“Steps to Our Culture”: Cultural Cultivation and Teaching Children about a Culture “Left Behind”

Pangri Mehta*

University of South Florida

*Please address all correspondence to Pangri Mehta, Department of Sociology, University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Ave., CPR 107, Tampa, Florida 33620. Email: pmehta3@mail.usf.edu.

Abstract
Using an Indian dance studio in Tampa, Florida as a point of entry, this study draws upon three years of ethnographic data at a Bollywood dance studio and 12 in-depth qualitative interviews with Indian immigrant parents to examine ethnic and cultural socialization practices. With the rise in immigration, and ethnic and cultural diversity, there is a draw to connect and maintain ties with the culture that was “left behind.” As immigrants build their lives in a new land and immigrant communities flourish, an increasing number of structured activities are being developed for the purpose of cultivating ethnic and cultural knowledge in their children. In this paper, I use interview and ethnographic data with parents of children who are taking Bollywood and classical Indian dance at an Indian dance studio located in suburban Tampa to add further nuance to ethnic and cultural socialization research by coining and developing the concept of cultural cultivation. Expanding upon Annette Lareau’s work on concerted cultivation, I define cultural cultivation as the strategic efforts immigrant parents make through structured activities inside and outside of the home to cultivate cultural knowledge in their children. Cultural cultivation is introduced in this paper as an ethno-cultural socialization process that is deliberate, regarded and taken on principally as women’s work, and seen as beneficial to parents. Though often considered laborious, this paper demonstrates the ways that cultural cultivation is highly valued by interviewees as it enriches cultural competence, helps build social networks, and encourages a sense of community among both Indian immigrant parents and their children.

Keywords: child socialization, ethnic socialization, cultural socialization, immigrant parents, Asian Indian
October 2014:
It was a little after 12pm and Naach Indian dance studio had been bustling with students and families since 9am. India Fest practices were in session and Sheila, the studio owner, and I had been spending our Saturday mornings and afternoons training elementary, middle, and high school age teams for the upcoming Indian dance competition in November. I had just sat down to rest for a moment before starting the next class when 14-year-old Riya crouched down next to me to give me an update about an exam. It was in our interview two weeks ago that she confessed to being stressed out about a test on Hindu mythology and symbolism she had to take the following weekend in order to pass on to the next level at her Hindu Sunday School. A high achiever and beaming with pride while speaking with me at the studio, Riya said that she studied hard for the test and was proud for having done so well. As I gave her a congratulatory hug, I thought about the work that went into holding on to the culture ‘left behind’ through cultivating Indian cultural knowledge among Indian diaspora. The families involved at Riya’s Sunday School and her success on the exam were examples of this, as were Naach and all of the India Fest practices at the studio. Like Riya indicated, this was labor for children, but working at Naach, I knew that this was also a product of both her parents’ and the local Indian community’s concerted efforts. As I made a mental note of the conversation with Riya, Sheila called to the next group, Junior Bhangra, to get in formation; she wanted the students to perfect Bhangra-style technique before moving on to new choreography.

Introduction
As scholarship on immigration, culture, and ethnic identity demonstrates, connecting with the culture “left behind” (Ram 2005) through activities like the classes offered at Naach Indian dance studio and Riya’s Sunday School as well as consuming ethnic foods and media are important to feeling a sense of home and belonging among immigrant families and their children (Chacko & Menon 2013; Ram 2005; Wilcox 2011). While ethnic and cultural socialization literature argues that second generation children learn about their parents’ immigrant cultures through daily practices and routinized behaviors (Hughes et al. 2006; Quintana et al. 2006), the excerpt above demonstrates that teaching about a culture “left behind” can also be much more deliberate. Part of a larger study on Asian Indian families and immigration, this paper utilizes ethnographic data, home visits, and interviews with parents to nuance childhood socialization research by highlighting immigrant parents’ efforts of ethnic and cultural socialization as strategic. Using ethnic and cultural socialization research and Annette Lareau’s (2003) work on concerted cultivation to inform one another, I coin the term cultural cultivation and define it as the strategic efforts immigrant parents make through structured activities inside and outside of the home to cultivate cultural knowledge in their children. Cultural cultivation is introduced in this paper as an ethno-cultural socialization process that is deliberate, regarded and taken on principally as women’s work, and perceived as beneficial to parents. Though considered laborious, cultural cultivation as a socialization strategy is invaluable to the families portrayed in this study as it enriches cultural competence, helps build
social networks, and encourages a sense of community and belonging among both Indian immigrant parents and their children.

**Literature Review**

**Ethnic and Cultural Socialization**

The childhood socialization literature is vast and broadly examines the values and behaviors children learn that facilitate adaptation to their surrounding social environments. A portion of this research focuses on ethnic and cultural socialization among immigrants and minorities. Collectively ethnic and cultural socialization is conceptualized as children’s acquisition of values, behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes associated with an ethnic or cultural group and how they view themselves as part of that group. For immigrant or minority families, ethnic and cultural socialization involves teaching children about their ethnic culture in order to help maximize adaptation to their surroundings and is seen as having a positive impact by promoting knowledge about, pride in, and favorable attitudes about own ethnic groups (Brown, et al. 2014; Constantine & Blackmon 2002; Hughes 2003; Hughes et al. 2006; Johnson 2001; Marks et al. 2007; Quintana et al. 2006; Rogers et al. 2012; Stevenson 1997).

Though separated in the literature, there is a close relationship between ethnic and cultural socialization. Most ethnic and cultural socialization studies tend to focus on Latino and Asian (primarily Chinese and Japanese) immigrants, their children’s cultural retention, and strategies for negotiating identities and pressures of ethnic minority and mainstream cultures (Hughes et al. 2006; John & Montgomery 2012; Marks et al. 2007; Rogers et al. 2012). While ethnic socialization literature argues that ethnic cultural knowledge heavily influences the development of an ethnic identity and promotes feelings of belonging to an ethnic community (Marks et al. 2007; Rogers et al. 2012), cultural socialization refers to the messages about cultural history, heritage, and pride that youth receive (Hughes et al. 2006). Cultural socialization literature focuses on the techniques parents and guardians engage in inside of the home to teach children about racial and ethnic history, culture, customs and traditions, as well as how they promote ethnic, racial, and cultural pride. According to cultural socialization research, these practices involve sharing knowledge about cultural and historical figures, languages, books, music, stories, celebrating cultural holidays, and cooking and eating ethnic foods (Hughes et al 2006; Suizzo et al 2008). Both ethnic and cultural socialization scholars argue that among recent immigrants, ethnic and cultural socialization occurs through daily and routine practices and lifestyle, but for parents who are generationally further removed, conscious and deliberate efforts are more commonly made in order to promote ethnic identification (Alba 1990; Hughes et al. 2006; Marks et al. 2007; Rogers et al. 2012; Waters 1999). In contrast, this paper challenges the aforementioned assertions by demonstrating cultural cultivation as a deliberate and time-consuming socialization process in which new wave (post-1990) immigrant parents are engaging.

