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Master of None: Understanding the 1.5 Generation of Asian Indian Youth

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Master of None
Understanding the 1.5 Generation of Asian Indian Youth

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from The College of William and Mary

by

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There was something wrong with her. She did not know what it was but there was something wrong with her. A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself. The sense of something farther away, beyond her reach.

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To my mom—my rock—

Thank you for always standing behind me no matter what.

To my dad—my #1 fan—

Thank you for believing in me even when I didn’t believe in myself.

To my sisters—my inspiration—

Thank you for always reminding me for whom I want to create a better world.

To the voices in this study—

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Without you, this research would have no pulse and for that, I am forever indebted.
A few months ago, I attended a lecture at the College of William & Mary hosted by the Middle Eastern Student Association. Stephen Sheehi, Professor of Arabic Studies, intensely paced the front of the large lecture hall, answering a host of questions from anxious students about 45’s recent travel ban. Coming from a sociological background and having read works like Erika Lee’s (2002) “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924” which demonstrates clearly the United States’ legacy of exclusionary immigration policies, the ban did not surprise me. What did surprise me, however, was when Sheehi stopped, threw his arms into the air, exasperated, and stated, “I mean, 11/9 was a 9/11 moment!” Holy shit, I thought. And for perhaps the millionth time since the election, my stomach sank and I descended into yet another episode of 45-incited despair.

On September 11, 2001, I was 6 years old. We had just moved to the United States a mere three months prior and had recently moved out of my uncle’s apartment into our own in Herndon, Virginia. I don’t remember much from that day, but I do remember that after 9/11, my mom stopped wearing scarves and started wearing a bindi to work and my dad shaved all his facial hair. Almost 2,500 miles away in Meza, Arizona, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh Indian immigrant to the States, was murdered at his Chevron gas station by Frank Roque, a white supremacist who later boasted about killing a “towel head” (Lewin 2001). A blood-red target had been painted on the backs of brown bodies across America…I just didn’t know it, and life continued as it always had.

In the fifth grade, we moved to Ashburn, Virginia and I found myself drawn to academics, or should I say, success. Growing up, I was a high achiever. I loaded my CV with anything and everything Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) had to offer—choir, debate,
theater, honor societies. I graduated in the top five percent of my class and was granted admission to one of the best public universities in the country. My mom, being the one who chauffeured me around for years, used to always say: “Nairuti, you’re the jack of all, but the master of none!” I never thought much of that seemingly insignificant maxim…until November 9, 2016.

On November 10, I called my mom. I had waited a long time to do it, because I knew she would be frantic. She picked up the phone and asked me, “are you okay?” “Yes, Ma, I’m fine. Please don’t worry.” She knew I had been to a protest and I could sense the fear and urgency in her voice. Knowing I was starting to get annoyed, she lowered her tone, “Nairuti, please don’t do these kinds of things. You know, beta, we were not born here. We will always be second-class citizens. Be careful.” Second-class citizen. Her words stung, and I felt sick. All the awards, the accolades, the praise, the years of success seemed to vanish and I just became a brown body, unworthy of the title “American.” Master of none. Master of none. Master of none. The words rung in my head, and I realized no matter how many times I get an A on a paper, no matter how many times I sing the national anthem with my a cappella groups, no matter how many times I vote in an election, no matter how many times I fight alongside my fellow citizens for the rights of all Americans, I will never be American. A few weeks later on February 22, this time only a thousand miles away in Olathe, Kansas, two highly educated Indian immigrant engineers, Srinivas Kuchibhotla and Alok Madasani were shot by Adam W. Purinton, who yelled “get out of my country” before fatally wounding Kuchibhotla (Berman & Schmidt 2017).

For a little over fifteen years, I have pondered what it means to be an American. It seems as though my existence has been one giant paradox. My family and I moved to the United States in pursuit of the glorious “American Dream.” My mom was recruited by an American company,
Cherry Road Technologies, through the H-1B visa program. She moved to the United States, and my dad and I followed her, legally, a few months later. My dad worked a few odd jobs—sales clerk in a liquor store, business analyst at Amtrak, instructor at a math and English learning center—but now is the COO of an IT consulting company in Washington D.C. My mom too moved up the ranks; today, she works as a project manager and gradebook specialist for Loudoun County Public Schools. Though today we live as active, contributing community members in one of the richest cities in the richest county in America, I still wonder—am I American? Because if I am, why do I get frisked every time I go through Dulles International Airport alone? If I am American, why do people constantly ask me where I’m really from and comment on my lack of an accent? If I am American, why do I still feel uneasy in predominantly white spaces? If I am American, why does my mom feel the need to remind me of my second-class citizenship?

In order to process these seemingly contradictory experiences, I turned, as I always have, to academia—sociology, in particular. I understood the discipline as a way to capture and synthesize the “interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world” (Mills 4:1959). I knew that the only way to reconcile, and perhaps relieve, this inner tension was to engage with my very own sociological imagination and make what was the most familiar—my very own life and experiences—strange, thereby “[reintegrating] parts of [my own] experiences that have been denied within social and academic discourse” in order to “reveal and break a series of overlapping silences and prohibitions [that]…frown upon the use of the ‘personal’ in scholarly work” (Davidman 2000:9-10).

As I embarked on this journey to break silences (Davidmann 2000), I met others from many different walks of life that shared my own story—the story of the 1.5 generation Asian
Indian immigrant. In this study, I ask the following: how do professionally-oriented\textsuperscript{6} Asian Indian youth of the 1.5 generation view their place in “American society”? Through the social institution of education, how do they make sense of the following paradox: a privileged class status versus an oppressed “forever foreign” identity?

Engaging with my respondents—all Asian Indian 1.5ers—was both a joy and a challenge. After their interviews, many respondents were thankful for the experience, likening it to a “therapy session,” which affirmed and continued to drive my commitment to the research. Others, like Aadithya, who shared a narrative of “a completely a different time” when his family lived in one-bedroom apartments and slept on the ground with nothing but a blanket and watched PBS Kids with a television set his father had found in a dumpster, turned the figurative mirror of life-history-sharing around, prompting me afterwards to run quickly to my car and sob relentlessly. There were many times that I felt the almost unbearable weight of my past experiences with economic vulnerability, social exclusion, and “othering” come crashing down on my shoulders. Through this research, I have struggled to make meaning and draw data-driven conclusions from the interviews with my respondents. Sometimes, the work just felt too personal, and I often felt paralyzed by the thought of not doing justice to the narratives and histories of these individuals, my parents, and my community. But I knew this work was important. I knew that the fastest growing, highest-skilled group of immigrants in the United States today deserved to be more than a simple footnote in Asian American studies literature.

This research casts critical light on the assumption that, with their high levels of socioeconomic success and low levels of political engagement, Asian Indians in the United States are simply not a problem.\textsuperscript{7} As sociologists with a privileged knowledge and understanding of the disturbing outcomes of volatile race relations in this country, we cannot
afford to stall our research until the very moment a population becomes the primary target of hate crimes. I aim to challenge the narrative that lauds Asian Indians as the “model minority of model minorities”—to better understand the lived experiences of American youth of Indian origin within the social institution of education. In this study, I ask: how do these professionally-oriented Asian Indian youth understand their Indian cultural heritage—one that often taints them as “forever foreign” and their American way of life often as “honorary whites” (Tuan 1998)? What role does the American public school system play in these identity formation processes? Finally, how does an understanding of the 1.5 generation of Asian Indian youth inform our insight into the lives of other immigrant groups, specifically undocumented youth?

In this study, I find that, in order to make sense of their paradoxical existence, Asian Indian youth of the 1.5 generation often adopt a hyphenated identity of Indian American. While this hybrid identity suggests a sort of reconciliation between an ethnic national identity and an adopted cultural identity, my respondents often create distinct boundaries between what it means to be “Indian” versus “American.” I argue that this persistent tension and associated boundary work is a result of a process I term *split socialization*, both longitudinal (over the life course) and lateral (between two primary cultural domains—home and school). This split socialization, accompanied by a system of racialized tracking which places Asian Indians in primarily white spaces in the public school system, often inspires experiences of social exclusion and “othering.”

Through these processes, Asian Indian millennials begin to understand themselves as inhabiting racialized bodies and to be racially and ethnically distinct from their white, native-born peers. While these experiences are evidently influenced by race, they are also largely influenced by class- and gender-specific dynamics, inciting my respondents to respond in different ways. Some opt for “whitewashing,” in order to fit in, while others resist the
devaluation of their culture in the classroom, by engaging in forms of ethnic maintenance. However, despite the struggles of this population, we see that Indian-born youth of the 1.5 generation often downplay experiences of discrimination and “othering,” openly embracing what they know to be the elusive American dream.

I argue that the 1.5 generation of Asian Indian youth is cultivated in schools to claim and assert an identity that hinges on academic success and upward mobility. Bolstered by the stereotype promise of the model minority myth, Asian Indians experience what I term an *honorary integration* into the American public school system, and consequently, into the sacred fabric of American society. Simply put, these youth internalize the narrative that if they work hard they will succeed and be offered the same benefits as their white counterparts. In this project, by sharing this culmination of their stories as well as my own, I hope to break the silence of these masters of none.

**BACKGROUND**

Indian migration to the United States began in 1820 when the first Indian set foot on American soil (Rangaswamy 2000). As the nineteenth century progressed, many more Indians, primarily merchants and indentured servants, made their way to the Americas from Britain’s “crown jewel.” But, it was not until the initial decade of the twentieth century that we see a significant wave of Indian immigration. Following a series of Chinese and Japanese exclusionary policies, most notably the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907, Asian Indian Sikhs arrived in the United States in search of employment opportunities in the lumber, railroad, fishing, and, in particular, agricultural industries (Poros 2011). Though needed and explicitly recruited for their labor (Prashad 2000), Sikh immigrants faced precarious labor conditions and were frequently the objects of racist treatment. Considered to be “ragheads”
plotting a “Hindu invasion” (Lee 2015) of the predominantly white neighborhoods of the Pacific Northwest, Sikhs were driven down to the Central Valley of California by white farmers fearing their own job security, where they continued their agricultural pursuits. Today, there is a large community of Punjabi Sikhs in southern California, a site and a population that has been extensively studied by sociologists (Gibson 1988; George 1997; López-Garza and Diaz 2001).

The nativist expulsion of the Punjabi Sikhs to Southern California was just the beginning. On February 5, 1917, Congressional debate resulted in the Barred Zone Act, which officially excluded any persons coming from most of China, all of India, Burma (Myanmar), Siam (Thailand), the Malay states, part of Russia, all of Arabia and Afghanistan, most of the Polynesian Islands, and all of the East Indian Islands (Lee 2015). In addition, various Alien Land Laws were passed which prevented Asian populations from owning and leasing land in the United States (Lee 2015), compromising the livelihoods of those already settled in the U.S. In 1924, the Johnson-Reed Act established national-origins quotas, dictating that only two percent of the total number of people of each nationality were allowed entry into the United States. As Asian immigrants were already barred from entry, this act did not directly apply to them (Office of the Historian 2016). We see a practical halt to Indian immigration during this time period—at least until 1946 when the Luce-Celler Act relaxed existing quotas to allow entry of a total of 100 Indians per year (Rangaswamy 2000).

After 1965, however, we see a surge in the Asian population in the United States, radically changing the demography of the country. The impetus behind this “new migration” (Lessinger 1995) was the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, or Hart-Celler, Act, which abolished the national-origins quota system and gave preference to high-skilled immigrants or
those entering under the premise of family reunification (Lee 2015). With this Act, we witness the establishment of the H-1B visa program for temporary, high-skilled workers. This program, reflective of the “government’s anxiety over long-term migration[,]…import[ed] highly skilled technicians, on H-1B visas,\(^8\) to work for three years, with their current skills, and then ship them home as their value begins to deteriorate” (Prashad 2000:80). Indeed, with the 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act, as a political compromise, a cap of 65,000 H-1B visas per annum was set (there was no cap initially). However, as a result of the employer sponsorship provisions long-term settlement became associated with the H1-B visa program (Chisti and Yale-Loehr 2016). Employers could sponsor a high-skilled immigrant for legal permanent residency, which also allowed for the continued exploitation of the immigrant’s labor at a lower price than a native-born high-skilled employee. Driven by the Immigration Act of 1990, which established a diversity visa provision, encouraging recruitment from non-tradition (i.e. non-European) countries of immigration, H-1B visas were used by various American companies to recruit highly skilled Asians for STEM-related employment opportunities (Poros 2011). In contrast to the first wave of Asian Indian immigration post-1965, this wave included more “young, educated urban dwellers, with strong English language skills” (Zong and Batalova 2015) seeking skilled jobs, most commonly in the science and engineering fields or with business or management occupations (Desilver 2014). Today, Asian Indians receive the highest number of H-1B visas—70 percent of the 316,000 H1-B petitions approved by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in 2014. Indeed, of the Indian immigrants who migrated to the United States in 2013, 52 percent were in the country as a result of employment-based preferences (Zong and Batalova 2015).
Site Selection

According to the Migration Policy Institute (2015), Indian Americans are among the fastest growing group of foreign-born Americans—Asian immigrants. Though Asian Indians traditionally settled in New York (Lessinger 1995; Khandelwal 2002; Maira 2002, 2009), Los Angeles (George 1997), and Chicago (Rangaswamy 2000), the Indian population today is drawn to other metropolitan areas, such as the environs of Washington D.C. (Strengthening South Asian Communities in America 2012), which, as the third most heavily populated area in the country, boasts over 80,000 residents of Indian origin (Zong and Batalova 2015).

In the last several decades, the Indian immigrant population has settled in the “high-tech corridor around Dulles International Airport,” attracted to the abundance of information technology occupation opportunities, affordable housing, as well as excellent schools (Morello and Keating 2011). Indeed, “among immigrants who arrived in the 1990s [and after, as a result of the 1990 Immigration Act], 48 percent of those living in metropolitan areas resided outside of central cities in suburban areas” (Waters and Jiménez 2005:109). Unlike the large aforementioned gateway cities, these newer sites of first settlement for Asian Indians are under studied (Waters and Jiménez 2005). By analyzing the experiences of Asian Indians in this greater metropolitan area of Washington D.C., I hope to fill this empirical gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While Asian Indians are one of the most educated racial-ethnic groups in the United States, they are also, more often than not, recent arrivals. In fact, approximately 87 percent of Indian adults in 2010 were foreign-born and nearly 38 percent of those individuals had been in the United States for ten years or less (Desilver 2014). This high level of educational attainment among the first generation is not only indicative of the classist (Prashad 2000) and, consequently,
exclusionary immigration policies enacted in the post-1965 era (a classic example being the H-1B visa program), it is also a perfect demonstration of Asian Indian immigrants’ hyper-selectivity, a concept developed by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (2015). Hyper-selectivity refers to “above-average educational attainment: the overall percentage of college graduates in an immigrant group compared with the overall percentage of college graduates among non-immigrants in the country of origin” (2015:29). Essentially, Asian Indians who migrate to the United States are often richer, more educated, and have more social and economic resources than their nonimmigrant counterparts.

Though there has been some work on the ethnic and racial experiences of these Asian Indian professionals of the first generation (Dhingra 2003; Han 2006; Dhingra 2007; Poros 2011) and their children (Gibson 1988; Lessinger 1995; Maira and Srikanth 1996; Rangaswamy 2000; Khandelwal 2002; Maira 2002, 2009; Purkayastha 2005; Han 2006; Dhingra 2007; Dhingra 2008), the unique experiences of Indian-born children of these immigrants have been largely overlooked.

In this study, I focus specifically on these children, the 1.5 generation (Rumbaut and Ima 1988), who were born in the India but migrated to the United States before the age of twelve. These young people are “neither part of the ‘first’ generation of their parents, the responsible adults who were formed in the homeland, who made the…decision to leave it…nor are these youth part of the ‘second’ generation of children who are born in the U.S., and for whom the ‘homeland’ mainly exists as a representation consisting of parental memories and memorabilia…While they straddle both worlds they are in some profound sense full part of neither” (Rumbaut and Ima 1988:22). Often, they have completed some kind of schooling in India before moving to the United States and, much like their parents, once they arrive in the
United States, they expect their dreams of socioeconomic success and achievement to be realized. However, as they enter the American public school system, they confront racialized discriminatory practices, largely for their phenotypical and cultural differences. Unlike the second generation, who is not born in India and, consequently, does not experience what I term *longitudinal split socialization*—whereby an individual is socialized multiple times, over the life course in two or more distinct cultural traditions (e.g. within the Indian public school system and then again in the American public school system)—these Indian-born youth, struggle to make sense of their place in American society.

