely hard.” Variantly, both fathers and mothers spoke about regrets in parenting; however, fathers regretted using baby sitters or not speaking the ethnic language, whereas mothers regretted overworking and not allowing their children to date.

In reflecting on children’s bicultural experience, fathers typically and mothers generally noted the bicultural influence and the related struggles within this bicultural identity. For instance, fathers believed that raising children on the basis of their own Indian cultural values would not have been effective. It is interesting that it was mothers who identified ways that they addressed this issue in their parenting. Some mothers spoke English to their children outside the home; others used both American (open-mindedness, respecting differences) and Indian values (interdependence, respect for elders) in raising children. Although the bicultural identity was seen as a strength, both sets of parents noted several struggles in their children’s cultural identity. One mother shared, “They had it hard. . . . At home they had to be Indian; outside they were thrown into a society of which we hardly had any knowledge.” Additionally, parents noted particular struggles, such as dating (e.g., a daughter might have felt isolated because of the no-dating rule), racism (e.g., speaking with children about needing to work harder than White children), and concerns for a lack of cultural continuity in their children. For instance, one mother shared, “When we are here, I don’t think they have a choice” with regard to intermarriage. Relatively, a father made the following statement:

> The only time they might be able to identify themselves is maybe if they go to a Hindu temple or if they have some Indian deities in their homes. . . . But beyond that, there is very little Indian identity.

**Transmitting Ethnic Identity**

Two categories evolved in this domain: maintaining priorities in transmitting specific values and strategies used to transmit cultural
values. Values that were important to the parents entailed the need for cultural continuity, educational and financial security, discouragement of dating and premarital sex, concern for others, and associating with the right kind of people. The fathers in our study seemed to generally emphasize the need for cultural continuity and typically valued education and financial security. Cultural continuity was reflected in being involved with Indian friends and associations, maintaining vegetarianism, knowing the native language, and marrying an Indian. This latter value of marriage, which included such ideas as that dating implies a long-term commitment and eventual marriage and that spouses should be highly educated and have a “good family background” seemed particularly salient to the fathers in our sample. As one participant recalled saying to his daughter, “You are an Indian girl; you should marry an Indian man.” Although cultural continuity was typically emphasized by the mothers in our study, education and financial security were generally considered a top priority by them. One mother explained, “Hard work and being disciplined is the way for a successful life.” According to another, giving priority to certain professions (e.g., law, medicine, and engineering) was considered “an Indian thing,” because of an association with job and financial stability. Both sets of parents also typically discouraged dating and premarital sexual involvement. They explained that both these behaviors could distract children from their education and career goals, suggesting that these goals should be accomplished before marriage. Another value was concern for others, as demonstrated by taking care of elders and doing good deeds for others. Although the theme was variant, only the fathers in our study seemed to believe that it was important for their children to associate with the “right kind of people,” believing that this would prevent their children from falling into bad habits (e.g., drugs and alcohol).

The mothers and fathers in our study used several strategies (e.g., modeling, maintaining religious practices, imparting cultural knowledge, and emphasizing flexibility along with traditional values) in transmitting ethnic identity to their children. However, there were some variations in the extent to which each of these strategies was endorsed. For instance, mothers generally and fathers typically reported transmitting cultural values by modeling, maintaining religious practices, and imparting cultural knowledge. With respect to modeling, the parents demonstrated the importance of family by the respect that was given to grandparents and by the participants’ understanding that “children live what they see.” In speaking about the importance of religion and spirituality, mothers reported going to temple with their children, teaching stotras (e.g., prayers and hymns), observing important religious holidays, and engaging in religious discussions. Imparting cultural knowledge by reading Indian books (e.g., “Reading Indian books gives [children] identity with culture”) and by having children attend and participate in cultural programs was another strategy that was generally more salient for the mothers. Conversely, fathers typically and mothers variantly emphasized flexibility with traditional values (e.g., allowing freedom in career choices, an openness to children’s choices of marriage partners, and not setting rules regarding dating).