In addition to having a better understanding of how ethnic and cultural identities are cultivated in children, socialization literature also argues a strong correlation between higher levels of ethnic identification and wellbeing. For
instance, Suizzo et al.’s (2008) research on cultural socialization and parental practices suggests that adhering to culturally valued traditions and group norms not only facilitates a sense of community and solidarity, but often functions as a protective measure against discrimination. Markset al. (2007) and Quintana et al. (2006) argue that among ethnic minority children and adolescents, higher levels of ethnic pride may help them cope with discrimination in school, and other daily stresses. And still, several other studies suggest that cultural socialization is associated with higher self-esteem in peer groups (Constantine & Blackmon 2002; Kiang et al. 2006), as well as better cognitive outcomes and anger management (Stevenson 1997).

Socialization research has paved an important path in helping us understand the positive impact of ethnic and cultural socialization on children of immigrants. There are gaps within this stream of scholarship, however, which merit further attention. For instance, with the exception of a few studies, such as Umaña-Taylor et al.’s (2009) work on the relationship between ethnic and gendered socialization among Mexican-American adolescents, little qualitative socialization research offers a close analysis of the gendered aspects of ethnic and cultural socialization processes. Also, prominent works on gender socialization do not take into account culture and ethnicity (Endendijk et al. 2014; Thorne 1993), and the few that do address the intersection of race, class, and gender in socialization processes primarily focus on experiences of and managing racial discrimination among blacks (Collins 2000) and Latinos (Garcia 2012). And while several studies on reproductive labor have demonstrated child-rearing (Collins 1994; Hochschild & Machung 2003) and cultural transmission (Ram 2005) as gendered, much of this line of research that focuses on women of color and immigrant women centers on their reproductive labor as paid domestic (care)work in other’s homes (Duffy 2007). The specific efforts immigrant parents make to cultivate cultural knowledge in their children, though at times laborious, are not often studied as part of reproductive labor. What’s more is that little socialization scholarship integrates Asian Indian families despite them being one of the fastest-growing Asian ethnic groups in the U.S. In fact, 19% of all Indian immigrants residing in the U.S. today emigrated after 2010 from states including Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu (Zong & Batalova 2015), with their current population estimated at close to four million (Census Bureau 2015). And finally, while the data in this paper demonstrate that ethnic and cultural socialization involves concerted efforts on the part of parents and guardians, few studies explore why immigrant parents engage in these specific practices nor do they delve into the effects that these concerted efforts may have on their lives and sense of ethnic identity. For example, although several studies view immigrant parental practices of ethnic and cultural socialization as inevitable and a regular part of daily life, to what extent and in what ways might parents’ and guardians’ efforts of ethnic and cultural socialization actually be deliberate? In the name of remembering the culture ‘left behind,’ what are the specific goals immigrant parents have of ethnic and cultural socialization? Understanding that reproductive labor associated with childrearing as well as cultural transmission is still primarily regarded and taken on as

*Michigan Family Review, 21(1), 50-75, 2017. DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mfr.4919087.0021.104](http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mfr.4919087.0021.104)*

This article is protected by a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license.
women’s work (Collins 1994; Hughes et al. 2009), in what specific ways are immigrant parents’ concerted efforts of ethnic and cultural socialization also gendered? Moreover, much of the socialization literature, including parental socialization, conceives of socialization as a unidimensional parent-to-child process. But how might socialization have a bi-directional impact? To clarify, how have immigrant parents’ specific efforts to foster ethnic cultural knowledge in their children shaped their own identities and the ways they practice Indian culture in the U.S.? In this paper, I extend our understanding of ethnic and cultural socialization by attending to these specific questions.

From Concerted Cultivation to Cultural Cultivation

To examine ethnic and cultural socialization as strategic and deliberate efforts, rather than simply a process which occurs only through daily lifestyle or routine practices, I use Annette Lareau’s (2003) work on concerted cultivation as a jumping off point. Lareau’s extensive ethnography with 12 black and white families examines the relationship between parenting practices, socialization, social class, and race. Arguing that she found more differences between social classes than race, Lareau develops the term “concerted cultivation” to describe parental practices of the dominance middle class and juxtaposes it with “accomplishment of natural growth,” a child-rearing strategy more common among working class and poor families. Lareau’s accomplishment of natural growth is characterized by children having the freedom to spend more time playing with friends than in organized activities as well as a clear boundary between children and adults with parents using directives rather than soliciting children’s opinions and persuading them into action. In contrast, cultural cultivation involves enrolling children in organized extracurricular activities (such as gymnastics or soccer), playing an active role in their children’s education (such as attending PTA meetings and completing homework together), soliciting their children’s ideas and opinions in important decisions, and reasoning the hows and whys to children with the intention of “developing” their talents. Lareau argues that these different strategies of child-rearing can lead to the “transmission of differential advantages” (5) and suggests that the communication skills honed through concerted cultivation are not only considered to be valuable and competitive in professional settings, but have been also linked to academic and financial success. Additionally, with concerted cultivation, children learn how to voice themselves and negotiate their wants with adults which promotes a sense of entitlement. As a consequence of concerted cultivation, the boundary between children and parents is blurred as children address, question, and challenge adults as equal to them.

Bridging Lareau’s work with my own questions centering on the specific goals the interviewed Indian immigrant parents have regarding their efforts to teach their children about the culture ‘left behind’ as well as the ways that this socialization process is gendered, I coin and develop the term cultural cultivation. Further connecting cultural socialization, which refers to the messages youth receive about their cultural heritage, with ethnic socialization, which promotes feelings of belonging to an ethnic community, I specify cultural cultivation as an
ethno-cultural socialization process and define it as the fostering of ethnic cultural knowledge in children through structured activities that take place inside and outside of the home. For the families involved in this study, most of these structured cultural activities revolved around learning about the arts, religions, and languages of India.

**Methodology**

Using a Bollywood and classical Indian dance studio, Naach, which claimed to offer “Steps to Our (Indian) Culture” as a point of entry, this paper draws on three years of ethnographic data collected during my time teaching as a Bollywood instructor and in-depth interviews and home visits with 12 Indian immigrant parents. Part of a larger study, the data presented here demonstrate deliberate strategies of ethnic and cultural socialization specifically geared toward teaching children of immigrants about a culture ‘left behind’ through a process I call **cultural cultivation**. I conceptualize cultural cultivation as the fostering of ethnic cultural knowledge in children through structured activities and argue that it is regarded and taken on principally as women’s work. According to interviews with parents, facilitating ethnic cultural knowledge through activities and concerted efforts at home is often considered laborious, but highly valued as it fosters cultural competence, social networks, and a sense of community.