To understand the interaction between the larger structures and processes of citizenship and national belonging and the “micropolitics of citizenship and performances of [Asian Indian] immigrant youth in everyday contexts” (Maira 2009:5), I examine young Asian Indians’ experiences within the social institution of education—more specifically, the American public school system. As several researchers have shown, the connection between schooling and the training of a standard citizenry is well-established (Gonzales 2016). In the United States, education is, in fact, one of the most agreed upon means of upward mobility and indicators of assimilation (Merton 1964; Gans 1992; Waters 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Kao et al. 2013). Public schools especially, due to a series of integrative legal actions, serve as “the great equalizer[s] of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (Mann 1848). Schools (as opposed to the workplace) are not only the primary drivers for the socialization of immigrant youth in the United States, they are also the primordial structures for the teaching of democratic, and consequently “American,” ideals of citizenship, including hard work, achievement, and mobility through self-reliance. Schools, however, also
often serve as “sites of stratification, often reinforcing and widening society’s inequalities” (Gonzales 2016:73).

For Asian American youth in particular, schools serve as enforcement mechanisms of the exceptionalist narrative\(^ {11} \) of the model minority phenomenon; they become a space in which immigrant students first confront the myth. Originally promulgated by William Pettersen’s *New York Times* article “Success Story, Japanese-American Style” published in 1966 and later popularized by various media outlets,\(^ {12} \) proponents of this essentialist myth argue that the success of Asian minorities in the United States primarily stems from a cultural upbringing that values hard work, docility, and educational success. As a racist response to the Civil Rights Movement, Asians were lauded for their ability to achieve without the help of government-sponsored programming, while other racial minorities, specifically Blacks, were chastised for their reliance on welfare and social services (Zhou 2004). In this way, as a result of their high levels of socioeconomic status, Asian Americans gained status as “honorary whites” (Tuan 1998) in American society, an identity conferred on recent Asian Indian immigrant students.

This honorary racial status for this group of is further confirmed by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou’s (2005) theory of segmented assimilation. In their research, Portes and Zhou challenge the straight-line assimilation model (Gordon 1964), arguing that it ignores the diverse complexities of newer generations of non-European, non-white immigrants. Using the examples of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Punjabi Sikhs in California, and Caribbean youths in South Florida, they conclude that educational and economic mobility may in fact be the result of leveraging ethnic social capital “that their communities make available” as opposed to “adopting the outlooks and cultural ways of the native-born” (Portes and Zhou 1993:81-82). Drawing on dual labor market theory, they suggest that the United States’ economy is bifurcated, with two
potential social outcomes: “acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-
class...[or mobility in] the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the
underclass” (1993:82). Consequently, the social outcomes of the second and future generations
depend on the initial stratification of the first, “the process has become segmented...we observe
today several distinct forms of adaptations” (1993:82). When we take for example Indian
immigrants who arrived in the States post-1965, the assumption is that, due to their high
education and skill level of the first generation, the second generation, their children, will benefit
from upward mobility in American society.

However, I argue that such a class-oriented model neglects the importance of race and
transnational ties (Maira 2002; Pukayastha 2005) for shaping social mobility in the United
States. Additionally, the segmented assimilation model does not address the more microlevel
processes of identity formation and negotiation. It is no surprise that Asian Indians, though
socioeconomically successful, are highly racialized subsets of the population, especially after
9/11 (Maira 2009), and represent a “forever foreign” (Tuan 1998) “other” or “immigrant
nobody” (George 1997). Unlike their white European immigrant predecessors, who have the
privilege of being able to adopt a symbolic ethnicity (Gans 1979; Waters 1990), meaning they
can shed their ethnic ties when they please, Asian Indians’ ethnic racial identity marks their
existence, an experience that holds important implications for their cultural belonging in the
United States.

Cultural belonging, I contend, is much broader than simple structural assimilation or even
“‘Belonging’ [does not] merely [have] to do with individual feelings and
sensibilities...belonging is also about cultural histories, political capital, intellectual priorities,
and even actual materiality, including economics” (228). Though socioeconomically a part of the fabric of America, Asian Indian youths’ struggle to identify as wholly American as a result of intricate racial dynamics. Consequently, Asian Indian youth born of hyper-selected parents demonstrate a unique balancing act between the class-oriented “honorary white” and racially-charged “forever foreign” narratives.

Though the larger literature on Asian Indians in the United States suggests a tension in the complicated and multifaceted dynamics of belonging and exclusion, these experiences among high-achieving youth are rarely studied. Although Asian Indian youth are not a considered to be a problem population, as Gibson (1988) reminds us, “their success, however, offers no cause for complacency” (167). Most of the literature that calls attention to these dynamics among the Asian American youth population focuses on the psychological consequences (low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, drug use etc.) of the model minority myth (Bhattacharya 2002; Ng et al. 2007; Qin et al. 2008; Rivas-Drake et al. 2008). While the sociological literature looks beyond mental distress as the sole indicator of exclusionary dynamics, it addresses specifically external influences, like peer networks, in the form of the microaggressions or more general “othering” practices of stereotyping and cultural humiliation that they perpetuate (Gibson 1988; Lee and Zhou 2004; Dhingra 2007, 2008; Sue et. al 2007), or on identity formation and conflict, it does not reveal the entire picture. In this study, I suggest that we must look at these tensions within the context of larger sociocultural dynamics present in the school as a social institution.

In order to understand the seemingly contradictory experiences of Asian Indian youth in school, we must go beyond the immigration literature, which suggests the influence of ethnic and cultural frames, specifically those created and enforced by first generation parents, on academic success (Lee and Zhou 2015), and engage with the broader literature on the sociology of
education. In this way, we are able to understand larger mechanisms and systems at play that create an *environment* in which Asian Indian youth succeed academically, but are “othered” socially.

As the immigration literature suggests, schools are a preeminent site of socialization for Asian Indian youth. But, this process does not occur simply through interactions with teachers and administrators or peer networks; indeed, it is a much larger, more formally engrained system—what Philip Jackson (1968) terms the “hidden curriculum.” In this curriculum, students learn the informal parts of school life including the attitudes, norms, beliefs, values, and assumptions associated with American culture (Seddon 1983). These lessons of the hidden curriculum stand in sharp contrast with those of the formal: “The formal curriculum preaches democracy, but the hidden curriculum imposes autocracy. The formal curriculum stresses academic knowledge and understanding; the hidden curriculum stresses the political process as a means of school achievement...textbooks, as a part of the formal curriculum, indirectly negate or contradict the traditional goal of American education, which is to provide equal opportunity to all children and youth to receive quality education and through it attain the ‘American Dream’” (Massialas 1996:64).

However, teaching of the hidden curriculum is funneled through class-specific dynamics. Michael W. Apple (2004), in his text *Ideology & Curriculum*, contends that there exists different curricular knowledge for high-status and low-status students; low-status students do not always have access to the high-status technical knowledge that is needed to achieve socioeconomically in the future. In my study, I aim to complicate this understanding by engaging with the additional dimension of race, a social location inextricably tied with class, especially in classrooms across the United States. Interviews with a sample of Asian Indian youth suggest that this group’s class-
specific social positioning as “honorary whites” grants them access to the hidden curriculum and predominantly white academic and extracurricular spaces.

As “honorary whites,” Asian Indians are racially tracked alongside their native-born white peers. Racialized tracking—a “practice of separating students for instruction, ostensibly based on their ability and prior achievement [which] often results in segregated classrooms” (Tyson 2011:6)—for Asian Indian youth is predominantly influenced by the model minority phenomenon, indicative of its stereotype promise (Lee 2012). However, despite high levels of academic success, youth of Asian Indian origin still experience social “othering” in schools. What implications does this hold for identity formation within this group and our understanding of self, race, and belonging in schools?

METHODS

In this research, I employ semi-structured, in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of Asian Indian immigrant youth. A qualitative methodology provides a multidimensional analysis of how this subset of the population processes and interprets (Weiss 1994) their paradoxical existence as high-achieving, “forever foreigners” within the American public school system. Semi-structured interviews offer an in-depth exploration and analysis of “how individuals [make sense of and often times continue to] sustain their achievements within embedded inequalities” (Dhingra 2012:14).

Given the paucity of empirical studies that explore the lived realities of Indian-born youth, I deployed an inductive, or grounded theory approach in my data collection (Glasser and Strauss 1967). Motivated by this tradition, I conducted semi-structured interviews (both in-person, using a digital recording device, or over Skype, using ecamm, a Skype recording
software) with ten Asian Indian immigrant youth who arrived in the United States before the age of twelve\textsuperscript{14} and had attended public school in the greater D.C. metropolitan area.\textsuperscript{15}

My positionality as an Indian immigrant woman who arrived in the United States at the age of five proved beneficial in that it allowed me to connect with my respondents in a deeper and more meaningful way. Though, I’ll admit, their “stories were filtered through the lens of my questions and interests” I wanted them, to an extent, to reclaim their “authentic voice” (Maira 2009:33). Respondents often shared very intimate details of their lives with little to no hesitation, recognizing me as a cultural insider. For example, respondents narrated stories of their “typical strict, arrange-married Indian parents” who came to the United States seeking “better opportunities” for their children who never allowed them to play outside without having finished their homework or date white boy and girls. I laughed along with Aadithya when he spoke of the SAT prep classes he had taken in Northern Virginia with the same teacher I had and giggled with Sravani and Samya when they spoke of their first boyfriends.

At the same time, my positionality potentially shaped my informants’ responses. As a female-identifying interviewer with a history of academic success, awards, and accolades, I potentially alienated respondents with lower levels of educational attainment or success. For example, one interviewee I knew tangentially in high school seemed incredibly reluctant to share details of his academic career, perhaps because he feared that I would judge what he perceived as failures and shortcomings. Other times I felt as though I was receiving more narratives of self-promotion from male respondents, perhaps as a way to combat any preconceptions they imagined I harbored about their masculinity.

Drawing on the literature in immigration and Asian American studies, I developed an interview guide that I piloted with two interviewees over the summer of 2016. These early
interviews revealed missing themes relevant for probing the immigrant experience. I used this experience to revise the guide and integrate new themes that emerged such as: family dynamics, the relationship to country of origin, friendships and social networks, academic and extracurricular experiences, and plans for the future (see Appendix A).

Though I set out to construct a purposive sample by reaching out (via email, phone, advertisements in newsletters, and on-site visits) to a variety of ethnic, cultural, and religious organizations and institutions in the D.C. metropolitan area, including South Asian and Indian grocery stores, restaurants, temples, learning centers, and community organizations, I struggled to recruit respondents solely from those sites. By engaging in a snowball sampling strategy, I expanded the reach of my recruiting efforts to include friends from SAT prep classes I took in high school, friends of friends at the College of William & Mary, cousins, and old high school acquaintances. Some contacts were reluctant to share their experiences, and did not follow-up after a few email exchanges. However, after the election, several individuals contacted me. One week during winter break, I conducted four interviews in a row with no break in between. I saw their eagerness to add their voices and stories as a form of passive resistance against the new administration. After the interview one respondent, Sravani, noted how important research on Asian Indians was, especially after the election. Though she was worried about what this would mean for our community, she seemed committed to using her story to inspire change.

My sample of the 1.5 generation of Asian Indian youth (see Appendix B), stratified by sex, consisted of five men and five women, all between the ages of 19-22—of the millennial generation. I explicitly chose this generational cohort to better understand the 1) experiences of the offspring of highly skilled parents whose migration to the States (and, more specifically, the D.C. metropolitan area) was a direct result of the Immigration Act of 1990, 2) the micropolitical
consequences of having lived through seeming antithetical times (each with its own contribution)
9/11, the liberal age of Obama, as well as, most recently, the election of 45, and 3) the
implications of coming of age in an increasingly interconnected and transnational society.
Though a sample stratified by geographic region of origin would have been ideal, my sample is
skewed toward South Indians; eight of ten respondents are from a city or town in South India,
providing a specific understanding of Indian diasporic history. I conceptualized class position
through several indicators including father's/mother’s highest level of education and
father’s/mother’s occupation. I did not ask explicitly about income, but I was able to deduce
socioeconomic status based on occupational prestige and stories of specific status symbols.
While not all respondents’ parents were hyper-selected (consider Ram’s father who did not
complete high school), they all arrived in the United States under the H-1B visa program. Not
every individual in every family is a U.S. citizen—most are Green Card holders, a few still have
Indian citizenship, and one respondent (Tara) and her mother are Canadian citizens. No
respondent or any member of his/her family is undocumented. Finally, to quantify academic
achievement, I used SAT scores as well as the respondent’s brief description of his/her average
grades.

Though in constructing this sample, I aimed to achieve a degree of representativeness, I
understand that time, resources, and overall feasibility limited my sampling strategy. To mitigate
some of these issues, I actively sought out a negative case—a respondent who perhaps did not
entirely embody the “model minority” or the privileged class status shared by the others. The
difficulty I encountered in contacting these individuals was indicative of how deeply entrenched
class-based networks were in this area. Often times, as I recall, these individuals who were not
“successful” in the eyes of the community (e.g. went out too often, dropped out of college,
became pregnant at a young age, and/or did not have a steady or prestigious job) were explicitly hidden—never spoken about or even seen at social gatherings. In “looking for evidence that disconfirmed by interpretations” (Esterberg 2002:175) of the typical Asian Indian youth of the 1.5 generation, I was able to access a richer analysis of my data and this population.

**FINDINGS**

A pattern that emerged in my interviews with these young men and women was their articulation of a hyphenated identity, which they described using the label “Indian American.” Indeed, nine of the ten individuals I interviewed identified using this label, which they explained best represented their experience as immigrants living in the United States. In articulating this identity, my respondents engaged in salient boundary work through which they drew sharp, often nuanced and layered, distinctions between what it means to be American and Indian. While “American” served as an adopted identity—a representation of their socialization and future in this country—“Indian” was defined as something desirable to “hold on to.” The idea of their Indianness as tied to a heritage, homeland, and culture, was resonant and meaningful in my respondents’ day-to-day lives and practices. Most of my respondents identified like Aadithya, a 21-year old undergraduate student at a university in Maryland, who explains what this hyphenated identity means to him:

> For me, it’s always been easy to feel like an outsider around white people here because I always feel like they’re like in this club...Like if there was a group of white people talking, and I was the only Indian, I would feel like the Indian representative of the group. If I’m amongst other Indian Americans, we would all be mixed identities. It wouldn’t matter there. If I was in India, I would feel the weight of America on my back, if that makes sense.
Other respondents shared similar stories of discomfort in both Indian and American spaces, as they felt their identities were frequently complicated by and split between both international and interpersonal borders. Additionally, the Indian American youth whom I interviewed often described experiencing what DuBois (1903) might term a form of “double consciousness.” For DuBois writing in the early 1900s at the height of Jim Crow, African Americans developed a form of consciousness that involved “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (DuBois 1903:8). Such double consciousness involves racialized feelings of “two-ness…two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (1903:8).

In this way, it is important to see that, for predominantly Asian-born, post-1965 immigrants, ethnic identity is not entirely symbolic (Gans 1979; Waters 1990), as it has racialized implications for their experiences in the United States. Hamsa sums up her racialized, hyphenated experience: “I am always going to be Indian—the Indian girl living in America, but now I am sort of like half and half.”

I argue that these individuals, still cognizant of their time in India and still living with their first-generation parents, experience a split socialization in two ways: 1) over the life course (longitudinal) and 2) between two principal social domains, the “ethnically charged” home and the “Americanizing” school (lateral), both of which create a source of continuous tension for these “masters of none”.

As a result of the school sorting, which tracks them alongside white groups, they come to experience themselves as “honorary whites.” Despite this honorary membership in a group privileged by class and, to an extent, race, these youth all reported salient memories of instances in which they were made to feel different, “other” or “foreign” (George 1997; Tuan 1998). In relaying these experiences, they seemed to be grappling with exclusion from a circle of cultural
belonging both at school and with their white peers. Through these embodied experiences of racialization, they begin to conceptualize themselves as ethnically and racially distinct, demonstrating the boundaries of their “honorary whiteness.” And such experiences were inflected through class and gender.

In response, my respondents describe adopting various strategies that exist on a spectrum of accommodation to white, American culture—in the form of whitewashing—to a form of resistance, specifically the rejection of the devaluation of their Indian heritage and culture. While the actual definition of whitewashing is contested among my respondents, it seems to occur in two primary ways: 1) through the exoticization of identities and experiences and 2) through forms of gendered rebellion. Some respondents responded to discrimination by “acting out” and rebelling against the structures of Indianness by sneaking out of the house without their parents’ knowledge, consuming alcohol, and engaging in other behaviors that pushed back against the idea of docile Indian women or of emasculated Indian men. Resistance to “othering” through the preservation of cultural identities and a reassertion of their Indian heritage, was enacted through respondents’ maintenance of transnational ties to India. Respondents used trips to India to reinforce and maintain transnational ties with extended family and community in India. Among this affluent population with the necessary financial and legal resources to travel abroad, summer trips to India to visit family were akin to a ritualized practice (Durkheim 1965). These trips, which happened almost every summer, frequently coincided with major family events—for example, weddings, anniversary celebrations, and funerals. In this way, these young people grew up still relatively integrated within transnational family networks. While these transnational ties proved alienating to these youth as they navigated their daily life in the
US, for some they became source of grounded strength that centered them in the face of the confusing tensions of lateral split socialization.