Discussion

Consistent with previous literature, our participants seemed to affirm their cultural identity by reinventing their original culture in the new culture (Dhruvarajan, 1993). In keeping with acculturation models (e.g., LaFromboise et al., 1993), our participants selectively acculturated to the host culture (Prathikanti, 1997). However, the selective retention of cultural values in adapting to the host culture did not seem to be a simple matter of choice. Rather, our data suggest that both the fathers and the mothers in our study engaged in a thoughtful process of negotiating conflicting cultural demands.

Despite its benefits (Prathikanti, 1997), immigration seemed to come at a cost to our participants. Participants perceived significant losses in the form of familial guidance, cultural continuity, and environmental supports. These losses seemed to significantly influence participants’ choices in maintaining and negotiating their own cultural identities. It appears that for first-generation Asian Indian immigrants, an important factor in dealing with the stress of acculturation lay in adaptive coping strategies. In particular, the fathers’ connection to their Indian identity seemed to come from both a behavioral (e.g., engaging in Indian celebrations and tradi-

tions) and a cognitive “discipline,” whereas the mothers seemed to use a cognitive emphasis (i.e., strong faith) that helped to ward off external pressures that might alter their inner core of being Indian. Furthermore, mothers explicitly identified a need for adaptation as a “key to survival.” This not only is consistent with Patel et al.’s (1996) research but is in keeping with the emphasis placed on adaptation to the environment in the socialization of Indian women.

Challenges in Transmission of Culture and Ethnic Identity

A typical challenge experienced by both sets of parents included limited family and community guidance in raising their children.
(e.g., Jayakar, 1994). These early lessons might have influenced the mothers to speak about the need for accommodating to the new environment.

In examining the experiences of immigrants, literature on the alteration model of acculturation highlights that families acquire and preserve characteristics of both cultures to function effectively within each culture (e.g., LaFromboise et al., 1993). Although the mothers and fathers invested considerable efforts to hold onto cultural values and practices despite significant challenges, both sets of parents alluded to a bicultural, compartmentalized identity wherein they were Indian at home and American at work. In fact, this form of bicultural functioning (Patel et al., 1996) seemed to be the chosen model for Asian Indian parenting.

**Immigrant Parenting and Ethnic Identity Transmission**

In reflecting on their parenting experience, mothers regretted overworking and not being available to their children, whereas fathers regretted not speaking the ethnic language. Furthermore, although both sets of parents felt the lack of an extended family presence, women spoke of it when discussing parenting, whereas fathers spoke of it in relation to guidance with cultural continuity. Although in recent years there has been a shift to nuclear families, the influence of extended families, the expectations of the mother as the primary caregiver and nurturer, and the view of the father as the disciplinarian and breadwinner in the family were very much in place in the 1960s and 1970s. These expectations might have placed an inordinate amount of responsibility for parenting on the mothers. However, in having to experience parenting on their own, without the help of extended family, fathers might have become more engaged in the parenting process, with parenting becoming a more shared and complementary experience for the two sets of parents. This is evidenced in values differently endorsed by each set of parents. For example, fathers spoke of a fear of lack of cultural continuity if children engaged in interracial marriage, whereas mothers took this a step further by voicing concerns about being able to maintain a connectedness with their grandchildren. Whereas fathers spoke about a need for flexibility in traditional values, mothers spoke of actually using both Indian and American values in raising their children.

Furthermore, contrary to second-generation perspectives that parents may not understand the need for children to integrate a bicultural identity (Inman et al., 1999), our study reveals that first-generation parents not only were aware of their children’s bicultural struggles but were able to identify specific challenges that their children experienced (e.g., dating, racism). In recognizing these challenges, parents questioned whether they did right in transmitting the values that were important to them or whether they should have encouraged values that would help their children adapt to the new society. This was particularly evident among mothers, who wondered whether restrictions on dating at a younger age might have been the cause of their children’s current unmarried status. Raising their second-generation children within a culture that embraced values that were incongruent with their own heightened participants’ awareness about how they were parented and, in turn, how they wished to parent. Although parents in our study were raised within an authoritarian parenting context, their sense of parental authority was challenged by a number of factors, making it impossible to fully engage in traditional culturally determined patterns of parenting. Furthermore, because of the implicit modeling of culture in participants’ own upbringing, the additional challenge of needing to formally learn about their own cultural practices seemed to make it even more difficult for participants to explain to their children about the significance of the culture and ultimately transmit a sense of cultural identity.