**Why Tampa and Why Naach?**

Tampa, located in Hillsborough County, Florida, is an ideal site to study cultural cultivation among Indian immigrants and their children because of how rapidly the Indian population has grown. From 1980 to 2010, the Indian population in Hillsborough County had swelled from less than 4,000 to more than 15,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 1980; U.S. Census Bureau 2010), making Indians the fastest growing Asian group in the county. Furthermore, Chakravorty and colleagues’ (2017) statistical research demonstrates that Florida is the 6th most popular destination for Indian immigrants, and that suburban Tampa is one of the top settlements for high-income Indian immigrants.

With the growth of the Indian community in Tampa and Tampa suburbs, cultural activities designed to teach children of Indian immigrants about the culture ‘left behind’ have flourished. Naach, in particular, has had a strong foothold across Tampa since the early 2000s because of how involved it has been in the local Indian community. Holding Bollywood and classical Indian dance classes five days per week, the studio is also used to teach Indian art classes and yoga on the weekends. Engaging the rest of Tampa Bay, Sheila, the owner of Naach, has regularly entered between five and eight dance teams for India Fest which has an annual Indian dance competition, encouraged students to perform Bollywood or Indian classical dance numbers for school talent shows, and networked with community organizations and local universities so that her students could showcase Bollywood and classical Indian dances at multicultural festivals. All of this positioned Naach at the heart of the Indian arts among the local suburban community, making this studio an excellent access point for the questions explored in this paper.
Interviews

Though the dance studio did not explicitly market itself toward one gender, most of the students were girls and women. At the time I started data collection, the studio had approximately 60 students enrolled in both the children’s and adults’ Bollywood and classical dance classes. Less than 10 boys took the kids’ classes and no men were enrolled in the adult classes. There was also a high presence of mothers who often stayed in the waiting room watching their children through the window and lively talking amongst themselves during classes, making this very much a women’s space. While fathers did drop off and pick up their children, those who stayed for the duration of the class often waited outside of the studio and frequently remained in their cars. Only one father regularly stayed in the waiting area as his two daughters took their Sunday afternoon Bollywood class. Moreover, because of my positionality as a young Indian woman in the field and an “insider” to acceptable cultural gender norms, I was hesitant to ask fathers for interviews without their spouses present as such a request could be construed as forward and inappropriate behavior. The one time I did ask a father, Ajeet, for an interview, he gave me his wife’s, Simran, phone number so that I could coordinate a time and date with her. The gendered demographics of the studio as well as my concerted efforts to minimize perceptions of inappropriate conduct with fathers heavily influenced my adult interview sample. Thus, the adult interview sample included ten mothers and two fathers with all but one conducted during home visits. Of the ten, five were stay-at-home mothers and both of the fathers worked outside of the home. All of them lived in northern Tampa suburbs at the time of the interviews and had emigrated from India to the U.S. between 1988 and 2002. Adult interviewees had the opportunity to discuss topics including what aspects of Indian culture they wanted to impart onto their children and why, ethnic and cultural socialization strategies, and perceptions of similarities and differences between “Indian” and “American” cultures. The table below lists the pseudonyms of the participants involved in the study, their ages, the Indian state from which they emigrated, state language, religion, number of children, and the activities they have enrolled their children.

I proposed conducting interviews at the dance studio or a location of the participants’ choosing, as I wanted them to feel at ease with me (Weiss 1994). All but one were conducted at the participants’ homes. Conducting interviews at participants’ homes was a valuable methodological tool as it allowed for a triangulation of ethnographic data collected at Naach, provided an intimate and comfortable setting to discuss personal experiences and attitudes, and offered a glimpse into their daily lives outside of the studio. A more detailed description of the homes visited is provided in the findings section. Additionally, based on the neighborhoods and residences many of them lived in, it was clear that a majority of my participants were upper middle class. All interviewees lived in a single family household, with half of them living in gated communities with a security guard checking the driver’s license, license plate, and reason for the visit with each non-resident. Most of the participants lived within a few miles of each other.
in upper middle class complexes and neighborhoods and a few live in what appeared to be solidly middle class areas.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Language(s)</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Children’s Indian Cultural Activities</th>
<th>Children’s Non-Indian Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divya</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>Tamil, Hindi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bharatanatyam (classical dance form), Bollywood, India Fest</td>
<td>Swimming, English and Math Wizard, Kumon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anira</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>Telugu, Hindi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kuchipudi (classical dance form), India Fest, Hinduism, Telugu, yoga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gandhi</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>Telugu, Hindi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esha</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>Gujarati, Hindi</td>
<td>Jain</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bollywood, Hinduism, Jainism, Indian singing, Gujarati, India Fest</td>
<td>Piano, voice lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lalitha</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>Tamil, Hindi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bollywood, Kuchipudi, Indian Art, India Fest, Hinduism classes</td>
<td>Kumon, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simran</td>
<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>New Dehli</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bollywood, India Fest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajeet</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>New Dehli</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roshni</td>
<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kuchipudi, India Fest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nisha</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>Telegu, Hindi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bharatanatyam, India Fest, Kuchipudi, Bollywood</td>
<td>Karate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamya</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>Tulu, Hindi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bollywood, Bharatanatyam, India Fest</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neha</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>Gujarati, Hindi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bollywood, Hinduism school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vena</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bollywood, India Fest</td>
<td>Piano, singing, karate, golf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews were in-depth and lasted between one and four hours, and with meals and several of the participants’ children excited about showing off their rooms to their dance teacher, home visits lasted up to five hours. The semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was memorized, facilitating a comfortable flow of conversation (Brinkmann 2013). All interviews were digitally recorded and detailed fieldnotes were typed after each home visit. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and all participants as well as the dance studio were given pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

This study utilized a grounded theory approach to analyzing qualitative data, allowing me to refine interview questions and conceptualize ideas that best explained the interview and ethnographic data (Charmaz 2006). Though I had theoretical leanings (for example toward Lareau’s (2003) concept of concerted cultivation, I did not force data to “fit” already existing concepts and theories. Instead, I focused on reoccurring themes in the data which, as this paper reflects, offer new insight into scholarship on socialization.