Finally, nearly all my respondents demonstrated a pattern of downplaying experiences of discrimination and racism, often reminiscent of strategies of accommodation utilized by the first generation (Dhingra 2012). My respondents openly recognized the hardships faced by their parents since their arrival the United States, including, sometimes, a complete stagnation or lack of upward mobility. However, they did not always seem cognizant of the ways in which they benefited from school sorting and their honorary white status. They all expressed adherence to the narrative of the American dream and saw themselves as poised to achieve it.

In this thesis I argue that this adherence to the American Dream narrative is the result of an American system of public education that operates as a mechanism of racialized social control “that alters one’s sense of reality to justify the unequal social order” (Park 2008:136). Through institutionalized mainstreaming, Asian Indian youth, especially those of the 1.5 generation, who are “able and eager to fit into an unequal society” (Apple 1995:13), are cultivated to shed their cultural and ethnic ties from their time in India in exchange for the chance to succeed. Driven by teachers, counselors, and administrators who act as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980) and bolstered by the presence of the model minority stereotype, Asian Indian youth experience 

*honorary integration.* This understanding of oneself encourages Asian Indian youth of the 1.5 generation and high-achieving immigrants of color more broadly to work hard with the promise of academic and professional success. At the same time, systemic race- and class-based barriers are rendered invisible to them. With an occasional success story, the institution perpetuates an unequal class-race system, thereby maintaining the status quo. While capable of appeasing this population (and others) of immigrants, schools are also able to maintain a Brown- and Black-
bodied underclass that will, at the end of the day, never be able to achieve as highly as their white, native-born counterparts.

*Indian in America, American in India: Constructing Hyphenated Identities*

While all my respondents were born in India, they moved to the United States at various ages—the youngest, Sravani, at age two and the oldest, Hamsa, at age nine. Although some recalled moving to the United States, respondents who migrated at a younger age had little to no memory of their life in India. Samir sheepishly concedes, “[I feel like] my memories formed as soon as I got off the plane. Like I don’t remember anything before the plane ride, like in India the first five years. But I remember like literally walking off the plane.” Others completed preschool, kindergarten, and even grade school up to the fourth grade in India. A few, like Hamsa, even had the faintest hints of an Indian accent.

But, regardless of the number of years they had spent in India before emigrating or the number of times they had visited, all respondents vehemently defended their birthright tie to their country of origin. Hamsa, a twenty-two-year-old graduate student from the southern state of Andhra Pradesh who moved to the United States at age nine defends the “Indian part” of her identity, stating: “There are parts of India and Indian culture that I am not willing to let go of...Like the food and the music and my family...religion. It’s part of the culture.” For many respondents, the adoption of a hyphenated identity involved an articulation and understanding of ethnic difference. They felt, either through personal transnational connections with family and friends back home and early memories of India—formed on their own or recollected through stories shared by their parents—that the country and its cultural heritage was a part of their personal historical narratives and should not be forgotten.
Such ethnic self-identification also involved respondents’ grappling with their racialization—with being identified as racially “other” in the United States. Samir, who lived in a predominantly white neighborhood, had predominantly white friends, had only ever been in relationships with white women, summarizes this experience: “I look at myself every day and I don’t see that I’m American.” For Asian Indian youth of this and latter generations, unlike their European immigrant predecessors, their ethnicity is rooted in phenotypical characteristics and cannot “be felt without having to be incorporated in [or influencing] everyday behavior” (Gans 1979:9).

At the same time, however, respondents explained how they no longer felt as if the identity label “Indian” fully encompassed who they were. During these visits back to the homeland, respondents often felt uneasy among family members, and confronted linguistic and cultural barriers that signaled their differences from their extended family members. Respondents who migrated especially early, like Sravani (age two) and Thanvi (age four), shared stories of meeting family members (e.g. grandparents, aunts, uncles) and feeling distant, unable to communicate fully or relate to anyone. Sravani mentions how “[visiting India] is cool, but only when I’m with my [Indian American] cousins and my [Indian American] brother.” When she is with other individuals with similar bicultural experiences, she feels more at ease, as she is able to interact more comfortably.

Respondents’ articulation of hyphenated identities suggests the formation of hybrid understandings of self that reconcile what they perceive as distinct parts of who they are—“Indian” and “American.” However interviews with these individuals reveals a much more complicated picture—one in which Indian American youth also engage in boundary work, “practices and preferences one makes to affirm a commitment [or aversion] to a socially defined
identity” (Dhingra 2007), to demarcate the borders between “Indian” and “American.” Boundary work produces a major tension within the processes of ethnic identity formation and understandings of self and belonging among my interviewees.

Boundary making: constructing “Indian” and “American”

For my respondents being Indian is juxtaposed with all things “American.” First, for them, “Indianness” is defined by conservatism—an appreciation for tradition and culture—while “Americanness” embraces a more liberal attitude. Shyam explains,

I’d say [the identity label which resonates with me most is] Indian American. Mostly ‘cause I think family has a huge impact on who you are growing up and my family definitely taught me more cultural values. So that’s the Indian part of me. I’m still very conservative, very put together, in a way. Not as outgoing like the regular American style, growing up. But because we are in America and most of my friends were American growing up, I identify with the more liberal nature here…[For example,] with my friends, sex is always a big topic. Parents never brought it up, usually. But with my friends, these topics were more easy to talk about. Feelings, relationships, academics, future goals,…identity…political issues. Being able to talk to about them in a free and open environment is what I deem “liberal.” And that comes from more of my American side. With my Indian side, it’s easier to stay closed with what I know and understand, like not take risks, play it safe. And I am more like that in a way but I can talk about things more easily which is why I identify as Indian American.

For respondents like Shyam, being Indian implies having strict parents who constantly encourage academics over relationship-building (romantic or otherwise) and are more reluctant to talk openly and emotionally with their children. Shyam continues, “So like…relationships,
talking about issues, talking about feelings is a big thing. Never talked about feelings growing up. Uh...yeah, the more close-knit stuff never really happened. I never had experience with that.”

Other respondents, especially women, made it clear that Indian culture is not as progressive as Western culture in that it restricts women in a lot of different ways. Female respondents with older brothers, like Thanvi or Sravani, shared stories of parents being more restrictive with them compared to their brothers. Sravani, a resident of Virginia, for example, though accepted to universities across the country, was not allowed to go out-of-state for university, while her brother attended Stanford University. Other female respondents recalled constantly being questioned or advised about their marital plans. Tara, when asked if she did envision herself marrying an Indian (as her family hoped), replied, “I think so? I hope so? I think I would want to marry an Indian who is kind of in the same position as me, like not an “Indian Indian,” only lived in India, but like I would want someone who has moved around and in my position in terms of how attached and open to other things they are.”

She continued:

I think Indians who have lived in India for their entire lives are different than I am. I think I am not necessarily worse or better, but just different. I can’t see myself ever living in India again so I don’t think that would work if they did. The other thing is, like, I feel like you have different values and different morals and I’m not as religious as I think people would be there. […] I also think that—and it’s a stereotype, but I think largely true—Indians living in India are going to be a lot less open to things than Western culture has allowed us to accept. Like whether that be being homophobic or being against drinking or being against, you know, even the sense of sexism between a man and his
wife. […] But I feel like if I married someone who has lived there his entire life, there is a lot of chance that I would be unhappy.

In Tara’s narrative, we can see how, though she appreciates the familiar comfort of Indian culture, she rejects much of what it represents, which to her is intolerance and bigotry. Finally, female respondents share stories of not being able to wear certain clothing when they visit India, or perhaps being judged by their Indian peers for drinking or participating in other deviant behavior. In this way, we can also see the intra-ethnic social boundary making, monitoring, and surveillance often associated with identity formation among those high-achieving minority groups who have internalized, to a certain extent, the racism they often face in white society (Pyke and Dang 2003).

Second, while the label “Indian” suggests a sort of longing for the conventional past, “American” is often associated with more forward-thinking concepts including liberty and freedom, acceptance and appreciation of diversity, and an opportunity for upward mobility, or the “American Dream.” When asked what American culture means to her Hamsa, a 22-year-old graduate student at a university in Virginia, responds:

Independence, freedom, and the fact that people don’t judge you based on the school that you go to or the place that you work at or what you study. So [for example] people don’t judge you [based] on the clothes you wear. You are just free to do what you want or to be what you want to be…No one is going to question my choices, my decisions, as long as I am taking care of myself, working and contributing to someone else’s well being, I am good.

Though Hamsa touches on all three of the elements of being American, she explains how these freedoms are conditional, to a certain extent. Those who work hard, like Hamsa and her Asian
Indian peers, have access to the benefits of being American, meaning that those who do not, those who rely on welfare and other social services to move forward with their lives, perhaps do not have access or are not truly American (Dhingra 2003). Though not explicitly mentioned in the interviews, we begin to see, within this professionally oriented population of Asian Indian youth, the formation of an understanding of racial realities in the United States. As we will see later, Asian Indians do distinguish themselves from other immigrant groups of color, specifically Latinx populations, who they believe to need “more help” in the classroom as a result of their seemingly predominant participation in ESL/ELL programming.

At the same time, interviewees also seemed to relate their hyphenated identities with a notion of multiculturalism that embraces diversity: “[Being American means being] a part of diversity in the US. Anyone who lives in the US and grew up with American roots. I’ll know what pani puri [an Indian street food] is but I’ll want a burger,” Sravani says. For Asian Indian youth of this generation, “Americanness” provides an alternative aspect of their identity that rejects the intolerance, close-mindedness, and lack of acceptance more commonly associated with “Indianness.” Respondents often framed their definitions of Indianness as intolerance by invoking religious beliefs.

In one conversation with Hamsa, she explained how Hinduism and, by association, being Indian can involve a lack of tolerance other religious identities and traditions.

*Nairuti*: Are there any other identity labels that speak to you besides Indian American?

*Hamsa*: Indian. Like for a long time after I moved to the United States, for about seven to eight years, I would think of myself as Indian. The Indian American thing happened just recently. I was like, oh my God. There is a lot of me that wants to be American and likes the part of my life that happened here and actually wants to hold on to it.
Nairuti: Was there a specific moment or memory that you associate with that switch?

Hamsa: It wasn’t a moment. It was my last trip to India…I realized that there were a lot of differences of opinion between the rest of my family and me, and I realized that I was not the Indian girl that moved here. I realized that I have embraced part of America and America’s culture and I realized, then, that I am Indian American and not just Indian anymore. So, generally, in India, when I went there, they way they talk about other people or other religions or races and they would pinpoint them and talk about those people. I was like, OMG, we don’t do that in America! Like when they call someone by the religion that they follow, I don’t like it. It bothers me little bit. I think that has to do with my upbringing here.

Hamsa went on to tell a story about her family. Notably, she prefaced this anecdote by acknowledging that it did not cast her or her family in a positive light, and she requested that I not judge her or her family for what she was about to share.

When I was in India in 2014, the youngest of my older cousins got married which means I was next. So they were like, yeah sure, whatever, choose your husband if you want, just don’t marry a Muslim. And I was like…that just bothered me. I was like, why pinpoint a Muslim? Why call them out like that? That I don’t like. That’s when I realized I don’t think of people the way my family thinks of those people. When I see a person, I see a person. They see a religion. They see race. So that’s when I realized…I sort of let go of that idea, and now I just look at people as people. [color blind racism?]

Stories of the religious divide between Hindus and Muslims are plentiful in my dataset. Though all of my respondents identified as Hindu, they were quick to explain how being Hindu was nothing more than a symbolic expression of their Indian culture and heritage. They often
distinguished themselves from their “really religious” first-generation parents or their families back in India or qualified their religious identity by phrases like: “I think I am religious and I do care about it, but it’s more like a spiritual thing for me.” In this way, for Hamsa and many other respondents, the adoption of the hyphenated identity, Indian American, serves as an alternative identity in face of what they believe to be a more conservative culture back home.

While respondents can insulate themselves to a certain extent from “Indian Indian” culture, a form of their “Indianness” was openly expressed and lived in their home and family lives. This continuous interaction with Indian culture both abroad and in the home alongside experiences with white peers in the school creates a persistent tension in the identity formation of Asian Indian youth—one which I term split socialization.

Split Socialization: Longitudinal and Lateral

The 1.5 generation has a particular experience of socialization due to distinct institutional and cultural experiences. Unlike the first generation who often experience socialization and cultural orientation to American society through the workplace, the 1.5 and second generation of Asian Indian immigrants are socialized through schools. Seven of ten of the participants in my study received some kind of schooling in India, one of them up to the fourth grade, an experience that results in what I term longitudinal split socialization. Those seven, unlike their second generation counterparts, after having been acclimated to a completely different culture, then moved to the United States and continued their education here, within the public school system, thereby splitting their socialization into two distinct cultural spheres, each associated with its own social and cultural norms. Tara, daughter of a World Bank employee, explains the confusion that resulted from this longitudinal split socialization:
I definitely did get some stuff that messed with my head. I used to always call the teacher ma’am, but you don’t call the teacher ma’am here, but you always call them ma’am in India. But I didn’t know! And I remember being made fun of for that.

My respondents also described how their experiences at home were markedly distinct from those at school. At home they are under the reign of their parents, resulting in a socialization rooted in their cultural and ethnic heritage. While at school, under the influence of teachers, administrators, and peer networks, Asian Indian immigrant youth are taught what it means to be “American,” something that is frequently very different from what it means to be Indian. But it was in the domain of school that my respondents came to realize that they were “different.” My respondent relayed constant struggles to reconcile what they learned at school with expectations that came from their family—that is, two distinct forms of socialization rooted in two distinct cultural domains (home versus school), which I term lateral *split socialization*. Shyam explains:

So I remember in fourth grade, I was talking to my friends…they’re all white. So I remember I said something about my mom [who] yelled at me and hit me with her belts and my friends’ eyes were all like “What?! You should call child protective services!” *laughs* Who are these people? Like what is going on? That, to me, was insane. I thought that was normal, but to them, that was the worst thing in their head. Like, I could never imagine my parents doing that. And I was like, “So what do your parents do?” …And there were a lot of different things like that that just showed we grew up in two very different households.
Shyam, though integrated into both cultures, is constantly met with the burden of engaging in cross-cultural dialogue. This constant border crossing between a racialized ethnic identity and an adopted cultural identity is typical of lateral split socialization. Language often plays a key role in this process. Many respondents shared experiences of speaking their mother tongue at home with their parents or grandparents, and English with their friends at school or even their siblings. Respondents, like Tara, describe striking a difficult balance between speaking Hindi, a language that represented her Asian Indian heritage, and English, a language that perhaps symbolized her American identity.

_Nairuti_: So do you speak a different language with your grandparents?

_Tara_: Yeah, I speak Hindi with them and I think it's good because after going to college, I really don't speak Hindi that much at all. Even with my Indian friends, I don't speak Hindi at all. So I feel like I'm losing some of it because I've been through so many language transitions. So I don't remember how to read and write it. I read very slowly so my dad gets embarrassed when I try to do that. I tried to do that in a _mithai_ shop once and he got really embarrassed and told me stop because he said people will probably think I'm crazy because I was reading it so slowly and I was so old. But, I speak it pretty well, I think, and my accent hasn't been affected. My grandma, the younger one, loves to brag about that to her friends like, look, even though they lived in America, both of them can still speak Hindi and they don't even have an American accent. I feel really lucky that I've maintained that and with my grandparents there, I know I can only speak in Hindi so I try a lot harder to.
These experiences of split socialization reinforce Asian Indian youths’ identity as ethnically and racially distinct from their white counterparts. Despite their “honorary white” status in the school system, primarily as a result of racial school tracking, they are still viewed as “forever foreign” by their white peers, resulting in a unique form of social exclusion.

*Lunchboxes & Unibrows: Experiences of Social Exclusion and “Othering” at School*

Among the 1.5 generation of Asian Indian youth, experiences of social exclusion are defined within the realm of cultural belonging. As opposed to an explicit spatial exclusion from mainstream American (e.g. white, upper-middle class) spaces, Asian Indian youth instead become more sentient of the informal racial boundaries of their honorary whiteness. While most of my respondents are in the same classes and extracurricular activities as their white, native-born counterparts and have predominantly white or Asian social networks, they confront salient experiences of “othering” and being made to feel different, and are in this way excluded from particular circles of cultural belonging. Such instances of cultural exclusion often involve class and gender-specific dimensions.