Despite these doubts, both sets of participants believed that parenting within a bicultural context enhanced their relationships with their children by altering parenting practices (e.g., taking the children’s view into consideration) and facilitating children’s bicultural adjustment. Consistent with research (e.g., Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002), our participants adopted an authoritative parenting style and talked about a democratic style of parenting, wherein they grew with and learned from their children. However, given their cultural influence and their own upbringing, parents seemed to blend their new attitudes toward parenting with some familiar aspects of authoritarian parenting. Parents held onto values (e.g., education, care for others) of their native culture by using strategies (e.g., modeling, reading religious stories) that were familiar to them. The parents’ ability to maintain some core cultural practices while adapting to the demands of the host culture suggest an active and intentional parenting style that was reinterpreted to integrate multiple sociocultural contexts.

Finally, consistent with previous research (Dhruvarajan, 1993; Inman et al., 1999), participants in our study acknowledged the need to emphasize specific values (e.g., importance of education, strong ties to family, and values related to marriage) in their socialization practices. However, the reasons these values were so important seemed to be impacted by participants’ minority experiences. In particular, the emphasis on education went beyond a cultural expectation (e.g., that one should be a doctor or lawyer) and was based on participants’ desire for their children, as minority members of a culture, to have a future that ensured occupational and financial security. Relatedly, the emphases on strong family ties and an appropriate marriage partner (i.e., of Indian descent) were based on a need to continue cultural values that were being challenged by sociocultural environments.

**Limitations**

First, our findings are limited in their generalizability to other Asian Indian communities or to those who have immigrated in more recent years. A second limitation is related to data collection. Although interviews were conducted separately with each parent, it is unknown whether parents discussed their individual interviews with their spouse and how this might have influenced the interviews. A third limitation may be reflective of the methodology itself. CQR may not be the most appropriate methodology in assessing interdependent data (e.g., couples). Furthermore, because Asian Indians tend to be circular in their speech patterns and use stories to respond to questions, some elements of the participants’ experiences might have been lost when the data were shifted into written form. Additionally, some Indian terms (e.g., madi) have no exact English counterparts, which affected our ability to fully reflect participants’ experiences.

**Implications for Practice**

Although this study focuses on Asian Indian immigrant parents, our findings have broader implications in cross-cultural counseling.
and family therapy. An important aspect of multicultural counseling is being sensitive to cultural contexts of all family members. The influence of immigration, its impact on ethnic identity retention, and the cross-cultural challenges in parenting provide an important context in understanding immigrant families. Furthermore, because parenting styles are influenced by values, beliefs, and social parameters of both the native and the dominant cultural groups (Arendell, 1997), it is important that clinicians maintain awareness of and challenge their assumptions about optimal parenting styles. Although immigrant parents might modify their parenting styles, clinicians need to respect alternative parenting styles that might have been found to be successful through years of cultural practice.

Relatedly, understanding the significance of losses, expectations, and challenges for immigrant parents also provides counselors with insights into specific challenges experienced by second-generation children. Within this context, the use of narratives can be a beneficial tool for families negotiating intergenerational conflicts and challenges (Tewari et al., 2003). This is specifically evidenced in our study by parents’ belief that sharing their immigration experiences made for closer and stronger relationships with their children. This kind of intervention allows immigrant parents to acknowledge losses that might have occurred in their own immigration experience and also explore their expectations in their relationships with their children.

Future Research

Although results of this study provide some indication that immigration experiences significantly influence parenting for Asian Indian parents, findings may be further examined through replications and extensions of the study. One replication may involve conducting a comparable study focusing on other Asian Indian subcommunities (e.g., Punjabis), which may vary in their emphasis on specific values and transmission processes. Additionally, this study could be extended to an examination of temporal contexts in parenting (e.g., in the 1980s and 1990s vs. the 1960s and 1970s). The themes from these studies may not only allow a more comprehensive understanding of parenting experiences but also shed light on the social, historical, and temporal contexts that surrounded those experiences. Furthermore, given that our study does not directly assess parenting within a couple context, future research might interview parents separately and together to assess the partner influence on parenting.

References