Rather than strictly adhering to a fixed number of months at Naach and interviews to conduct, my time in the field was guided by the intention of reaching theoretical saturation (Baker & Edwards 2012; Mason 2010). Throughout the process of data collection, I wrote several analytic memos to help note frequency, range of responses, organize, and begin analyzing observations and interviews. Several rounds of descriptive, analytic, and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995) of fieldnotes, interviews, and analytic memos were done by hand to determine key categories as well as explore emergent themes. Key categories included socialization strategies and the intentionality of socialization practices. Emerging themes and subcategories related to each of the broader key categories contributed to conceptualizing the term cultural cultivation. With less of a focus on quantity and more on quality, the following data analysis thoughtfully utilizes the multiple methods employed in this study to help portray the richness and complexity of each participant.

In order to develop and outline the three main dimensions of the concept of cultural cultivation, this data analysis is divided into three sections. The first section discusses three key aspects of Indian culture that each of the parents mentioned as being important to pass on to their second generation children growing up in the U.S., particularly with regard to religion, their ethnic language, and shared foods, and why immigrant parents saw this as so important. The second section examines cultural cultivation as gendered labor, and specifically as an ‘added step’ to Hochschild and Machung’s (2003) concept of the “second shift.” Finally, the third section elaborates on parents’ perspectives about how they personally benefitted from this strategic processes of ethno-cultural socialization. This paper ultimately argues that cultural cultivation is a deliberate ethno-cultural socialization strategy, and though laborious, it is incredibly important to the Indian families involved in this study as it enhances cultural competence, social networks, and promotes a strong sense of community.
Findings

Min(d)ing Culture

Just as ethnic and cultural socialization literature suggests, immigrant parents described facilitating the production of ethnic cultural knowledge in their children through everyday practices and routines such as setting aside time to pray together in the morning, code-switching between their mother-tongues and English (and at times making more concerted efforts in the home to teach their children how to speak, read, and write in their ethnic language), and cooking and consuming Indian foods. Moreover, in addition to the Bollywood or classical dance classes, as well as other academic and non-Indian related after-school activities, many of the parents interviewed had enrolled their children in at least one, if not multiple, classes geared toward cultivating Indian cultural knowledge. These activities undoubtedly kept both children and their parents incredibly busy. Typical weekdays for several of the children included a full day of school, Kumon, dance, and often a non-Indian related activity (like swimming, karate, or piano) before heading home for the evening to have dinner and finish up their homework. Weekends were kept busy, too, with Hinduism, Indian art, Indian language (most commonly Gujarati and Telugu), Bollywood, and classical Indian dance classes. Despite their hectic schedules, many parents expressed these activities as not only valuable exposure to Indian culture, but also crucial to teaching their children about the culture ‘left behind’ in a “proper way.”

Anira spoke to this point most explicitly. Emigrating to the U.S. with her husband in 1999 from Andhra Pradesh, Anira is a spirited mother of three who is known for her ‘do it right or don’t it at all’ attitude at the dance studio. Her high expectations not only permeated her daughter’s classical dance classes, but also propelled her to do as much as possible to teacher her kids about Indian culture. This resulted in enrolling her two older children, ages 14 and 8, in an intensive religious class that was split up by age group and met every Sunday for two hours where her daughters would learn about Hindu philosophy and mythology, slokas, their state language (Telugu) in written and spoken form, and yoga. Below, Anira talks about the value of sending her children to these weekly classes:

Yeah, because we never learned this in school, right? We just knew them (religious practices and myths) generally. But now they are being taught in a proper way, like who is who and who is what, what and which, how they are related—when the question comes, we’re like, “Really?! I didn’t know that!” So at least they are learning. At least they’ll have some background, right? I don’t want them completely confused. As they get older, if they lose or they don’t know—see, we’re all Hindus. So if they don’t know what Hinduism or what their background is, what will they teach their kids?

Like many of the immigrant parents I spoke to during interviews and in the dance studio, growing up in a community where religious and cultural traditions were so firmly intertwined with one another and engrained in daily life contributed to their general knowledge about Hinduism and routinized rituals. Because Anira was not formally taught about Hindu philosophy or the symbolism...
which is so heavily entrenched within myths and rituals, she, and several other parents, saw the opportunity of enrolling her children in a directed and intensive religion class as essential to providing a solid knowledge based about their ethnic heritage that they themselves can pass on to future generations. More than offering “some background” so that her kids were not “completely confused” about Hinduism, cultural cultivation demonstrated the deliberate efforts made to share a more detailed, nuanced, and “proper” understanding of Indian cultural history and religions than Anira and her husband can provide alone.

Esha, too, felt that cultural cultivation, specifically through structured activities outside of the home, was critical to teaching her two daughters, Khushi who is 10 and Anya who is eight, Jainism and Gujarati, both of which she held dear. Born in Mumbai (formerly called Bombay), Esha first moved with her family to California, traveled to Texas for optometry school, and eventually married a second generation Gujarati man with whom she started a family in Tampa. During our interview, Esha described the intense efforts made to teach her children about Indian culture. In the name of cultural cultivation, Esha relied on a number of Indian-focused structured activities outside of the home, including enrolling her daughters in Bollywood dance, Gujarati language, Jainism, and Indian voice lessons. While at the dance studio, Esha frequently sat on the edge of the dance floor to observe the classes that her girls were taking. She remained watchful over her energetic and playful daughters, quickly calling to them to settle down when she noticed them getting rowdy in their Bollywood dance classes. Invested in what her children were learning at the studio, she was the only parent in my three years of teaching to ever ask me to translate Hindi song lyrics to the students so that the kids knew what they were dancing to.

Yet, our conversations about what aspects of Indian culture Esha wanted to pass along to her daughters and how she did so weighed heavily on her. Speaking in a measured and soft tone, she described wanting to teach her children about Jainism (religion) and Gujarati (the language she grew up speaking), and her desire to cultivate in them a love for Indian pop culture and Bollywood. Though she took it as a triumphant success when she found her daughters choreographing their own moves to Bollywood songs over the previous summer, Esha frequently spoke of feeling unsatisfied, and at times disappointed, at the fact that she was not able to teach her daughters Gujarati and that the girls were emotionally disconnected from the religion she grew up with. Taking this with a heavy heart, she referred to herself in her interview as being a variation of an “A. B. C. D.,” or an American-born-confused-Desi (Desi referring to South Asian diaspora). Having been born in India, Esha acknowledged that she did not fit the first two criteria, but nonetheless described feeling confused and frustrated that she did not practice, let alone convey Indian culture to her children, in the way she saw fit. Below, in the context of religion and spirituality, Esha expresses her struggle and the efforts she made through outside activities in an attempt at resolution:

I have an image or idea of what I feel God is, but I don’t know how to convey that to my kids. I just grew up with it, but we don’t practice the bhajans (religious devotional songs) and the morning prayers that I grew
up with. So I don’t know how to convey that same feeling to my kids…but they don’t have that attachment….We tried to do a form of religious school at the Jain Temple and that didn’t work out. And we tried [a different religious school]. It didn’t work out with our schedules. But maybe [we’ll] try the Sunday school at the Jain Temple again.