Asian Indian youth of this generation often find themselves at a disadvantage among peer groups due to distinct levels of cultural capital (e.g. knowing what brands of clothes to buy, being able to recognize certain pop culture references, etc.). Hamsa described a lack of cultural competency in his interactions at school, “They played *Mulan* in class in ninth grade and I was the only one who had not seen it. We had a substitute teacher that day and he was like, “Everyone has seen this movie, right?” People in the classroom knew I wouldn’t have seen the movie and they said my name out loud and I was like, “How did you know I haven’t seen this movie?” In this incident, not only is Hamsa confronted with her ethnically distinct identity, her status as “forever foreign” is also reified.
The “lunchbox narrative,” as one respondent called it—the experience of bringing a particular kind of “ethnic” food to school for lunch and being made to feel different as a result—was a common among the Asian Indian youth in my sample. As food is an integral part of culture and lunch is a ritualized occurrence at schools, respondents often cited this experience as being the first time they truly felt culturally excluded within their peer groups. Shubham, a South Indian respondent shares:

_Shubham_: I think something that everyone who has immigrated to the U.S. as a kid can understand is the food issue of like when you’re first in school, you bring different foods than everyone else and you feel kind of like outed.

_Nairuti_: Outed?

_Shubham_: Like outed as an other. Like seen as not normal.

_Nairuti_: Was there a specific time when that happened to you?

_Shubham_: I was in first grade in upstate New York. My mom would pack me lunches and they were great but I guess they had a non-Western odor to them, which I thought smelled great, but I guess for some people it doesn’t. Which is fine. And so that’s like a negative experience.

This experience of “coming out as ethnic” is well founded in the literature on Asian Indian youth culture (Maira 2002). However, it is described as a ritualistic process that occurs voluntarily in colleges as a result of “ethnic student organizations and social relationships…[that are] supported by a multiculturalist vision of ethnic identity and difference” (2002:108). The involuntary characteristic of Shubham’s “outing” can have damaging and lasting effects. Not only do these experiences lack a multicultural framework that appreciates diversity and preaches acceptance,
they also reinforce societal racial boundaries on Asian Indian youth, further convincing them of their difference and the devaluation of their culture by mainstream (white) Americans.

**Gender and class**

Body and beauty images were other bases for exclusionary experiences, especially for young Asian Indian women. Highly influenced by the predominantly white feminine imagery rampant in American media, Asian Indian women feel obliged to abide by and consume white beauty standards, stereotypically represented by straight, blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin. Thanvi recollects, “I remember I would go to school with two pigtails or two braids everyday so one time someone commented on it and so I made my mom stop doing it.” Oftentimes, young Indian American females internalize white beauty standards and, thus, feel driven to suppress or seek to modify ethnic physical characteristics (e.g. straightening their hair, wearing colored contacts, using bleach-based product in their skin care regimens). Samya recalls:

For me it was kind of being bullied in middle school. You know how in gym class you have to wear those kinds of shorts, right? A lot of, you know, white girls—you couldn’t see the hair on their skin, you know? It was a lot of self-esteem and body issues that maybe caused me to act up a little more. You know, the concept of shaming is not something that people did, but I do remember his name. There was this group of guys that just made fun of me in gym class for that and that caused me to go home one day and...this is a testament to my determination or my stubbornness...but I spent a few hours cutting every hair off my body with scissors. Not even like a razor. And there were these little cuts all over my legs and it wasn’t that bad, but it was obvious to anyone that looked at me that I spent hours taking scissors and cutting off every hair follicle. But my mom was like, “What are you
doing?!” And I tried so hard to hide it from her, but she found out anyway.

Tara, a light-skinned North Indian female, shares her first encounter with female whiteness:

_Tara_: I remember people pulling at my hair because it was black and nobody else had black hair. I remember one time this kid called me a monkey.

_Nairuti_: Oh my goodness, why?

_Tara_: I don’t know, just because I was brown, I guess. I don’t really know. I remember I wanted to change my name to Katie because of my teacher. I was in love with her. _laughs_. Her name was Katie and I was like I want to be Katie too! My parents will make fun of me for that. I wanted to just be her!...You know a French manicure? Like how it makes your nails white? My fifth grade teacher…had a French manicure all the time. I genuinely thought that, since I was brown, I had brown nails. And white people had white nails. I remember thinking that was so cool. I was so jealous! Later, I realized that it’s just the nail polish. _laughs_. And that was in fifth grade, so clearly not very bright.

Tara quickly moved from talking about a blatant experience with racism—one in which she was likened to an animal—to talking about her experiences with a white femininity is striking. Not only does it demonstrate an internalization of and an unwillingness to confront her racialized experience as a Brown woman in the United States, it also exposes the consequent adoration for all that is white as a potential “fix” for racial discrimination. Her recollection of her teacher’s French manicure in particular, as a consumptive practice and commodity (Bettie 2003), also demonstrates her recognition of and grappling with symbols that represent mainstream upper-middle-class, female whiteness. For Asian Indian men and women such performances of class are inextricably linked with performances of being American. For young girls, performances of class are particularly associated with cultural consumption (Bettie 2003) like getting a French
manicure, knowing what brands to wear or living in a large, single-family house where they are able to host sleepovers or causal hangouts.

For Asian Indian men, class-based performances of “Americanness” counter the dominant image of the emasculated Asian male that is so often perpetuated in American media. Asian Indian male respondents, in an effort to establish their masculinity to me, as a female-identifying interviewer, were less likely to open up and more likely to use humor as a self-defense mechanism when addressing more emotionally charged topics of belonging and inclusion than their female counterparts. Frequently, they shared stories of their participation in sports or other dangerous and deviant activities like sneaking out of the house at night, driving without their parents’ permission, or engaging in alcohol or drug use—activities commonly associated with white masculinity. Take, for example, Shyam, who felt his class-oriented masculinity, and consequently his “Americanness,” threatened at a graduation party hosted by a white male friend:

I went over to his party and I realized like, oh shoot, I might actually not be American. I might be brown or Indian…I walked in and I’ve always had a sense of like I’m different but I always had someone to be different with…But it was just a totally different group of people. Everyone dressed almost the exact same. Kind of like very preppy, very high class…And seeing that and seeing the people there I was like, Wow, I am not supposed to be here. This is not my party…It was the most intense feeling because I came from my car where I was jamming out to Indian tunes…And it went from…zero to a hundred…And that compounded by there was no other ethnic group there. I was the only ethnic person. There was like one Asian dude. Like Oriental guy. We stuck together for a little while…but man, that time was like the biggest, starkest example [of feeling different].
Because I don’t ever see myself…like I never look at my skin and think, oh shoot, I’m brown. I’ve always felt comfortable. If I didn’t feel comfortable, I would find a way to be comfortable. That was like the one time I couldn’t find a way to be comfortable… […] That was the first time I realized that I was actually different. = […] I was walking around, I could see that people were looking at me differently…I felt kind of like a person on display.

In this narrative, we see the complexity of social exclusion as experienced by Asian Indian youth as “honorary whites.” While Shyam is granted admission into this “privileged space” of upper-middle class whiteness, he observes the consumptive practices of those around him, suggesting that he may not perhaps have the financial, or even cultural, capital to engage in similar consumer behavior. However, as his account of the party continues, we observe that his lack of spatial ownership is a result of the overwhelming presence of whiteness, which then becomes inextricably tied to his understanding of class. Asian Indian youth like Shyam often find themselves cognizant of their racial difference in such white spaces. This abrupt lifting of the “veil” (DuBois 1903) for Shyam results in a kind of cognitive dissonance, as he is unable to bridge the divide between his privileged class status and oppressed racial position.

Responses to Exclusion: Accommodation to Resistance

As a response to these exclusionary encounters, Asian Indian youth negotiate identity in a variety of different ways on a spectrum of accommodation to resistance. Accommodation involves accepting the upper-middle class whiteness as the norm and adapting behaviors and attitudes to acculturate to the mainstream. Asian Indian youth use the specific term “whitewashing” to refer to this reaction. For example, in response to other students making fun
of his ethnic lunches, Shubham chose to “whitewash” himself, or adopt mainstream cultural practices.

_Nairuti_: Did that change your behavior in any way? After that experience, I mean.

_Shubham_: Yeah, absolutely. I guess that’s the moment I would consider myself, and I imagine a lot of other people, to start Westernizing and whitewashing themselves because I feel like food is such a central part to culture that it forces people to adapt to it. So from then on, I ate whatever white people ate, like PBJ I guess, like every single day. *laughs.* Yeah, it definitely forced my hand at becoming less Indian.

_Nairuti_: Whitewashing…what does that mean to you?

_Shubham_: Replacing, I guess, traditional characteristics with those of Western culture. So I guess an example would be food: you stop bringing traditional food in. You start bringing in more, quote unquote, white people food.

However, meanings of whitewashing are often contested, specifically by Asian Indian women, for whom the term “whitewashed” also refers to forms of intra-ethnic social control.

Indeed, the term “whitewashed”, and its counterpart, “FOB” or “Fresh Off the Boat,” is a “symbolic device used to create meaning, mark and maintain internal social boundaries, and control social behavior among co-ethnic peers” (Pyke and Dang 2003:155). While all respondents understood or had personally interacted with the term “whitewashed” before, in the interviews female respondents had more of a visceral reaction to the term:

_Nairuti_: What does whitewashed mean to you?

_Sravani_: I think it’s just a dumb, dumb label. Like you said, what does American mean? I think America is a composition of every culture and every nation and when you say whitewashed it puts a certain tone of superiority on white people, which is also a terrible
label because there are white people that are not American. So you just need to learn to find that differentiation. It’s just something that always irked me when I was younger. Like I’m not white. What do you expect me to talk like? Should I have an accent? I grew up in America. Why would you call me whitewashed? You know what I mean?

*Nairuti*: Do you remember the first time somebody called you that?

*Sravani*: No, I have no clue, but it’s something I hear all the time. When I first meet people and they don’t know me, they’re like, Oh Shruti, she’s like not [Brown enough]...I don’t have a lot of Indian friends or stuff like that, but I don’t think that affects who I am. Also Indian people are so dramatic, [*laughs and rolls eyes*].

For female Asian Indians acculturation is associated with sacrificing their purity, while for men whitewashing is considered to be simply striving to adopt a more masculine identity. This understanding is common among young Indian American men as well. Aadithya explains whitewashed:

If people did consider me whitewashed, it would be...you usually hear that term thrown around when something antagonistic happens towards someone’s other culture. Like if...someone called me whitewashed, it would be because I had done something that looked antagonistic to Indian culture. Most situations it comes across when an Indian American girl goes back to India to visit and she’s wearing a skirt and they’re like...what?! And that’s it.

As women historically bear the burden of cultural reproduction, the use of the term “whitewashed” renders Asian Indian women culpable for their loss of cultural authenticity. When confronted with the term, Samya, like many other female respondents, is quick to justify her commitment to Indian culture, specifically through religion:
The term “whitewashed” is such a relative thing because to many people, I would seem whitewashed. But to a lot of [other] people, I’m not at all. Understanding what whitewashed means [is to] understand what white means and white can mean so many different things. White can be a stand-in for being American. White can be a socioeconomic thing. It can stand for the dominant group, what the dominant group does. For me, I’ve always viewed being whitewashed as being what the dominant group does. So for me, being Indian doesn’t mean doing what the dominant group does. As you adopt things that are more mainstream, I think you become a little more whitewashed. When you come to the United States, you can speak your language pretty fluently, but over time, that deteriorates, and you adopt what the dominant culture does, which is speaking English, so in that way, I have maybe become whitewashed but in other ways, probably not. The religious customs I practice at home are not what the dominant group practices, which is Christianity.

For Samya and many other respondents who see the acculturation process as a spectrum, this dichotomous understanding of identity and identity formation imposed upon them by family and peer groups is restrictive. Revealed here are mechanisms that operate within the Asian Indian immigrant community that often pigeonhole youth of the 1.5 generation into narrow conceptualizations of Indian and American, forcing them to choose between one or the other.

**Whitewashing as a means of accommodation—gendered rebellion**

Another dimension of whitewashing as a means of accommodation among respondents was rebellion—a practice that intentionally subverted Asian Indian young men’s ethnic identities of docile and emasculated Asian children who always listened to their parents. These deviant acts served as performances of the values they associated with being American—values of
freedom and agency to act independent of cultural or familial restrictions. However, much like their female counterparts, while they participated in deviant, or white behavior, they were sure to continue to achieve highly in schools. Ram, for example, enjoyed spending time with his friends, doing things of which his parents would certainly not approve. He recalls:

I remember senior year, our salutatorian invited our research class to come over for a bonfire...I actually got to drive there. My parents let me stay there. That was my first experience with people outside my parents’ house. It was interesting because it was a new experience because they had alcohol and weed there. I hadn’t smoked before then. A lot of the kids from our class that went to [various highly-ranked universities in Virginia] were there. His parents’ barbecued for us and we just sat around a bonfire and roasted marshmallows.

When he mentioned his experience smoking for the first time, he made clear eye contact with me, so as to seek a certain approval from me, but when I responded with a blank expression, encouraging him to continue his story, he averted his eyes and ended his account quickly, with a quick tidbit about the parental guidance that was present and the “chaste” events that pursued. This reaction to my lack of one demonstrates a yearning for ethnic authenticity in the face of others he considers “ethnically authentic” (i.e. academically successful, maintains explicit ties with Indian culture, etc.). Many respondents had reacted in a similar way, making remarks about my commitment to the culture by means of academic research. The space in which Ram participated the deviant behavior of smoking pot can also represent a sort of continuation of his ethnically-rooted values of family and hard work. For example, he was still in a space with highly successful students and that space was surveilled, to a certain extent, by students’ parents, demonstrating strong, family values.
Some males described constructing a hyper-masculine self as a form of rebellion against the predominant image of the emasculated Asian Indian male in popular culture.

_Samir_: High school actually got the wilder side of me…there was less restriction. Being on a sports team, you not only meet other people but you feel like there aren’t any limits to what you’re doing. I wouldn’t say I made poor choices, but I definitely did things out of my comfort zone and I’m glad I did because those were beneficial experiences for me. I don’t know…exhilarating?

_Nairuti_: What were some of these experiences?

_Samir_: Starting sophomore year, I would sneak out of my house a lot and just hang out with friends. Really a non-exhilarating thing to do. I had always been by the book and my parents were obviously kind of hawks as well. The summers—that’s what I remember about high school so much. It was leaving the house and texting a bunch of people from classes and being like, do you want to go to the pool tonight, do you want to go biking, or do you want to go to the canal because we live by the river. Just doing random stuff, not really thinking about it. I think I reverted back to my old middle school self right now because in middle school, I used to think about stuff a lot but in high school, I stopped doing that entirely but now I’m back to overthinking everything. It was nice to have four years of not really being by the book.

Sneaking out of the house at night without parental permission was a common theme among many of my male respondents. While Asian Indian youth constantly engage in this sort of identity switching (Maira 2002), toeing the line between Brown and white, they never cross these racial borders, for if they do, they are quickly shunned as “whitewashed” by their co-ethnic peers. For Asian Indian women especially, any hint of crossing the line between Brown and
white (e.g. not being able to speak their native language as Sravani mentions, wearing revealing attire as Aadithya articulates, being a part of a sorority like Tara) can result in a permanent label of “whitewashed”.

However, not all respondents responded to experiences of exclusion through accommodation. Others sought to maintain what they saw as a level of ethnic authenticity by preserving their ethnic and national identities. By maintaining transnational ties to India through ritualized visits over the course of the academic year, respondents engaged in a sort of cultural preservation.

*Vacationing in the Homeland: The Influence of Transnational Ties*

Transnationalism, as first used in the context of migration by Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, is a “process by which migrants, through their daily life activities create social fields that cross national boundaries” (1994:7). A process inextricably linked with globalization, transnationalism has offered migrants the opportunity to stay in touch with their home cultures in a variety of ways. Much research has been done on the relationship between first generation immigrants and their countries of origins. Many of those immigrants kept in contact with families and close friends back home in the form of financial remittances. These close ties with their countries of origin fostered the development of transnational identities among the first generation (Basch et al. 1994). Aided by the proliferation of social media and more accessible and easy-to-use forms of telecommunication, several of my 1.5 generation respondents described ways that they maintained transnational ties with their homeland. Facebook, Skype, and Whatsapp were common tools respondents used to stay in touch with friends and family in India. In his recollection of his grandparents, for example, Shyam notes that keeping in touch via regular phone calls helps him to feel close to them. Major holidays (both
Indian and American), birthdays, and other life events (e.g. weddings, funerals) were marked occasions that families would commemorate by communicating over a technological device or by traveling to India in-person. These ritualized visits, often taken once every academic year, served as reinforcement mechanisms for familial and other broader social networks in India. Though almost always fond memories among my respondents, frequent visits to India epitomized Asian Indian youth’s difference as compared to their white, upper-middle class native-born peers who did more than simply visit family over their summer breaks. At the same time, however, these trips afforded a strengthening of cultural ties as a source of strength and resilience in face of social exclusionary practices in the United States.