Esha discussed how she did not practice the same traditions she grew up doing at home with her daughters. Though she did not expand upon why throughout the rest of her interview, it was clear that this was turning into a growing sense of regret, loss, and missed opportunity for Esha. In an attempt to help convey not only cultural knowledge, but an internal emotional connection with Jainism, Esha sought out religious schools throughout the local Indian community and tried to take her daughters to the Jain Temple as often as their busy schedules would allow. Though the first two times did not work out, Esha had a continued desire to involve Khushi and Anya in these religious and cultural activities. Esha’s case demonstrated that the routinized practices of ethnic and cultural socialization are, at times, not nearly enough to teach children about a culture ‘left behind.’ Therefore, the deliberate efforts of cultural cultivation, even among immigrants, are viewed as necessary.

Like religion and spirituality, almost all of the parents expressed how important it was for their children to learn their native language. Each of the interviewed children, and most kids at the dance studio in general, seemed to be able to comfortably understand their parents’ mother-tongue. In fact, many of the children were able to communicate back to their parents in their ethnic language. However, as English became more commonly used in their daily lives, parents expressed how they not only wanted, but needed to make more concerted efforts to teach children how to communicate in their native language. Anira, below, speaks to this. She and her husband, Anand, were committed to making sure that their three children could speak their native language, Telugu. Yet, when discussing her eldest daughter’s language ability, Anira stated with a look of hesitation, “Uh, she’s okay with it,” and continued on in a more animated tone:

I keep telling [my daughters], if you don’t continue to speak in Telugu, what will you teach your kids? They’ll become all English speaking! You’ve lost a language. Our language will die at some point because everybody is spreading out everywhere. So, you know, you have to make an effort in some things. …[But now] for us, English comes so freely—even me. I’m at fault, too. I keep speaking to them in English sometimes.

Extending beyond her immediate family, Anira revealed her deep concern about the loss of language on a much broader scale, and in turn, implied that part of why she feels it is so important to teach children the language of their immigrant parents is so that these ethnic languages did not die out among diaspora. She perceived the loss of her mother-tongue as a potential and dire consequence to building a life in a new land. Feeling as though she was at fault, too, because “English comes so freely,” Anira took responsibility for her children not being as proficient in Telugu as she would like. Thus, more than relying on
daily routine, she recognized that specific efforts had to be made inside the home and outside of the home through Telegu classes in order to protect the language as well as her and her children’s sense of identity as Indian.

While Anira is concerned with the survival of ethnic language across borders, others emphasized it as an important tool for maintaining transnational relationships. Many of the immigrant parents I spoke to both casually at the dance studio and during formal interviews mentioned having little family, outside of their spouse and children, in Tampa. Their extended families were either spread out across the U.S. or “back home” in India. For immigrants with much of their family living in India, their children’s bilingualism was key to developing and preserving transnational relationships. Simran, a warm and vivacious Punjabi mother of two who moved to the U.S. in 1999, expands on this. With her and her husband having been raised in Dehli, both speak Hindi and focused on cultivating their children’s Hindi speaking skills at home. Simran explained:

We try to teach [our son and daughter] Hindi because our parents are most comfortable in Hindi. So if [the kids] don’t know the basic language of our family, we are just two of us here. The whole family is back in India. If they don’t know Hindi, there will be no alliance between them. They will be in a room with no conversation or just some very patched communication through signals or whatever. See, at home, we try to tell them to [speak] Hindi. But when they go out there, they are likely to use whatever conversation they are having with their friends. …But at home, we do try to tell them [to] learn the language with us.

More than recognizing Hindi as the language with which she felt most comfortable speaking or that helped her feel a sense of connection to the surrounding Indian community, Simran here emphasized the importance of Hindi to building an “alliance” or relationships between her children and her extended family in India. She made clear that teaching her children Hindi was essential to cultivating meaningful connections beyond “some very patched communication” with family abroad. Her frequent usage of phrases including “we try to teach….at home” or “we try to tell them to speak Hindi” highlighted not that their children learn the language through everyday routinized ethnic and cultural socialization, but rather the purpose-driven efforts she and her husband made at home.

In addition to religion and language, interviewed parents collectively regarded cooking Indian foods as essential cultural knowledge to pass on to their children because, as one interviewee, Lalitha, succinctly mentions, “Food is very important. That shows our culture.” Like Lalitha, Divya, mother of 8 year old Dipika and 6 year old Aisha, from Tamil Nadu saw food as essential to preserving Indian culture in the U.S. Warm, welcoming, and showing an incredible amount of cultural pride, Divya reminisced about the way her family used to cook with fresh spices in Tamil Nadu, the south Indian state in which she was raised. She frequently linked culture with science by discussing the “scientific value” of culturally engrained practices, specifically how cooking with fresh spices specific to South Indian cuisine is beneficial for the body. And while she intended to pass
Divya, as well as the immigrant parents above, articulated the specific efforts they felt they needed to make with religion, language, and foods in order to preserve and pass along Indian culture to their children. Though “in [her] heart” Divya does not “want to forget them,” she, among other mothers, found it difficult to always make time for cultural cultivation, a point which will be expanded upon in the next section.

Cultural Cultivation as Gendered Labor

Just as mentioned above, Divya, as well as other immigrant mothers, discussed how difficult it was to make time for cultural cultivation. This was due in large part to childrearing, and therefore cultural cultivation, being perceived and taken on as women’s work, regardless of whether they already had fulltime jobs. At the dance studio, mothers were not only overwhelmingly more involved, but also occupied the space. Whereas mothers often remained in the waiting area during their children’s dance classes, rarely did fathers stay, and those who did often waited outside of the studio on the sidewalk or by themselves in their cars. One could easily argue their absence is because the dance studio is seen as women’s space and this no doubt was reflected in the data sample of this study. Still, throughout almost all interviews and several informal conversations at the studio, and despite being seen as important to both mothers and fathers, mothers described taking on a bulk of the responsibility when it came to cultural cultivation and teaching their children about the culture ‘left behind.’ As Divya, a fulltime software engineer who spoke of frequently working overtime, stated matter-of-factly, “I’m doing both duties, job and home duty.” In her interview, she went on to describe the specific efforts she, and she alone, made with trying to teach her daughters Tamil and the guilt she felt for not having enough time. With an unmistakable tinge of exhaustion and guilt, Divya told me:

Divya: I started teaching [Dipika and Aisha] reading. Like, I had all Tamil books from India. I taught them and had them practice the letters and the alphabets and everything. They started writing and they started recognizing. And by seeing the picture, they could tell in Tamil stuff, like pre-k-ish things. But now they lost most of it. And it’s me and my husband’s fault. We didn’t enforce that much. If we would have, they would have learned. But I don’t have any time. That’s what I hate now.
Like, I feel like I should be a housewife. I am very serious. I am missing a lot. At this age, they won’t get it back, right? So, I always think I should stay home for these kind of reasons. Sometimes, I literally don’t have any time between class (extracurricular activities) and homework and to cook and clean. And my office is so crazy. Yesterday I was working 11pm to 12am. Morning I went to work at 8am. Came home at 5:30pm. Then again I logged in at 11pm to 12:15am. …So it’s been like that for the last one month. …I’m tired and I have to finish all important things first. Like food. That’s first priority, right? So after one month if I try to reinforce (reading and writing lessons in Tamil), it will be very hard. Very tough. So, lot of things. One thing was learning Tamil. That fell off like this (snaps her fingers).

_Pangri:_ Would you say that you take on more of the role of teaching Indian culture to the girls?

_Divya:_ Yup. Mm hm. Mostly me. But [my husband] was really trying to find Tamil [teachers]. But still, gents they are like that, right? They won’t keep talking much about it, no.

Divya expressed how important it was to her that both Dipika and Aisha knew how to read and write in Tamil. From specially ordering children’s books from India to spending extra time at home, Divya described the efforts she made almost entirely by herself to try to teach her daughters the written language. Moreover, exhaustedly describing her days, Divya found it difficult to keep up with both the demands of her office which required her to often work beyond a 9am-5pm schedule as well as the basic childrearing responsibilities at home. Married for nearly 13 years at the time of the interview, Divya felt like she not only took on the majority of the parenting role at home with transporting her daughters to and from their extracurricular activities (which included Bollywood, Bharatanatyam at another classical dance studio, Kumon, and swimming), helping them with their homework, cooking, and cleaning, but was also the primary transmitter of cultural cultivation inside of the home. With the exception of looking for Tamil teachers, Divya’s efforts of cultural cultivation, specifically teaching her daughters Tamil, Hindu prayers and rituals, and making foods that reflected the culture she grew up with, rested primarily on her because as she stated throughout our interview, “Dad doesn’t like that department” and “…gents are like that, right?” Thus, Divya felt largely alone in her efforts of not only childrearing, but also cultural cultivation. Not having enough time between her job, cooking and cleaning, and helping her two daughters with their homework, Divya expressed feeling drained and stretched for time, and as a result, had to forego of some cultural cultivation practices that she valued, like teaching her daughters written Tamil and making many traditional Tamilian foods for them. Feeling guilty for not engaging in cultural cultivation in the way she would like ultimately led Divya to sincerely question whether she should leave her job or stay at the expense of sacrificing valuable time with her daughters. For fulltime working mothers in Divya’s position, cultural cultivation was a clear ‘added step’ to their “second shift” at home.
Like Divya, Esha expressed taking on the primary responsibilities of cultural cultivation. Holding a degree in Optometry, Esha decided to stop practicing after her daughters were born so that her husband could get his medical practice up and running. After a few years, the two collectively decided “that it worked out better this way” and she continued to take on the primary role of raising their kids at home while he remained working fulltime as a physician. As a homemaker, Esha described wanting to teach and share with her kids many of the same aspects of Indian culture that Divya and other mothers had mentioned above including religion, language, and Gujarati foods. Yet much of this responsibility lay primarily upon Esha not just because she spent more time with the kids, but also because between her and her husband, she felt she held more of the cultural knowledge. And since she held the brunt of the day-to-day responsibilities of taking care of their daughters as well as the cultural knowledge, she suggested that, in a way, she felt unable to convey cultural knowledge, especially the language of Gujarati, to her children in the way she wanted on her own. Below Esha describes the difficulties she encountered in trying to teach her children Gujarati:

The language and the music is such a big part of our culture and I want them to be familiar with it….The language, we tried to teach….We did the Gujarati lessons. I would like to re-visit them on my own….It’s just that my husband’s not fluent in it, so we don’t all speak to each other in Gujarati. We might communicate to each other in half-Gujarati half-English. That’s why [Khushi and Anaya] never learned….[and] I think of how hard we all try to have rotli (flatbread), daal (lentil soup), bhaath (cooked rice), shaak (vegetables) twice a week or um, make sure we have our Diwali (festival of lights) function. I try to make time for those things that are Indian, while still trying to run their daily life and make time for whatever extended family thing that’s going on, along with taking kids to this, that, and the other. It’s trying to get the cultural part in there too with the everyday life.

Esha, too, demonstrated how in her household cultural cultivation functioned for her as an ‘added step’ to child-rearing in which largely she engaged. Though she used the collective language of “we all try,” in practice, Esha’s excerpt above and overall interview revealed how she took on most of the work associated with cultural cultivation including transporting the girls to their Bollywood, Indian voice, Gujarati language, and Jain religion classes, cooking traditional Gujarati meals twice a week, celebrating Hindu holidays, and even contemplating teaching them Gujarati on her own. With all of this, she conveyed her efforts of and exhaustion in “trying to get the cultural part in there too with the everyday life.” For Esha, incorporating “the cultural part” required clear and deliberate efforts. Yet despite all she did to enhance her daughters’ knowledge about and pride in Indian culture, there was a sense in which Esha felt unable to adequately engage in ethnic and cultural socialization on her own. Language, for example and as discussed above, was a salient issue for Esha. She had previously enrolled her daughters in Gujarati lessons, but later on in the interview stated that
these classes did not work out because of the instructor’s focus on written script rather than teaching conversational Gujarati. Moreover, not being able to understand Gujarati affected her daughters’ interest in other outside cultural cultivation activities, such as Indian voice lessons. Esha stated that her daughters “found the Indian voice very difficult because they don’t understand.” She went on to say, “And I’m sure in many other families the kids understand, but mine don’t.” Feeling this as a significant lack, Esha considered taking it upon herself to formally teach her children Gujarati at home, even though she knew that this would be a difficult task as she saw her husband’s inability to speak Gujarati to be a barrier to her children’s acquisition of a secondary language. Still, this did not stop Esha from wanting to teach her children Gujarati or from more broadly “[trying] to make time for those things that are Indian, while still trying to run their daily life.” There was no doubt that Esha saw cultural cultivation as not only an ‘added step’ to childrearing but difficult to do, especially since she took on much of this responsibility single-handedly. And despite a larger collective desire to teach children about the culture ‘left behind,’ Divya’s and Esha’s experiences of taking on the bulk of the cultural cultivation responsibilities, regardless of whether they had fulltime jobs outside of the home or not, rang true and were reflective of several of the mothers interviewed.