Exoticized nostalgia and alienation

Shyam, fond of visiting family members in South India, shares a typical experience when he goes to someone’s house in India, demonstrating the ritualized nature of these visits:

So when you go to someone’s house, it’s always a like a mini-festival in a way. It’s always, “Wow, you’re here! Let’s do a small pooja quickly”. There’s always a mountain of food, always a ton of beverages, snacks, and sweets…We would sit down and they would say, “Wow, you grew up! You’re so different now. You were this little kid!” I don’t remember any of the stories they tell me but they tell me stories about me growing up, about them growing up, and the entire time it’s this childhood trip for them. They’ll go down memory lane and they’ll talk about me and their family, what’s going on in their neighborhood or community. But for the most part, it’s just as if you were visiting a regular friend’s house. Just like talking for hours.
While respondents often associate these trips as some of their fondest memories growing up, they are often a demonstration of what Sunaina Maira (2002) terms a “legacy of nostalgia”. Explicitly writing about second-generation, Indian American youth, she writes: “their [returns to India] are often marked, in the diaspora, by a ‘nostalgia without memory.’ There is a indeed a collective memory, but it is a recreated popular memory based on a myth of pure origins—a yearning to recover a presumed missing link—that is historical, cultural, and personal” (2002:113). Essentially, though respondents of the 1.5-generation may have faint memories of their hometowns from before their initial departure, during these “vacations,” they create memories laced with romanticized imagery of what becomes a foreign place. When asked what first comes to mind when she thinks of India, Thanvi responds, almost instinctively: “I don’t know why, but I thought of the village I went to once. It’s just the first thing I see. Land and trees, like mango trees.”

She continues:

I think it’s where my dad was originally from, but I had never been there except for that one time in the ninth grade. I remember…I don’t know…I expected something completely different. But the houses were so nice and calm. The whole village was so calm and pretty. And the people were so nice and welcoming. We went into this relative’s house but like I didn’t know who they were. Me and my brother were silently sitting there and they took us into the backyard and they had a bunch of mango trees and fruits just there. There was a wall and a bunch of land they were planting on and you could see the river from there. It was so cool. It was just so cool because I’d never actually seen something like a village scene.
This depiction of her father’s ancestral homeland, though beautiful, adopts an Orientalist\textsuperscript{20} gaze, one that is, in essence, the exoticized antithesis of the West. Thanvi glamorizes her description of the visit, embellishing it with charming images of mango trees, calm houses, and river. It’s almost as if we’ve entered a whitewashed dreamland. Ram and Shyam also echo Thanvi’s description:

\textit{Nairuti}: What’s the first thing that comes to mind when you think of India?


\textit{Shyam}: Uh…the first thing that comes to mind to mind is closeness. Because of family and the culture there, closeness is how I would describe it. You know when you smell something and it brings back a memory, it’s really vivid, right? So here, if I smell poppy seeds or some kind of sense from India like immediately I feel comfortable. I feel like myself. It kind of calms me down in a way. In a way, comfort and closeness is the best way I can describe it.

So why do these respondents all share this fetishistic fascination with India, their country of origin, even though, unlike many of their second generation counterparts, they are attune to local realities and have experienced, either personally or through the recollections and storytelling of their parents, many of the hardships of their relatives still in India?

I propose that these ritualistic returns to India, though relished, to a certain extent, by the 1.5 generation, are often alienating experiences. While their white American peer groups spend their summers at adventurous summer camps or on luxurious family vacations, they may feel restless among family members or family friends with whom they have little in common. Samir,
who moved to the States when he was five years old from New Delhi, recalls his last visit to India.

So everyone on my mom’s side of the family is back in Delhi and I think seeing that once in a while is really refreshing because, you know, you have a lot of friends who are born here, they have their relatives here, so they get to see their grandparents whenever they want, maybe on the weekends too. I never really had that experience so seeing grandparents or other relatives was like, you know, a really special experience. And it was the same thing on my dad’s side too…I guess the past couple of years we’ve been going to India mostly for weddings…and traveling. I think the last India trip we had, it was my cousin’s wedding and after we were done, we ended up going on a temple tour for three or four weeks all around India, like historical sites. Everyone in my family loves that kind of stuff so that’s what we try to aim for. Talking to relatives, we try to spend maybe like a week doing it, but it gets a little boring and repetitive, I think, so we try to hit as many places as we can, like the touristy stuff.

Even though Samir feels a longing for his relatives (as compared to his native-born friends who generally have more geographic access to their families), he admits to feeling bored when he’s around them, preferring to tour around. Many other respondents expressed a similar dissatisfaction, yearning to tour, thereby collecting more enticing memories of this mystical world; one respondent even calls her love for India and its culture “a weird fascination.” These struggles to understand India and its vast cultural narratives are all a part of this alienation associated with transnational ties.

So I don’t remember what [my hometown] was [like] back then, but the past two times I visited, it just keeps getting bigger and bigger. I remember the first time I saw a mall in
India and it was just so different. I remember when I went when I was ten years old versus the new mall that they constructed…it was just…the new mall was better then some of the malls that I’ve been to here! Like the old one was like…you know in movies they show you like towers of shops in the middle of slums? That’s what it was like. The transition was crazy.

Maira describes this phenomenon: “While some second-generation youth idealized India as a mythical place of origin, for others the nostalgia projected onto India as the embodiment of authentic culture was disrupted by the realities of cultural change apparent on their visits there” (2002:116). In this example, it’s almost as if Thanvi expects India to remain this pure, golden, exotic land that exists for her amusement. By intentionally exoticizing their experiences in India and sharing stories of Oriental marvels, Asian Indian youth subconsciously cater to the fetishes of her white peers, thereby accommodating an understanding of a India as foreign and different.

_Ethnic maintenance and cultural preservation as resistance_

Others, like Samya, who moved to the United States when she was five years old and was naturalized recently during her freshman year of college, going back to India served as a kind of imposed cultural cleanse—a way to combat, and even resist, the exclusion she was feeling in middle school. She recalls this experience, about which—she later confided—she had never spoken with anyone else:

So like middle school sucks, right? It sucks for everyone…You know, I wanted to fit in. My parents were not really pleased with the fact that I was trying so hard to fit in. They weren’t pleased at the fact that I was less focused on my academics, like oh my gosh, there was one A-. You know?…So when first-generation Indian Americans talk about moving back to India, it was seen as a punishment for acting out, like their parents would
threaten to ship them back to India. But it wasn’t in a threatening sense for me, like this was something that should happen organically. Like it was mostly me acting up in middle school played a part in wanting to move us back to India…I think they could sense that I was drifting. But it’s also just spending so much time on looks and social stuff. Like I wanted them to buy me Abercrombie and Fitch and I wasn’t really talking about the important stuff, according to them. Like school…It wasn’t communicated very well to me, like my parents didn’t tell me why. They just said, “This is going to be good for you; this is just the first step to something.” Except I didn’t know what that something was.

For Samya, interestingly, going back to India for an extended, and perhaps unknown, period of time represented not a destabilizing force, but a way to reconnect with her roots.

Even though there was so much uncertainty because of the move, it ended up being the best thing that I really needed at that time, which I didn’t realize at all. But it was so good for my self-esteem, my self-confidence and getting focused on what really matters. Like academics and the people.

When her parents, after months of what she describes as anguish resulting from not having their kids with them, brought her and her sister back to the United States, the transition back “ended up being okay”. She elaborates:

I think the experience in India helped finding out who I was and centering me again and embracing my nerdiness a little bit more…I think that really helped my confidence too, knowing that I had that in me. I just liked seeing how motivated everyone was to learn and it wasn’t like what you’d think—like you had to learn, but being in that environment was probably good at that age, being focused on learning, even though it’s kind of forced, but everyone is in it together.
For Samya, though her time in India was a direct result of an exclusionary experience (brutally shaving her legs to conform to White beauty standards), her sentiments of feeling “cleansed” after a visit to India are echoed among many respondents. These ritualized visits often serve a source of stability during the tumultuous time of adolescent identity formation. They provide a source of cultural preservation that youth use as a way of countering and, in effect, resisting the devaluation of their culture by the white mainstream. In this vein, Samya concludes:

I think now, I value my experience in India a lot more. I think about moving back a lot. I think seeds for that were set in high school. I often think back to how I can contribute to India a lot. I just think about it in the back of my head, but don’t know how that will pan out. I want to see if…like my parents took a bold step in coming here, so could I take the bold step of going back?

Choosing Just One: Downplaying Experiences of Discrimination and Social Exclusion

In his work on Asian American professionals, Pawan Dhingra (2007) notes how the first generation often downplays experiences of discrimination and social exclusion as a way of combatting the myth of the “yellow peril” and accommodating their behaviors and attitudes to those of the mainstream. However, he clarifies,

their response did not grow out of a naïve embrace of the United States as a free and welcoming society, nor out of a bitter resentment toward it with strong opposition to whites. They recognized that they were wanted primarily for labor but believed that they had attained a respectable class and racial status as the model minority. They hoped to inch up in progress by building on their accomplishments, rather than [by] challenging the system directly (2007:49).
In a similar vein, my respondents downplay discriminatory practices that they experience as a strategy of accommodation. For example, respondents who did share traumatic experiences frequently chalked them up to learning moments or opportunities to build character. Thanvi shares how she developed strategies to contend with these kinds of hurtful experiences:

Thanvi: I don’t think I've ever felt [discriminated against]. It also was like a personal thing because I learned. I grew a very big shell when I was younger, not because like anything happened, but because me and my dad are like the same person in terms of personalities so I grew up blunt and confident of myself. It would be hard to tear me down kind of. I wouldn’t let things bother me quickly, so I don't think even think if someone did try to say something, I would take it seriously.

Nairuti: Do you remember a specific instance where you demonstrated that part of your personality?

Thanvi: I think there was that one time when I had taken roti or something to lunch and this one kid that I didn't get along with said something about it. I told him, if I can eat it without crying, what's the problem? And then he never told me anything about my food ever.

This idea of having a thick shell or being able to handle discriminatory incidences was a common thread among many interviews. Others, like Sravani, would downplay the instance of racial harassment itself, saying things like, “I don’t know if I would call it bullying”, and eventually stop calling attention to such experiences entirely. She says, “I didn't really talk about it because I didn’t feel comfortable expressing what culture I came from. I would usually just pretend that we were all the same so I wouldn't really talk about it in school or with my friends.” But, while the first generation wanted nothing more than to simply fit into “dominant institutions
that advanced mobility and [avoid] the stereotypes of the unaccommodating minority” (Dhingra 2007:50)—the 1.5 generation’s reasoning for adapting similar methods is unclear. Perhaps it is because they, like their second generation counterparts, “believed that even though they may have been treated as minorities, they were not equivalent to [other minorities] because of their hard work, their acculturation, and their educational drive” (Dhingra 2003:131); essentially, they believed they did not deserve it, and consequently identified racism to “come only from prejudiced individuals, not to be an endemic problem within a meritocratic United States” (2003:118). While we expect the 1.5 generation’s experience within the education system to inform a feeling of belonging and critical engagement with the structural inequities in the United States, it does not and consequently, we see a downplaying of explicit experiences of racial harassment.

Segmented assimilation theory maintains the socioeconomic status of an immigrant group upon arrival plays a significant role in the socioeconomic outcomes of the second generation (Portes and Zhou 1993). As a result of the “specific cultural frame about achievement and success that is supported by public and ethnic resources [of the first generation], reinforced in institutional contexts, and buttressed by social psychological processes,” the 1.5 and second generation of Asian Indian immigrants does indeed ‘move up’ in American society (2015:8). However, as Park (2005) describes “All too often, studies of immigrant ethnic identity formation, work and labor, education attainment, and family, singularly focus on how well a particular immigrant group is absorbed into the United States. This traditional framework leaves little room for the critical assessments of the social hierarchy itself” (1). As segmented assimilation theorists posit, the upward mobility of an immigrant group occurs within a bifurcated economy—one of the “haves” and the “have-nots.” However, what does this supposed upward mobility mean for a
group that is often excluded from mainstream American society as “forever foreign” (Tuan 1998)?

Though almost all of my respondents’ parents were indeed hyper-selected, many of them were beneficiaries of the H-1B visa program. There is a distinct, class-specific divide between those whose parents took jobs that were considered to be within the trajectory of their education in India and those who took whatever jobs were available to them. The latter group struggled much more, both financially and socially. In Park’s (2005) study of ethnic entrepreneurship among Korean immigrants, she argues that the upward mobility of “poor, uneducated immigrants with nothing but their determination and ‘family values’” influences how their second-generation children talk about the outcomes of their parents (3). We can use this narrative of class-based mobility to perhaps begin to understand why 1.5 generation Asian Indian youth whose parents embodied this entrepreneurial spirit are perhaps more inclined to believe in the possibility of upward mobility. So, while we would expect this group to believe in the American dream—they’ve seen it happen—we would not expect the group whose parents settled for lower-level jobs to do so.

Ram sits across the table from me, proud. He understands hardship—he’s been through it. Co-ethnic struggles from the onset of his family’s time in the United States, a foreclosure that dropped his parents’ credit score. But, at the end of the day, it was, for him, a sort of initiation into being American. When asked to reflect on the American aspect of his hyphenated Indian American identity, he says:

American…[it’s like] living here and all the freedoms you get. Just the people and being surrounded by people that are so motivated. When you hear about American history, you just marvel at its magnificence. Everything that America has built and being a part of that
is why I would consider myself American. Like all the values we learn about in school…Also like coming here, my parents being able to come here and work their butts off to be something and America allowing such a thing, you know, I want to be a part of that. I also want to have those same experiences. I don’t want anything handed to me. I want to work my way up. I feel like that’s a pretty significant part of being American, like the American Dream kind of thing.

The “American Dream”—an age-old, ubiquitous narrative that lauds those who pull themselves up by their bootstraps and achieve high levels of socioeconomic success through hard work, strong family values, and an intrinsic, and sometimes seemingly cultural, drive to succeed.

Throughout the interview, Ram speaks fondly of his father, who finished nothing more than secondary school and a few years of an apprenticeship in electrical engineering in India and moved to the United States to provide “better opportunities” for Ram and his younger sister:

Right now, my dad continues to work for Popeye’s. His boss—she’s also Indian—she came here a long time before us. She married a doctor and that eventually gave her the resources to buy many stores. My dad started working with her and he went up from cleaning bathrooms and, next thing you know, he’s an employee, a training manager, and now he takes care of all her stores. He basically became a right-hand man, like he would do everything for all the stores.

Shyam narrates a similar story, one of his father, son of a factory worker, who, despite all odds, graduated from a top university in Hyderabad and moved to the United States, bringing along with him his wife and only son.

So my dad is from Hyderabad, you know, big town, South India…He grew up with his grandparents, his parents, he got his Bachelor’s, and he worked in India for a while [with
his parents in a factory]. My mom grew up in a village. She grew up with her parents, got her associate’s degree, and then my parents met each other through a typical arranged marriage. Then they stayed in like a village, which is where I kind of grew up there for five years in India. So my parents were always very mellow. My dad is very outgoing and very outspoken. My mom is very mellow. She’s very quiet. But they’re both very smart people. And they are both insanely hard-working. Like to come all the way from India to America without any stones here. They moved on their own pretty much. They had financial support from my grandparents but the entire choice was theirs, like let’s go to America and have a different life. And so that’s how they got here.

Despite moving around from state to state for the first four years of his life in the United States, today, Shyam and his family live in an affluent town in Northern Virginia, where his father is the owner of a small Indian restaurant. While we would expect Shyam (as opposed to Ram), son of a hyper-selected father, to question his family’s positioning now (as his father does not work in a professional, white collar setting as he would be expected to do so with his degree), he does not. Instead, he reflects on his family’s “upward mobility” in the United States.

Growing up, Shyam recalls, his parents often spoke about their family’s financial hardship. Often times, he believed he was a part of the American middle class. It was not until his junior year of high school when he went to Washington D.C. for a conference, that he realized that he was upper middle class, with a “pretty stable life:”

I was dressed up, in a suit and everything. A friend of mine was like, “I want to see a friend of mine who lives in D.C. Do you want to peace out for a while because we still have two hours before the next part of the conference?” And here we are, two guys, in nice suits. Like really nice suits for high schoolers. So we went and took a train to
northwest D.C. And if you know anything about northwest D.C., it’s not a good part of town. It’s a really bad part of town. I was walking down and I was like, wow, this is insane. When I was growing up, I used to live in these kinds of neighborhoods. Neighborhoods that weren’t a good part of town. The schools were really low class. But I was really young, so I didn’t understand. But once I saw this junior year, I realized like, oh shoot, this is where I grew up. This is where we moved away from. And the people who lived in these neighborhoods were just struggling to get by...I’m probably a lot better off than I think I am. Turns out I was. Turns out I was a hundred times better than I thought I was. I thought my parents were struggling because kids hear their parents talk about bills, being behind on payments. My parents did that a lot. But I realized, like, at least we could pay the bills. My house is nice. In a good neighborhood. We have a stable lifestyle. Seeing that, I was like oh, I’m upper middle class. There is no way I’m just middle class or could even begin to think I was lower class.