Parental Benefits

While cultural cultivation is a deliberate, and at times exhausting, ‘added step’ to childrearing practices, especially for mothers, several of the parents described how the benefits of it extended beyond their children. Many mothers and fathers, in fact, discussed how their migration to the U.S. encouraged their cultural cultivation efforts and, in doing so, forced them to explore and learn about aspects of Indian culture and symbolic meanings of which they previously had little knowledge. Anand, Anira’s husband, spoke about this explicitly. Anand is a jovial father from Andhra Pradesh who steadfastly shared Anira’s desire and vision of cultivating Indian cultural knowledge and pride in their children. Offering an impetus for why they wanted to begin the more concerted efforts of cultural cultivation, they shared a story about a University of Florida event which occurred a few years ago:

Anand: …they called people from different religions, one from Christianity, one from Islam and one from every other religion to come forward and talk something about your culture or explain what your religion is. So many Indians go to University of Florida. UF is full of them, but there was not a single person that could explain what Hinduism is. So. That was a big news. Like, what is happening to this generation that they cannot even explain what—even in a few short sentences can’t explain what their culture is.

Anira: …So we were trying to discuss, why is that happening? Trying to figure out…I was like, “Oh no, come on.” Someone should have gotten up and explained just a little bit what it is. So many Indian kids there, everyone was looking at each other’s’ faces, but nobody got up. So I want...
them to at least be able to explain who they are or what their background is.

Disappointed in and shocked by the lack of knowledge about Hinduism, Anand and Anira described this university event as one of the driving reasons behind wanting to make explicit efforts to teach their children about Hinduism and Indian culture. But as they both demonstrated throughout the interview, cultural cultivation did not just contribute to their children’s body of knowledge about Indian culture. While Anira mentioned above how surprised she was at times with the detailed information her children were learning in their Sunday school classes, Anand went on to explain that he became more knowledgeable about the symbolic meaning behind Hindu religious and Indian cultural traditions after immigrating to the U.S. With an air of pride because of the knowledge he has gained, Anand said:

> See, you learn [Indian] culture after coming here. That’s the big difference. When you are there (in India), you’re part of it. You don’t know the value of it or meaning or importance of it. Once you come out, you know why we do that; after you listen. That is the reason. Certain things you just do from habit.

Like Esha’s concern with trying to cultivate a connection in her children with religion because in contrast to her daughters, she “just grew up with it,” Anand acknowledged that being surrounded by traditional customs in India facilitated a comfortable habituation. However, this did not necessarily translate into having an understanding of the symbolic meanings behind myths, rituals, and traditions. In the pursuit of re-creating and teaching his children aspects of the culture ‘left behind,’ Anand recognized that being removed from the everyday culture necessitated that he look beyond the tradition and explore the deeper meaning behind religious and cultural traditions. Extending beyond his children, Anand found that cultural cultivation both incentivized and required Anand to engage with culture and religion in ways that he had not previously done while growing up in India.

Building upon this, Neha, a stay-at-home Gujarati mother of two, asserted that having a deeper knowledge-base about religious and cultural practices of India while living in the U.S. was critical to cultural cultivation. At the time of the interview, Neha had recently enrolled her 8 year old son and 5 year old daughter in my Bollywood dance classes and was excited about her two kids being old enough to become involved in cultural activities. She mentioned wanting her kids to “not just be into studies” and “thought that if they do Indian dance…they can make Indian friends…[and] know more about Indian culture, too.” During the interview at her home, she delved into what she wanted her children to get out of cultural cultivation and how necessary it was for her to have a more detailed and complex understanding of Indian cultural and Hindu religious practices so that she could pass knowledge and traditions on to her kids. With a Hindu calendar outlining auspicious days and religious holidays hanging behind her as we spoke sitting on her living room couch, she stated that in addition to Bollywood classes,
she had enrolled her children in Swadyaya, which meets every Sunday for 1-2 hours as a devotional group to interpret Hindu texts for the purpose of self-discovery, self-development, and broader social awareness. Neha also took on the primary role of making sure that her kids pray in the morning when they get up, before dinner, and at the end of the day. Referring to Swadyaya and making the concerted efforts to pray at home three times a day, she declared that “from this, they understand why they don’t lie to their elders.” But beyond the ritualistic practices, Neha expressed how important it was for her herself to be more knowledgeable about Hinduism and the traditions she was trying to impart on to her children. Rather than simply repetition to the point of habituation, she acknowledged that she needed to be better informed so that she could provide a justification for religious and cultural practices as well as teach about Indian culture within and relative to the context of American society. Below Neha explained:

Frankly speaking, I feel like you know more about Indian culture when you are in America. Because you are practicing. Another thing is, your kids don’t know anything about the culture and you are teaching them….I feel like as a child, kids learn here about the culture. If you follow, your kids are going to follow you…but you have to let them know in their way. If the generation is changing a little bit, you have to change, too…Because kids now are smarter than what we were. They’re not going to learn if they don’t know the reason behind it. If our mom would tell us, ‘This is bad,’ we would say, ‘Yes, this is bad.’ Now, our kids say, ‘Why is it bad?’ So we should know why. Before you teach your child, you should know why. What is the reason behind learning that.

Just as Anand, Anira, Esha, and several other parents mentioned in their interviews, Neha recognized that in a country where it is not part of a cultural or societal norm, she needed to actively practice Indian culture and religion (Hinduism). Neha believed that children, following in the footsteps of their parents, would learn as much as their parents teach and practice. But at the same time, Neha saw a distinct difference between her and her children’s generation. Whereas before she would follow practices out of cultural and societal norms, here she felt that she needed to offer justifications and rationales behind statements and practices to her children. Much like how Anand and Divya suggested above, cultural cultivation often propelled immigrant parents to seek out for themselves more detailed knowledges and rationales pertaining to traditions, norms, and practices so that they could confidently pass this along to their children.

In addition to learning the symbolic meanings behind cultural and religious practices so that they could teach their children, many parents also mentioned engaging in cultural cultivation as a strategy of translocal place-making
More than this, some discussed how in practicing Indian culture transnationally they even sought after and performed traditions that they had never engaged in while growing up in India. Anira’s interview demonstrated this most explicitly when she described a religious festival practiced in South India associated with changing seasons. Whereas in India she and some of her family members would make it a point to visit the temple on this day, after coming to the U.S. and deciding with her husband to engage in cultural cultivation, she decided to put together a more elaborate way of celebrating the festival. Anira described the festival as stemming from a religious mythical story, part of which involved cooking and sharing a meal in the forest. In order to re-create the ancient myth, Anira along with a close group of Telugu friends rented out a pavilion at Hillsborough State Park, brought cookware and utensils, and cooked a meal from scratch. Using large banana leaves as their plates, they sat next to each other on the benches and enjoyed their meals. After telling me about this event, which had occurred only a few weekends before our interview, I asked Anira if she celebrated these festivals and traditions in the same way as she did when she lived in India. Indicating a difference, Anira stated:

Not this many. We did one or two, but not as many. And most of these festivals, we used to stop by our neighborhood temple (laughs), which was quicker or we used to just do it at home…Diwali and all, we used to do it together…but other than that, we didn’t used to do this large scale. So now I tell my mom about this and she says, ‘You seem to be doing a lot more than we ever did!’

Moreover, when asked why she thought she celebrated religious festivals and rituals more elaborately in the U.S. than she did in India, Anira replied, “Maybe because we miss India and we are thinking that if we don’t do it, we’ll forget it.” Anira’s was one of the interviews that most plainly illustrated the power of cultural cultivation not only for children, but for their immigrant parents, too. Just as carrying out the festival was meant to help cultivate cultural knowledge in their children, Anira and her friends’ re-creation of a religious myth, along with others’ concerted efforts to teach their children ethnic languages and about religious and cultural traditions, spoke to the desire to hold onto or develop a stronger connection to India and Indian culture. In effect, cultural cultivation for the immigrant parents involved in this study was a time-consuming, tough, and exhausting way of cultivating Indian cultural knowledge, yet highly valued as it often fostered a sense of ethnic and cultural identity, a way to connect with and engage a community identity, and ultimately helped build a sense of home and belonging.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have coined, conceptualized, and discussed the dimensions of cultural cultivation. Distinct from much of the research on ethnic and cultural socialization which often regards the passing of ethnic and cultural knowledge as a somewhat automatic and unidirectional process which occurs intergenerationally between parents or guardians and children, cultural cultivation
acknowledges the conscious and specific efforts immigrants make to teach their children about a culture ‘left behind.’ As discussed above, immigrant parents felt it was important to pass along cultural knowledge and values associated principally with religions, ethnic languages, and foods, and engaged in deliberate practices inside of the home and targeted classes outside of the home (such as Bollywood or classical Indian, religion, voice, and language classes) to cultivate this cultural knowledge.

In-depth interviews, home visits, and data collected at the dance studio also demonstrated cultural cultivation as a gendered socialization strategy. From the exhausting efforts of transporting their children to (cultural) afterschool activities to setting time aside at home or enrolling them in classes to learn about Hinduism, Sikhism, or Jainism to structuring their time so that their children can formally learn their ethnic language to making Indian foods at home, mothers overwhelmingly were the ones who engaged in cultural cultivation as reproductive labor. Despite whether they worked fulltime outside of the home, the notion of woman as mother and therefore primary caregiver remained salient and ultimately resulted in mothers taking on almost exclusively all of the responsibility in teaching their children about Indian culture. While mothers often used the collective “we try” or “we teach,” details of the interviews demonstrated that they themselves took on a majority of this responsibility. There is no doubt that cultural cultivation was a highly valued ethno-cultural socialization strategy among immigrant parents. For many of the mothers, especially those who were also working fulltime outside of the home, cultural cultivation operated an ‘added step’ to not only childrearing, but also what Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung (2003) refer to as women’s “second shift” at home.

In addition to cultural cultivation as a primary technique for fostering cultural competence among their children, this paper makes an important contribution by highlighting the ways in which parents benefited from this socialization strategy. Socialization literature focuses on how ethnic and cultural socialization benefits children, particularly through enhancing their sense of well-being and fostering a sense of positive self and ethnic group identity. Qualitative data collected with Indian families, however, demonstrated how immigrant parents, too, personally gained from the structured activities of cultural cultivation. Cultural cultivation prompted several of parents involved in this study to make an active effort to learn the historical and symbolic meanings associated with religious and cultural practices, with the specific intention of using this knowledge to re-create rituals and explain and justify traditions to their children. Among parents who engaged strategies of cultural cultivation, many of them regard it as time-consuming and laborious, and important to fortifying their identities as Indians living in the U.S.

Limitations and Future Research

An important limitation to note in this study was the class homogeneity of the sample. Cultural cultivation was conceptualized within the context of upwardly mobile families at Naach Indian dance studio who had the financial means to pay for classes geared toward teaching about the dances, languages, and
religions of India. But what of Indian immigrant families with less financial flexibility to send their children to culture-based activities? How may the intentionality and/or strategies of cultural cultivation be affected by socioeconomic status? Building upon this, the concept of cultural cultivation can be used to examine ethnic and cultural socialization across immigrant communities. In what ways does cultural cultivation operate differently amongst immigrant communities, especially in the context of ethnic enclaves, cities with larger immigrant populations, and towns with fewer families from similar ethnic or cultural backgrounds? Examining such questions through a qualitative lens would enrich and nuance our knowledge about socialization.

Moreover, there are several dimensions, and likely parallels, of Lareau’s (2003) concerted cultivation that were not explored in this paper. For example, a defining feature of concerted cultivation is parental involvement in children’s school and afterschool activities with parents at times making demands of or offering teaching suggestions to the experts from whom their children take classes. While ethnographic data collected as part of a larger study recounted mothers making special requests at Naach Indian dance studio for “less feminine” or “easier” moves and even tried suggesting choreography and negotiating class times, the present manuscript has not addressed how immigrant parents may seek to ‘take the reins’ and have more of a say in what their second generation children do or do not learn about the culture ‘left behind.’ This aspect of concerted cultivation as it relates to cultural cultivation is a rich area for future research.

Another cornerstone of concerted cultivation that Lareau highlights is the sense of entitlement that children begin to develop as a product of learning how to voice themselves and negotiate their wants with adults. Lareau demonstrates how this contributes to a breakdown of the boundary between child and adult/authority figure. Keeping this finding in mind in the context of cultural cultivation, how might this sense of entitlement look differently among children of immigrants, especially in light of research on Asian American families which suggest that ethnic, cultural, and familial expectations require that children respect and obey their elders and authority figures (Kibria 2002; Zhou & Bankston 1998)? Or perhaps would the style of cultural cultivation (majority culture-based classes outside of the home versus majority culture-based structured activities inside of the home) affect the development of second generation children’s feelings of entitlement? Exploring such questions offers an exciting new line of inquiry within socialization scholarship.

References


Baker, S., & Edwards, R. (2012). How many qualitative interviews is enough?: Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research. *National Centre for Research Methods, Economic*


Michigan Family Review, 21(1), 50-75, 2017. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mfr.4919087.0021.104
This article is protected by a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license.