In this narrative, we see Shyam gain class consciousness, one in which he becomes aware not only of his class status, as it stands in opposition to the status of another, but also of his (and, to an extent, his family’s) experience of upward mobility in the United States. Perhaps it is this understanding of social status and awareness of social mobility that prompts Indian-born children of immigrants to believe so strongly in the possibility of the American dream. Though most literature criticizes the American dream narrative (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Maira 2002, 2009; Park 2005; Dhingra 2012), its continual presence in the lives of Asian Indian immigrants, specifically of this generation, is worth understanding. How do Asian Indian immigrant youth’s understandings of the American dream narrative influence its construction and perpetuation within their communities? And finally, what factors influence its continual presence?
Take for example, Samya’s family—her father completed both a master’s degree and a PhD at two separate Indian Institutes of Technology (Kharagpur and Madras, respectively), the most prestigious public institutes in India, while her mother completed her master’s degree in management. Additionally, both sides of the family are littered with high-profile professionals. Today, Samya’s parents work in the IT industry—her father for Fannie Mae and her mother for the federal government, in defense. She recalls that her family struggled during their first few years in the U.S., which was unexpected considering the high level of human capital with which they had come; they moved frequently and only had one car.

*Nairuti:* What are some of the first memories when you first moved to the US?

*Samya:* We lived in apartments basically for most of our lives. Living in apartments, I didn’t think it was weird until I learned that people who lived here for longer got, you know, single-family houses. But, interestingly enough, I think that played a role socially because other kids would go to each others houses for parties and they would be friends with each other and like, with me, it was always weird to call people over to celebrate things so my friendships just kind of stayed in school like I would have my friends that lived in the same apartment complex but friends from school didn’t really come…Most of my time in the very early years of elementary school in New Jersey, we would just take really long walks back from school because my mom couldn’t drive back then like super far to the library. Lot of reading, lot of walking. Walking to the grocery store. Walking to the roller skating place so we could play. Walking to my elementary school even. My dad had a car but he would take it to work.

Even after her parents had achieved a certain level of integration within the U.S. class-based structure (Park 2005), they felt as though they had perhaps not achieved enough. Often times,
first generation immigrants come with high hopes and expectations of a new life in America. Once they arrive, they become more conscious of the racial inequalities that persist in the United States (Waters 1999). However, because their lives, primarily financially, in the United States are better, even if marginally so, they do not question the existing structures. They continue to work hard, knowing that with their accents and cultural habitudes, they will never be able to truly assimilate into American culture. The second generation, on the other hand, born and raised in the United States (and socialized in American schools) expects a certain level of acceptance from their native-born, specifically white, American peers (Dhingra 2003). For this generation, India is a more abstract part of their cultural heritage (Maira 2002) while America is their homeland, a land in which they have achieved just as highly, if not more, than their white peers.22

The 1.5 generation holds a unique position in that, for them, India is more than a figment of their cultural past; many of them do truly consider it to be their homeland. They also remember the hardships their parents went through at the time of the move because they themselves also lived through them. But, despite these recollections, Asian Indian youth of the upper-middle class, still adopt a discourse that affirms the American Dream narrative. When asked what being American means to her, Samya, a college-educated female trained to be critical of social structures, still responds, with a glint of admiration in her eyes:

That’s something I’ve always appreciated—the aspect of self-determination in the United States. And I think that’s what it is to most people. For me…it is the land of opportunity. You know, the fact that your parents, my parents came with very little money in their suitcases, like not much capital, that story is not really possible in most places. Being American is making something out of yourself. Not being judged as harshly as you would
be in other places for pursuing your dreams. The fact that you can succeed as long as you work hard.

Why is it that despite lived experiences of socioeconomic stagnation or even, sometimes, downward mobility, these youth still believe in the “rags to riches” narrative? Why is it that this group of immigrant youth with legal ties (in the form of birthright citizenship, or *jus soli*), as opposed to simply cultural or social ties like their second generation counterparts, to their country of origin, expresses such a close connection to an understanding of “American values?” Why do these individuals, despite the knowledge they have of hardships faced by their parents and themselves, still believe in or buy into the American dream narrative? What are the consequences of this commitment to and sense of belonging associated with an “American” identity? I argue that the answer lies in the social institution of education, the primary site of socialization for this generation and the one in which, as a result of racialized tracking mechanisms, they interact the most with the mainstream of upper-middle class whiteness.

*Education and its Hidden Curriculum*

In this study, I argue that the American system of public education functions as a mechanism of racialized social control that forcefully mainstreams high-achieving Asian Indian youth of color into “fitting in” through hard work and perseverance. Buttressed by the labeling effects of the model minority stereotype and reinforced by street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980) like teachers, counselors, and administrators, Asian Indian youth experience what I term an *honorary integration* into the American public school system. While they have access to the same formal curriculum as their white, upper-middle class peers, the ideological teachings related to the “hidden curriculum,” the unspoken and unwritten curriculum that involves the teaching of cultural norms and values, vary.
So I think it was…second grade…I remember [my teacher] telling my mom that kids like me, that come from international backgrounds, if you push us hard enough, we can do really well. She said, “I see the potential in her. She’s catching on really well.” But I remember her saying that international kids need to be pushed a little harder and if you keep pushing them, they’ll keep doing better. And I was like, this lady doesn’t know anything about international kids. She’s…white. She was born here. She’s lived here all her life. How many international kids has she dealt with? And I remember her saying that and I remember feeling like oh yeah, okay, if you keep pushing me, I’ll keep doing better. And that’s when my mom made me take gifted and talented tests and stuff like that. I remember that being a moment where…I wasn’t that afraid to ask questions anymore. Even though her phrasing was a bit weird, it was nice that she saw potential in me. It made me feel smarter.

The parent-teacher conference that Tara describes clearly communicates the idea that success will result from hard work. It is interesting how quickly that frustration translates into a blind drive to succeed—a drive to keep working harder until she achieves the prized success her teacher promises. After this shift in trajectory and mindset that she experiences in second grade, Tara quickly becomes obsessed with succeeding in school and with receiving recognition. She explains: “Everything that was a high point was really related to academics. Academics were so important to me. More important to me than my friends. It was like school always came first.” Tara was not the only respondent that shared this internalized meritocratic worldview. Samya shares a similar experience,

There were a bunch of exams in school, but I remember one exam in particular in AP Chemistry, [which is] super nerdy [laughs]. My teacher was like, this the hardest unit.
Don’t be surprised if you score multiple percentage points lower. And when the results came out, I ended up getting the highest grade on it and I remember being pretty proud of that.

Even after her experiences with bullying in middle school, which drove her parents to send her back to India for an “ethnic cleanse” of sorts, she still believes that the United States is a land of opportunity in which “you can succeed as long as you work hard.”

For Asian Indian youth of this generation, the school does not serve as a slingshot to success. In their respective interviews, Ram and Samya clarify:

Ram: That’s when [middle school] they introduced Honors and Advanced Placement and how you can get ahead. And I’m sure every parent would want their kid to move forward or be at an accelerated pace. And same with my parents. They didn’t know that’s how the system worked…[but] their innate response was like, oh yeah, we want you on the accelerated path.

Samya: I just wanted to make a point. You know the whole notion that Asian Americans put their kids into all these extracurricular tutoring programs and things like that? And how Asian Americans are seen to be going ahead and taking challenging courses as a result? Sometimes that’s not always in the most favorable of lights. I read this article about how whites don’t want to send their kid to a predominantly Asian school because all the Asian American kids there will be ahead because they’re taking these extra, after-school tutoring to get ahead…[but] we’re not doing it to get ahead, we’re just doing it to keep up because our parents didn’t come with the knowledge to apply to college, what classes to take, how to answer questions and succeed in the American environment even though they may know the content of the curriculum.
Far from it, the school affords students like Samya and Raj a “way in,” as opposed to a “way up.” As Brown immigrant bodies, they understand the implications of the historical narratives of the “yellow peril” and the “War on Terror” (Maira 2009), and unlike their second generation counterparts (Dhingra 2003), accept, to a certain extent, their second-class citizenship in the United States. However, unlike their first generation counterparts, who are less likely to challenge the status quo (Dhingra 2007), these youth from the 1.5 generation do believe they have a right to equity (if not equality), especially if they are growing up and being socialized alongside their white, native-born peers. For them, success in school is not simply a “success frame” (Lee and Zhou 2015) imported from India, alongside their parents’ financial and ethnic capital. Instead, I argue, it is a frame, or a mindset, that is explicitly taught and reinforced in schools to urge immigrant students into believing in just the possibility of success. By intentionally allowing Asian Indian students into the white classroom, schools appear to be facilitating their racial integration. However, I argue that it is not simply sitting, playing, or studying alongside white peers that grants Asian Indian youth full access to American society. As we’ve seen in previous sections, interactions with white, upper-middle class youth in schools often serve as sites of tension, severely hampering and/or damaging the identity formation practices of Asian Indian youth and compromising cultural belonging. However, as we will see in this section, Asian Indian youth and their families internalize the meritocratic worldview imposed upon them by a variety of different actors and continue to achieve quite highly in the realms of school and work. In allowing them to achieve in this regulated manner (academically, though not always socially), the institution of education creates a space that is integrated only in name—while still maintaining a racialized and marginalized underclass of Black- and Brown-
bodied individuals that will, at the end of the day, never be able to achieve as highly as their white, native-born counterparts.

*Dimensions of honorary integration: citizenship and ELL*

The honorary integration of Asian Indian youth occurs in a variety of different ways. As the children of hyper-selected immigrants with strong English language capabilities and a clear path to citizenship, we see the Asian Indian youth in my study distinguish themselves from other immigrant groups in two distinct ways: with respect to their 1) legal status and 2) English language, and consequently, academic skills. In this way, schools produce an environment in which immigrant exceptionalist discourse is reproduced, thereby reinforcing an essentialist dichotomous understanding of immigrants—the “good, deserving” immigrants who enter legally, work hard, and make it versus the “bad, undeserving” immigrants who arrive in the United States illegally and are unwilling to assimilate (Chavez 2008), and overuse public benefits, like cash assistance and welfare. The integrated Asian Indian youth, as a result of their honorary status, serve as active agents in reinforcing these constructs, thereby deepening racial and ethnic divides.

Although celebrated in small ways, for example through the participation in the naturalization ceremony, acquiring naturalized citizenship is often understood by this group as a natural and expected part of the “fairly smooth” immigration process. However, it is important to note that those individuals that live in families in which some members are not naturalized citizens, but legal permanent residents, are quick to explain that their status as “non-citizens” is simply a delay in the bureaucratic process. While Sravani, her father, and her older brother are all citizens of the United States, her mother “is still” a Green Card holder and “waiting for her citizenship.”
My mom is still on her Green Card. She’s at the last part of the process before you receive your citizenship because when we were living in this other place when we first moved to Virginia, she was involved in a hit and run case that was really skeevy and done for money so that’s on her record, even though she was not guilty. So I think that slows down the process, but she’s the only one that’s waiting for her citizenship.

Unlike their undocumented counterparts, Asian Indian youth, privileged to be able to expect citizenship after a few years of participation in the national community, live far from liminal lifestyles (Gonzales 2016).

Another manifestation of this pattern of mainstreaming and inter-ethnic boundary making from other immigrant peer groups is visible in English Language Learning (ELL) programming—a federally-funded service to “improve the education of limited English proficient (LEP) children and youths by helping them learn English and meet challenging state content and achievement standards” (Virginia Department of Education 2017)—often viewed in a negative light in the Indian American community. Of the ten respondents, despite limited English language ability upon arrival, only four participated in an English Language Learning program, and none participated longer than two years. Among the 1.5 generation of Asian Indian youth, narratives of worried mothers opting their children out of language programming are common. Take, for example, Samya’s mother, who draws on the her own hyper-selectivity (and consequently English language capabilities) and on obtained cultural capital from co-ethnics who arrived prior to make a decision about whether or not to put her own daughter in English as a Second Language classes (ESL):

What I do remember is that my mom really pushed for me not to be in ESL. I had an older cousin, the one who graduated from Penn State and immigrated before us, and he
was kind of forced into ESL. And so at our family gatherings…my mom would always think…these are very basic things that they’re teaching right now. They’re not good enough. I don’t want Samya to be in that type of setting so she did whatever she could to prevent me from being in ESL.

This sense of pride among first generation parents and their 1.5 generation children in not needing or wanting “special treatment” is echoed by Hamsa, who recalled ESL programming being for those “who needed much more help than I did,” specifically those from Middle Eastern and South and Central American countries—“the Spanish-speaking countries.” She states, “I think I would learn better by being with normal people. Normal as in people who do not need special attention. I just wanted to be of the normal fourth graders versus someone who needs special attention.” By emphasizing English-speakers as “normal,” we see that Hamsa adheres to an understanding of English as central to the mainstreaming and assimilation process of schools and social control capabilities of her white and Asian Indian peer groups in the classroom.

Finally, three respondents shared experiences of being asked by teachers to serve as tutors in the ELL classroom. Shyam shares his volunteering experience as an ESL tutor in middle school,

I was supposed to do study hall for a while. Middle school was so easy though. I breezed through it. I was so bored…[and] once I got detention because I was dicking around. I talked to my student counselor and she was like, ‘Why are you screwing around?’ I was like, I don’t have any work. There is nothing challenging enough. So she put me in this program to help them out. It was boring as hell but it was also really fun. Something to do so I wasn’t sitting there literally daydreaming.
While Shyam was an immigrant himself, he worked with ESL students, noting how difficult it was for those students to succeed in that class. Schools, and more specifically the individual actors that operate within them like student counselors, often reproduce the inequalities that exist outside the classroom walls. In this example, by putting Shyam in the same classroom as ESL students but in a position of authority, the counselor reinforces the unequal power dynamics that result from immigrant exceptionalism. The influence of such actors—counselors, teachers, administrators—and their role in replicating unequal societal structures in the classroom will be discussed in the next section.

_Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators: Street-Level Bureaucrats_

As we understand and analyze “schools as sites of ideological production and reproduction,” we must understand that “actors [e.g. teachers, counselors, administrators, and/or peer groups] must elaborate [these] dominant ideologies” (Apple 1995:14). It would be misguided to believe that all teachers are nefarious ideologues out to brainwash immigrant children into becoming passive consumers of knowledge. Instead, drawing on Michael Lipsky’s concept of street-level bureaucrats—“public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work” (1980:3)—I hope to elaborate on the roles of teachers, counselors, and administrators as consistently present and active members of the institution of school who operate as agents who facilitate this honorary integration of Asian Indian youth.

Public schools serve as an extension of the state apparatus, and are thereby “accompanied by an extension of state influence and control” (Lipsky 1980:4). As actors of the state, administrators and teachers alike are expected to explain to their clientele (i.e. students and their parents) what their expectations of the institution should be. For example, most upper and middle
class students expect school to be a supportive and collaborative learning community that caters to the needs of each individual. For immigrant students, like Hamsa, school may be nothing more than a tool to continue along to the next milestone in American life. When asked if she had a favorite teacher or a favorite class, she responds, “No, not really. [The teachers] were all nice to me. I would just do my work and stay out of trouble.” Regardless, the client role (Lipsky 1980) explicitly taught to immigrant students conveys that they may only have high expectations of the system, if they are willing to work hard and catch the eye of a teacher or another staff member. Immigrant students quickly learn this:

_Nairuti:_ What were the interactions with your teachers like? Why was it so important to you to do well on exams?

_Samya:_ As a person, I think I just want to do the best I can and I am ambitious so that was an aspect of it. I knew that [these teachers] would be writing my recommendations for college too so it doesn’t hurt to do as best as you can in their classes. You know, most people at the end of junior year, you narrow down teachers who you want to write recs for you and that was always stuck in the back of my head and the fact that I did really well on these exams speaks to how well I can do in college. It was good for me to have them know that as well.

In this short example, we observe the transactional nature of students’ interactions with teachers. As opposed to continuous support systems that foster and create spaces of inclusion and belonging, teachers serve merely as gatekeepers to Asian Indian students’ academic success and achievement. It is important to remember that students are not passive actors in the system (Apple 1995); depending on their expectations of school (based on class as well as cultural and familial background) and its abilities to either encourage or inhibit their personal and
professional growth, they actively engage in such bureaucratized transactions in order to follow school-sanctioned routes to success (Bettie 2003).

However, students also understand that street-level bureaucrats are not to be held accountable for the institution’s failings. In this way, we often see students use the generalizable pronoun “they” to mean the system, absolving individual actors of guilt or accountability. Take, for example, Samir, who talks about his unforeseen participation in English Students of Other Languages (ESOL) programming in Maryland:

So when I first came to the States, they put me in ESOL. I know I was like the only person that had the same experience, but there were a lot of people from Israel in my first elementary school and they spoke English, I spoke English, my parents spoke it at home and everyone was picking up on it pretty easily, but they still put us in ESOL because we were still immigrants, technically, to the country. And the teacher knew it too but they just couldn’t do anything about it. Like there was a certain process we had to go through and the teacher couldn’t change it and no one else could so we kind of just dealt with it.

In this case, because Samir understands and accepts that the state classifies him as a “foreign,” the school (as an institution) will also see him as such despite his teacher’s understanding. However, state actors themselves are also individual actors, and personal biases and ideologies about particular racial-ethnic groups may result in discriminatory practices (Lipsky 1980).

For example, teachers may expect high levels of achievement from Asian Indian, immigrant students and understand and frame their interactions with them according to these expectations of success (Lipsky 1980; Lee and Zhou 2015). In this way, the model minority construct functions as both a threat (Steele and Aronson 1995) and a promise (Lee 2012). Asian Indian youth reported feeling pressured to constantly succeed or take Advanced Placement or
accelerated classes because they believed that was what was expected of them. At the same time, students’ meeting these expectations would lead teachers to understand all Asian Indian students as smart and hardworking, reproducing the narrative of the model minority. When I asked Samya if she had experienced the model minority phenomenon, she explained:

I feel like there are subtle ways; it’s not always overt. I think it’s benefited me more, like people have always given me the benefit of the doubt in terms of being perceived as smart. Like people look at me, they see I’m Indian, so they think I immediately know the answer to a question or like did well on an exam and sometimes I maybe didn’t, but people taking that I think is a benefit in some ways while someone else who is not Indian may not get that same perception. But the flip side is, people expect high-achieving things from me. So it works both ways.

Almost all respondents who had heard of the phenomenon described understanding that the notion of the model minority was problematic, but they also clearly understood the concrete ways in which they had benefited from this construct. Tara explains:

I remember my fifth grade teacher, everyone mocked her a lot…It was a really misbehaving kind of classroom and I didn’t do any of that. Because I was a very good girl. But I realized later that if I didn’t pass notes and stuff, no one was going to be friends with me. So I started passing some notes. But my teacher knew I was one of the better ones and she loved me as a result.

In this manner, teachers play a role in perpetuating this myth. From their interactions with teachers this group of students comes to understand the promise that their hard work will be rewarded.
Another subtle method of honorary integration in the school is award ceremonies. Many students shared their proudest moments as receiving certain accolades for their successful roles both in and out of the classroom. Ram notes that one of his motivations for volunteering at the dialysis center where his mom worked, was an award ceremony, demonstrating the subtle ways in which these students internalize expectations:

I think we [his family] were getting to the point where we realized we should probably do volunteer hours for college applications and things like that. But other than that, my parents didn’t know what we needed to do those things, but I heard from other people. Once we came to high school, the administrators would tell us at certain school events and give awards to certain kids who had volunteer hours and stuff.

Tara remembers being presented an award for best all-around student in the seventh grade. The following year, she recalls:

I expected to get it again…I was obsessive about it. I was always thinking like, who was best in this class, who was better than me, really figuring it out…And then my mom didn’t tell me that I got it again and that night, I just cried. It’s weird how much I cared. It’s eighth grade!...[But I eventually] got the award for outstanding academic achievement. My first reaction when I got it…I have this thing where I just can be proud. When I got it, I was like, wait, is the other one better?...And that’s when my parents had a huge talk with me about how these awards, first of all, don’t even matter. And once I have one, I should be happy about it and actually take time to enjoy it rather than stressing about the next year, which is what happens to me. It’s like that automatic response. And my parents are not like the typical Indian parents that people warn you
about. They’re strict about other things, sure, but about school, they were a lot more lenient on things than I was on myself. But I’m getting better at it.

In this way, for my respondents, award ceremonies represent a ritualized mechanism of control that further perpetuates a narrative of immigrant exceptionalism. Notably, in interviews respondents described their own “obsession” with the next award and not parental pressure as motivating them (Huang 2014). This phenomenon of constantly looking to the next way to prove oneself as a student (and perhaps one’s deservingness) emerged across multiple interviews.

Describing his future goals, Aadithya explains, “I want to be the best.” Such a strong sense of ambition was reflected in several of the interviews. And as high-achieving students, interviewees like Tara felt entitled to take ownership of their academic and extracurricular experiences. During course selection in her junior year, she was unable to get into the science course she wanted. Instead of passively accepting the result, she wrote emails to and met with her counselor, the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and the school principal until she was granted entrance into the course that she had selected. In this way, she assured her honorary integration into the white space of high-level classes classroom.

While such ambition and sense of entitlement could be read as inclusion, I argue that the internalization of the norms and rules of school-sanctioned routes to success focuses these students on individual achievement, turning their attention away from more systemic issues. Administrators who organize these ceremonies and teachers and other staff who present awards to students, especially immigrant students of color, do so in a way that reinforces students’ drive for excellence without questioning the larger systems and structures in place. Essentially, Asian Indian students of the 1.5 generation, much like their first-generation counterparts in the
workplace (Dhingra 2007), understand the importance of adhering to the rules of a system that are, as they see them, written to benefit them.

In a similar vein, counselors, especially those responsible for college and career preparation, support and reinforce competitive behavior. Encouraging students to participate in a host of activities, from honor societies to debate to choir to STEM clubs, for the sake of an impressive college application, they keep them furiously busy. Shyam shares memories from his especially tough sophomore year when he contemplated dropping out of the magnet school he had worked so hard to get into. His counselor, urged him to remain, “He said that everyone always has a bad year, a bad time. He was like, just stick with it.” Eventually, Shyam did decide to stay, and his counselor treated him to a basket of candies and little mementos from their conversations throughout the year. Shyam mentioned the counselor was constantly helping him “fix himself.” Instead of addressing the general stress culture that accompanies a magnet school education and validating Shyam’s difficult experiences, the counselor praised him for his hard work and ability to, truly, pull himself up by his bootstraps. This type of reinforcement enacted by school counselors creates a culture of immigrant exceptionalism, pathologizing those students who are unable to succeed on their own. It also upholds the idea that, in order to get recognition from the school and thereby justify their existence in the United States, immigrant students must not only be good, they must be exceptional, achieving just as highly, if not more, than their white peers (Chomsky 2012).

The internalization of a notion of immigrant exceptionalism cultivates an understanding of success as nothing more than individual hard work and personal ability to achieve. Like their parents, Asian Indian youth of the 1.5 generation who were socialized in a system that places high value on self-sufficiency, pride themselves on their hard work and financial independence.
Aadithya explains with pride, “We don’t use financial aid in my family. Like we don’t apply for loans or [for] financial aid. We directly pay for college. In some cases, I’ve had to work for it, but yeah, we prefer not to…use aid.”

This individualist rhetoric that is fostered in schools has important implications for possibilities of solidarity among immigrant groups and persons of color in the school and beyond. It is important to remember that while this population of hyper-selected Asian Indians are lauded for their academic excellence and celebrated in schools, their integration is a conditional status that pigeonholes them in a space of constant uncertainty. However, by shedding light on the paradoxical nature of Asian Indian youth’s integration into the American public school system, we are able to begin to understand the complex dynamics of inclusion, exclusion, and belonging among other, often “unwanted,” immigrant populations—namely refugees and undocumented immigrant youth.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

In this exploratory study of the 1.5 generation of Asian Indian youth, I aimed to understand how this cohort of immigrants makes sense of their place in the United States as a minority with a paradoxical privileged class status and an oppressed racial identity. Due to the limited and non-random sampling in this qualitative study, my results are not generalizable to the larger population of 1.5 generation of Asian Indian youth in the United States. However, it does provide a unique lens for understanding the educational experiences of a high-achieving group of immigrants—one that is often glossed over in the immigration literature.

Interviews with this group of young Asian Indians suggests that youth’s experiences of “honorary integration” in schools, primarily reinforced by the model minority construct, produce a young Asian Indian population that is incapable of viewing membership or belonging as part of
a broader community or culture. My respondents seem to enter a bargain that “revolves around…the desi political soul [i.e. the political activism among the Asian Indian population in the United States] in exchange for the license to accumulate economic wealth through hard work and guile” (Prashad 2000:2012). As Prashad (2000) describes, my respondents seem to be oblivious to the inequities of the structural mechanisms in play, which leaves them politically powerless and without allies. As a result, Indian American youth struggle to find their place in American society. By engaging in highly individualized responses to experiences of “othering” as opposed to leveraging their culture which maintains values of community, Asian Indian youth are integrated into the larger society, but in ways that are conditional and “honorary.” As Prashad puts it, “they live in America, but they are not of America” (2000:102).

This highly individualized and meritocratic understanding of self in American society has dire consequences for intergroup relations between Asian Indian youth and other immigrant groups and persons of color. Dynamics of racial power—“the status quo’s systemic tendency toward self-reproduction” (Kim 2000)—work in favor of Asian Indian youth, as they represent society’s class-privileged honorary whites. As a result of their honorary integration in American public schools, they work constantly to maintain this membership, often in ways that are damaging to other minority groups, especially African Americans and their Latinx immigrant peers. The orientation of Asian Indians towards hard work and individual achievement, can have the effect of minimizing the hardships and struggles of other groups. For example, Asian Indians’ individual achievements and lack of political engagement can be used by those in positions of power to support the dismissal of the struggles of Blacks as mere complaining or asking for handouts (Prashad 2000). Although the analysis of dynamics between Asian Indian youth and their Black student counterparts is beyond the scope of this research, this study does
illustrate the dynamics through which Asian Indians constructed stark boundaries between themselves and other immigrant and minority groups, such as their Latinx peers in schools. By distinguishing themselves from the “bad immigrants” and other, less successful minority groups in this way, Asian Indian youth endanger the possibility for intergroup solidarity.

In response to the interethnic othering perpetuated by Asian Indians in the United States, Prashad writes, “If we do not address the vital concept of difference, we allow the Right to frame our problems in terms of an ahistorical idea of equality (so that those who are unequal now cannot speak of their oppression without it being rendered as a claim for ‘special privileges’) when in fact it is nothing other than the cry of the oppressed for justice” (2000: 195). He calls for solidarity among oppressed groups, defining it as “a desire, a promise, an aspiration. It speaks to our wish for a kind of unity, one that does not exist now but that we want to produce” (197). My research points to the importance of the professionally oriented 1.5 generation for solidarity-building among groups of color in the United States. First, unlike their second generation counterparts, who are perhaps too distant from their narrative of migration, the 1.5 generation may be able to more easily relate to the hardships of other immigrants (consider, for example, their stories of vulnerability, economic and otherwise, upon arrival). Recognizing a shared experience of oppression could be a first step towards building coalitions of solidarity. Second, unlike their first generation counterparts, who were not socialized in the American public school system, the 1.5 generation has a greater sense of belonging to American society. I contend that this sense of belonging could become the basis for a critique of social institutions. Third and finally, these 1.5er youth have the unique opportunity to leverage their privileged class positions and citizenship status to fight for the rights of others.
In order to encourage immigrants of color, especially Asian Indian youth to feel welcomed into American classrooms, we must go beyond changes to curriculum. Instead, we must provide an environment in which students are motivated to preserve their own immigrant narratives and those of their parents through a critical pedagogy in which students not only learn about their personal ethnic histories and how those narratives intertwine with those of the larger narrative of American history, but also allow for students to weave their personal experiences of migration into their day-to-day lives in the classroom. We must also employ more faculty and staff of color in our classrooms. Being able to see individuals who look like them in a variety of roles serving as role models for different kinds of people is not only an empowering experience, but also one that narrows the achievement gap (National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force 2004). Schools and other institutions of learning should prioritize the funding of co-curricular opportunities for multicultural organizations to showcase their heritage and mandate attendance and critical engagement and reflection from all students, not simply those of color. By creating an environment that is friendlier to and encourages solidarity among our immigrant youth and our youth of color, we are able to mold active citizens, not simply accomplished persons, in our classrooms—individuals who prioritize community in their life choices and values.

While my research contributed to the larger dialogue on Asian Indian immigrant youth, specifically on those of the 1.5 generation, more research on this population is necessary. Future studies should engage in a more purposive sampling strategy that expands upon the one negative case I had in this study in order to provide a better understanding of the class dynamics at play in the racialized experiences of Asian Indian youth in the public school system. A multimethods study that incorporates participant observation (see Waters 1999; Maira 2002, 2009; Dhingra
and includes interviews (informal or formal) with those persons I identify as street-level bureaucrats—teachers, counselors, and administrators—could also provide a unique lens into the day-to-day lives of immigrant youth.

Next, drawing on Roberto Gonzales’ (2016) longitudinal study of the 1.5 generation of undocumented youth and the larger tradition of life-course ethnographic research, I contend that a longitudinal study would allow us the opportunity to analyze processes of ethnic identity formation over the life course as well as examine the implications of larger-scale sociopolitical events on the lived experiences of immigrant youth. In my research on middle-class, professionally-oriented and, presumably, upwardly-mobile, Indian-born, Asian youth in the DC area, a longitudinal analysis could prove useful. Despite high levels of educational attainment and the general success of Asian Indian youth in the American public school system, I wonder how, after receiving an education during which they were taught the American dream was possible, this population confronts the realities of glass ceilings in the workplace (Friedman and Krackhardt 1997; Fernandez 1998; Min and Kim 1999). Indeed, a sustained, closer look into the subjective lives of Asian Indian youth and the various social institutions with which they interact would serve as “an effective way to understand how vulnerable populations make sense of, contend with, and respond to the material conditions of their lives” (Gonzales 2016:28).

Finally, engaging in a comparative study of traditionally high-achieving immigrant populations (like Asian Indians) and a historically low-achieving one (like immigrants from Latin America) could provide interesting insight into the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the school and how mechanisms of racialized social control operate for different ethnic and racial groups in the United States. Indeed, as we have learned, legacies of oppression are not as distinct as we believe them to be. As the state has always been a driving force in the systematic removal
of people of color from our institutions that are intended to serve as equalizers for our communities, it is no surprise that the social institution of education is no different. The oppressed, historically speaking, have only risen when a critical pedagogy (Freire 2000) emphasizing liberation was implemented—one that enables the oppressed to become aware of, critically engage with, and question the power dynamics that maintain the status quo. A comparative study would not only allow an on-the-ground analysis of these particular dynamics, it would also actively fight against the immigrant exceptionalist discourse that is often perpetuated through academic work. I believe it is time to move beyond the use of white as the reference group and use our academic privilege to challenge oppressive frameworks that perpetuate the notion of white as “normal.” Research that empowers marginalized groups to make sense of their stories and critically engage with one another will contribute to building bridges of solidarity, not walls of fear.
REFERENCES


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Donovan, Shaun. 2015. Revised Delineations of Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Micropolitan Statistical Areas, and Combined Statistical Areas, and Guidance on Uses of the


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

I am conducting research for an honors thesis about the educational experience of the 1.5-generation of Asian Indian immigrant students. If you don’t mind, I am going to record this conversation using this digital recorder or a Skype recording software. This is so I can listen to you, rather than take notes. First, let’s make up a name for you, so that your privacy will be protected. You are the expert here. I am simply here to learn. I’ll ask a few general questions, but you can talk about anything you feel is important, even if I don’t ask about it. And, if you don’t feel comfortable responding to a certain question, you don’t have to. One more thing—if you want to answer off the record, we can turn the recorder off, and then turn it on again later. *For Skype recordings, notify the participant that he/she can tell me when he/she wants the recording turned off. In fact, why don’t you hold the recorder? That way, you turn it on and off yourself. Are you ready to get started?

Let’s start with you telling me a little bit about yourself. First, how old are you? How would you define your gender? Are you currently studying at a university? If so, what are you studying and why? If not, what do you do (job, technical school, etc.)?

Family Relationships

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?
   a. Tell me about your parents. How did they meet?
      i. Tell me about your father. Where is he from? Where did he go to school?
         What does he do? Do you know how much money he makes? (If so, please explain. Was this always the case?)
ii. Tell me about your mother. Where is she from? Where did she go to school? What does she do? Do you know how much money she makes? (If so, please explain. Was this always the case?)

1. If one parent is unemployed, probe for reason (H-4 dependent spouse?).

b. Are your parents religious? What religion do they practice?
   i. Tell me more about that. Was religion a big part of your life growing up? How so? Typical day at church, temple, synagogue, etc.?

2. How do you get along with your parents and/or your siblings?
   a. Extended family members? Tell me about them.

3. What are some of your fondest memories with your family? Tell me about them.

Immigration & Citizenship

4. In this section, I’m trying to better understand what your experiences were when you first moved to the United States.

5. Where were you born? Tell me about that city/village/town and the surrounding neighborhood. Who did you live with? What was it like?
   a. What do you remember most about living there?
   b. Did you go to school there?

6. At what age did you move to the States? What year was that?
   a. Where did you move? (probe for timeline in the US – if different residences) What was that experience like?
   i. What are some of the first memories you have of the move or your time in the States? Are there any stories that your parents frequently share?
b. Why did you move to the United States? Were you aware why at the time or did your parents tell you stories/explain it to you later? When did those conversations happen? What did they say?
   
   i. Can you ask directly about an H-1 visa or a sponsorship

c. Are your parents citizens of the United States? Are you a citizen of the United States?
   
   i. If yes, do you remember how it happened? Did you take the United States Naturalization Test or were you granted citizenship through your parents because they took the test? Do you remember that experience – what did the say/how did that share that experience with you (if at all)? Do you recall attending a naturalization ceremony and taking an Oath of Allegiance? What was that experience like for you?

   ii. If no, are you a legal permanent resident of the United States? Do you have a Permanent Resident Card (Green Card)?

7. Tell me some more about your home country.

   a. Have you ever been back to India since you emigrated to the United States?

   b. Do you visit? Do you like to visit? Why or why not? Do you have any family there? Tell me about them. What is your relationship with your family there?

   c. Do you read about it (news, in the language)?

   d. Recently, dual citizenship has become an option for Persons of Indian Origin. Are you aware of this policy change? Are you and/or your parents interested in pursuing this? Why or why not?

   e. When was the last time you visited?
i. Tell me about that trip. What did you do there?

ii. Is there a particular trip that really stands out in your mind? Tell me about it.

8. What holidays did you celebrate growing up?
   a. With who?
   b. Tell me about your most memorable holiday celebration.

Identity & Race

1. I am now going to read a series of racial and ethnic identity labels. Please listen carefully.
   Indian, American, Indian American, Asian, Asian American, South Asian, South Asian American, brown, white.
   a. What do these labels mean to you? How would you define Indian, American…etc.?
   b. Which of those labels resonate the most/least? Why?
   c. Are there other identity labels not on this list that speak to you? Which ones? Why?

2. Can you think of a time where you were particularly aware of one (or more) of these identities? When you were growing up, how conscious do you think you were about being Indian? Tell me about that time.
   a. Do you consider/talk about this part of your identity a lot? With whom?

3. When you think of India, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

4. Where is ‘home’? Where do you feel most ‘at home’?

School/Friendships/Social Networks
9. Tell me about the schools you attended (probe for full names of schools here and the county of the school system). What was your school like? Describe your elementary, middle, high school in one word.
   a. Elementary?
   b. Middle?
   c. High?

10. What kinds of people did you go to school with?
    a. SES, race/ethnicity, gender

11. If you could change one thing about each of these institutions or about your experience in general in the X County Public School System, what would it be and why?

12. Were you ever excluded or made to feel different in the classroom when you were growing up?
    a. What happened? Where? How did that make you feel?

13. Did you have a best friend growing up? Tell me about him/her.

14. Tell me about your group of friends. What were the ethnicities of your closest friends? (If Indians were present) did you seek them out? Why/why not? Do you think you had a preference?
    a. What do you do with those friends?
    b. Who did you feel closest to? Why did you feel that way? Do you still keep in contact with them? How often do you talk to them? What do you generally talk about?
15. Were you ever involved in a romantic relationship? Interracial relationship? Do you have a preference? How did you meet your partner? Did they ever meet your parents? What were those interactions like?

a. For LGBTQIA* individuals: are you out to your parents? What was that like?

**ESL/ELL Programming**

16. What language do you speak at home? With your friends (of Indian origin)? With your immediate family? Your extended family?

a. Which language do you consider your first language? Is there a language in which you feel more comfortable expressing certain ideas?

17. Did you participate in a program specific to second language learners (e.g. ESL/ELL) at your school? Were you ever asked to take a language test at the beginning of your academic career in the United States? Tell me about that experience.

a. If yes:

i. For how long?

ii. Tell me about that.

1. What was a typical day like?

2. Interactions w/ friends/teachers in ESL?

3. What do you remember most about your time?

4. What was your greatest accomplishment within the program?

5. What did you like best/dislike most about the program?

6. Can you tell me about a difficult moment in the program?
7. Do you have any past assignments, brochures, anything else from this program? Would you be willing to share those resources with me after the interview?

b. If no:
   i. What first comes to mind when you think of ESL/ELL programming?
   ii. What is your opinion of the ESL program in general?
   iii. Specifically at your school?

c. Where and when did these ESL classes take place at your school?

d. Did you know anyone who was part of a program like that? Tell me about it – do you know anything about their experience?

Extracurriculars/Social Life And Events

18. Tell me about your life outside of school.

   a. What kinds of extracurriculars were you a part of in high school?
      i. Were you a part of any ethnic clubs or organizations?
      ii. Typical day with X activity?
      iii. Leadership experience?

   b. Volunteer experience?

   c. What motivated you to participate in X activity?

   d. What else did you do outside of school? What was home life like after school?
      i. Typical after school day?

   e. Were you a part of any sort of religious community or organization? Tell me about that. Typical day?
f. What did you typically do on the weekends? With who? Tell me about your most memorable weekend.

**Academics**

19. Tell me a little bit about your academics.
   a. Tell me about a typical day at school.
      i. Lunch/meal times – what kinds of foods did you bring to lunch? Did your parents prepare these meals? Did you eat these meals?
   b. What kinds of classes did you take? (AP/IB, Honors, Accelerated, Academic, etc.)
      What led you to choose those classes?
   c. What were your grades like?
   d. Did you participate a lot in class? Why or why not?
   e. How did you get along with your teachers? Your administrators?
   f. Tell me a little bit more about your work ethic.
   g. Do you think your background as insert label here had anything to do with this?

20. What were some challenges you faced in your academic career?

21. What does success mean to you?

22. What is your proudest academic moment? Why does it make you feel the way it does?
   a. Do you have any photos, certificates, etc. related to that moment? Would you be willing to share those resources with me after the interview?

23. Tell me about some of the tests you were required to take (standardized tests) throughout your academic career.
   a. How would you say you did on these tests? Comparatively (to other students at your school)?
b. Did you ever take any test prep courses? What were your motivations behind taking these courses?

24. What was the college application process like for you? Where did you apply and why? Where were you accepted? Which university did you choose and why?

25. Are you aware of the term ‘model minority’? What does that mean to you? Have you ever experienced it?

Future Goals

26. So what are your plans (career, personal, etc.) for the future? Specifically after graduation? In 5 years? In 10 years?
   a. What led you to make these plans?
   b. Who have you spoken to about these plans (e.g. teachers, parents, religious leaders, etc.)? Tell me more about those conversations. What kinds of advice did you seek/receive?

27. *Why did you decide to participate in this interview? What peaked your interested about this experience?

28. Is there anything else important to you that we did not cover and that you would like to share with me?

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns after the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me at (571) 245-2054 or at nshastry@email.wm.edu.
## APPENDIX B: OVERVIEW OF SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Father's Mother's Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Father's Occupation</th>
<th>Father's Mother's Occupation</th>
<th>Age of Migration</th>
<th>Years of Schooling in India</th>
<th>Citizenship Status</th>
<th>Father's Mother's Citizenship Status</th>
<th>ESL/ELL</th>
<th>SAT Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shyam</td>
<td>20 M</td>
<td></td>
<td>undergraduate student</td>
<td>BA/BS</td>
<td>AA/AAS</td>
<td>restaurant owner</td>
<td>stay-at-home</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>U.S. citizen</td>
<td>Green Card holder</td>
<td>U.S. citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>19 F</td>
<td></td>
<td>undergraduate student</td>
<td>BA/BS</td>
<td></td>
<td>World Bank employee</td>
<td>stay-at-home</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Canadian citizen</td>
<td>Green Card holder</td>
<td>Indian citizen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samir</td>
<td>21 M</td>
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<td>consultant</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td></td>
<td>FDA employee</td>
<td>Fannie Mae employee</td>
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<td>Canadian citizen</td>
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<td>Thanvi</td>
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<td>JD</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>town government employee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>software engineer at Freddie Mac</td>
<td>receptionist software engineer for the government</td>
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<td>part-time teacher</td>
<td>QA tester at Freddie Mac</td>
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</tr>
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<td>genetic engineer</td>
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<td>BS</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent: “Master of None: Understanding the 1.5 Generation of Asian Indian Youth”
Nairuti Shastry, The College of William & Mary

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, entitled, “Master of None” conducted by
Nairuti Shastry.

The general nature of the study has been explained to me. I understand that I will be asked
questions about my educational experience in the United States and various aspects of my
identity and ethnic background. My participation in this interview should take approximately 1.5
to 2 hours. I understand that my responses will be confidential and that my name will not be
associated with any results of this study. I understand that I may decline to answer any question
asked and that I may discontinue participation in the interview at any time. I understand that with
my permission this interview will be audio recorded using a digital recording device. I
understand that, if recorded, the interview will be stored as password-protected electronic file
available only to Nairuti Shastry and her professor, Jennifer Bickham Mendez and that the
recording and transcripts will be destroyed by June 1, 2017. I am aware that I may report
dissatisfactions with any aspect of this project to the Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects
Committee, Dr. Ray McCoy, Ph.D., at (757) 221-2783 or rwmcco@wm.edu. I am aware that I
must be at least 18 years of age to participate. My signature below signifies my voluntary
participation in this project, and that I have received a copy of this consent form.

I give my permission for this interview to be recorded. ______Yes ______No

________________________________________________________________________
Signature Date

______________________________________________________________________________
Print Name

If you have any questions in regard to this project or would like to receive a copy of any
publications resulting from this research, please contact the Principal Researcher or her Faculty
Supervisor, Professor Jennifer Bickham Mendez.

Nairuti Shastry Jennifer Bickham Mendez
Tel: (571) 245-2054 Tel: (757) 221-2603
Email: nshastry@email.wm.edu Email: jbmend@wm.edu
NOTES

1 Drawing on Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s lecture at the Southern Sociological Society’s 80th Annual Meeting in Greenville, South Carolina, I will be exclusively using the number 45 to refer to the 45th President of the United States of America. Not only does his name incite fear worthy of a content warning among many individuals across the United States, I also staunchly believe that he is not my president nor does he represent the America I envision or believe in. By calling him by his name, I believe we legitimize him and his actions and I refuse to do so.

2 A decorative, often red, dot worn by Hindu women on the center of the forehead.

3 A Gujarati term for mother.

4 An Indian term of affection for a son or daughter.

5 According to the Bureau of the United States Census, Loudoun County is the richest county in the United States, with a median household income of $125,900 (Jeffrey 2016).

6 In this study, I define professionally-oriented, Asian Indian youth as individuals who, in the American public school system, achieve high levels of academic success and are often college-bound.

7 Maritsa Poros describes scholars’ reluctance to focus study on Indians in the US because they are not “a problem” and “seemed to fit in.” That is, “...they were not poor, segregated, unemployed exploited, illegal, criminal, or even culturally different enough...to spark much anti-immigrant sentiment (and) their presence in American society...did not challenge some of the fundamental way in which we think about the social order (2010:xii).

8 The H-1B visa category applies to “people who wish to perform services in a specialty occupation, services of exceptional merit and ability relating to a Department of Defense (DOD) cooperative research and development project, or services as a fashion model of distinguished merit or ability” and is specifically given to highly skilled and/or highly educated individuals. Spouses and unmarried children under twenty-one years of age of H1-B recipients are allowed to migrate to the States under the H-4 nonimmigrant classification (USCIS 2016).

9 For an exception, see Kangala 2011.

10 Different sociologists choose different age limits for the 1.5 generation. For example, while Han (2006) uses age 15, Maira (2002) conflates the 1.5 and second generation, defining it as any individual who was either born in the U.S. or moved to the States before age 7 or 8. The age itself is an arbitrary selection, but the purpose is to distinguish between those who were born in India, and consequently have some recollection of or feel a unique cultural bond to their country of origin, and then migrated and those who were born in the United States. Distinct from other research, I focus exclusively on the 1.5 generation of Asian Indian youth.

11 In order to conceptualize immigrant exceptionalism, a term first used in legal literature (Olivas 2012) I draw on the concept of black exceptionalism, articulated so eloquently by Michelle Alexander in her book, The New Jim Crow: “This is where black exceptionalism comes in. Highly visible examples of black success are critical to the maintenance of a racial caste system in the era of colorblindness. Black success stories lend credence to the notion that anyone, no matter how poor or how black you may be, can make it to the top, if only you try hard enough. These stories ‘prove’ that race is no longer relevant. Whereas black success stories undermined the logic of Jim Crow, they actually reinforce the system of mass incarceration. Mass incarceration depends for its legitimacy on the widespread belief that all those who appear trapped at the bottom actually chose their fate” (2010:248).

12 This media also includes the disappointingly recent Pew Research Center’s report—“The Rise of Asian Americans” (2012).

13 The racialization of Asian Indian immigrants first entered legal discourse in 1923 when Justice Sutherland declared Bhagat Singh Thind, an Indian immigrant who had served in the U.S. army and who then filed for naturalization under the premise that he was of Aryan, or hite, blood (as Indians were classified at the time), ineligible for citizenship in the court case United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind based on the common understanding of race—he simply did not look white.

14 I follow Rumbaut (1976, 1991) in defining the 1.5 generation in this way.

15 To establish distinct geographical boundaries for this study, I use the Office of Management and Budget’s Metropolitan Statistical Area of Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV. As per the 2015 OMB Bulletin on these delineations of these areas, participants will be recruited from the following counties: Frederick County, MD; Montgomery County, MD; District of Columbia, DC; Calvert County, MD; Charles County, MD; Prince George’s County, MD; Arlington County, VA; Clarke County, VA; Culpeper County, VA; Fairfax County, VA; Fauquier County, VA; Loudoun County, VA; Prince William County, VA; Rappahannock County, VA; Spotsylvania County, VA; Stafford County, VA; Warren County, VA; Alexandria City, VA; Fairfax City, VA; Falls
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Church City, VA; Fredericksburg City, VA; Manassas City, VA; Manassas Park City, VA; Jefferson County, WV (Donovan 2015).

16 Gans (1979) also understood the adoption of ethnic ethnicity labels to be a result of “secular ethnic cultures with the [first generation] immigrants brought with them” (6:1979). Among the 1.5 generation of Asian Indians (and even the more distant second generation), the ethnic identity label is far from secular. Religion, in particular Hinduism, plays a large role in the life activities and choices of many of my respondents (e.g. being vegetarian, going to the temple regularly).

17 Some immigration scholars suggest this socialization occurs (Dhingra, Park, Portes and Rumbaut, Maira, Lee & Zhou), specifically for the second generation, but here we can see that though this process is a point of convergence for the two generations, the concept I term longitudinal split socialization is not—it is only visible among the 1.5.

18 As the H-1B visa program afforded immigrants a clear path to citizenship, they were able to obtain a U.S. passport and its associated privileges quite easily. Respondents like Thanvi or Aadithya who are not yet citizens, but Green Card holders, or like Ram and Sravani, who both live in a mixed status family (Ram’s father and Sravani’s mother do not yet have citizenship) often feel the burden of non-U.S. citizen status, especially when they travel to and from India.

19 In many Asian Indian immigrant families, it is common to have one or both sets of grandparents stay with their children (typically their eldest son) in their country of permanent settlement. Though no substantial sociological research exists on this cohort of older Asian Indian immigrants, there is a host of public health literature on these individuals (Stanford School of Medicine 2017).

20 Here, I use Orientalist gaze, drawing on the theory of Orientalism proposed by Edward Said: “The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles” (1977:1-2).

21 Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (2015) critique this notion in their text The Asian American Achievement Paradox asking, “what is cultural about Asian American achievement?” They conclude that, indeed, it is the hyper-selectivity of post-1965 Asian immigrants that pushes them to adopt a cultural frame in which academic achievement and success are of paramount importance for their children.

22 Dhingra writes, “More importantly, participants defined being American in a cultural and economic sense. Participants had attained the ‘American Dream,’ which in turn embedded them further into the nation and, in their opinion, should have defined them as being comparable to middle and upper-middle class whites, instead of as foreigners based on their physical appearances. They also highlighted their educational attainment, use of mainstream norms, and work ethic as gaining them entrance into middle class, mainstream institutions like white-collar occupations, neighborhoods, restaurants, and clubs. Actors saw themselves as ‘model Americans,’ as opposed to ‘model minorities,’ since they had succeeded through playing by the rules established by the country.”

23 By underclass, I specifically mean other minorities and undocumented immigrant youth. Institutions like schools use the success of Asians to produce an underclass of Black and Brown youth who are not integrated even as honorary members.