

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:

“DOING THE INDIAN THING”: THE  
INFLUENCE OF CONTRASTING  
CULTURAL NORMS ON THE  
DECISION MAKING AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF SECOND-  
GENERATION ASIAN INDIAN  
AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Current research on Asian American college students articulates the impact of different aspects of life on the decision-making and development of Asian American college students. However, Asian Americans are comprised of people of many different ethnicities. Much of the research related to the Asian American population tends to highlight the experiences of East Asian Americans and often fails to disaggregate findings in a way that could accurately explain the unique life experiences of other Asian American ethnicities. The purpose of this study was to use social constructivist grounded theory to explore how contrasting cultural norms influence the decision-making and development of Asian Indian American college students. This study helps bridge a significant gap in the current body of research on the Asian Indian American. Asian Indian American college students are an understudied student population, and thus, they are poorly understood.

The research questions that guided this study were: (1) What are key aspects of Asian Indian American students' lives that influence how they think about American, Indian, and Indian American cultural norms? (2) How do these cultural norms influence the way in which Asian Indian American students make decisions related to their college experience and major life choices? Ten currently enrolled Asian Indian American college students at the University of Maryland participated in this study. Participants were interviewed twice. The first interview focused on life and family history, experiences during K-12 years, and more. The second interview focused on aspects of their understanding of Indian and American cultural identity. During the second interview, participants also presented an artifact they felt was meaningful to them, which represented an aspect of their identity they cherish. Key findings in this study highlighted the influence of family, identity salience of Indian identity, building a hybrid Indian American identity, decision making processes, and assertion of autonomy within participants' lives inside and outside of college. A theory emerged from the data, which explains the influence of cultural norms on students' lives and decision making.

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CULTURAL NORMS ON THE DECISION MAKING AND DEVELOPMENT OF  
SECOND-GENERATION ASIAN INDIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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## **Foreword**

As an Indian male born and raised in the United States, I faced expectations to adhere to the norms and expectations of my cultural heritage like many children of Asian Indian immigrant families (Dasgupta, 1998). My twin brother and I comprised the diversity in our school in the town of Salem, Connecticut until middle school. I was used to being the only person of color in the classroom, as my brother and I were put in different classes most years. Though I recognize the cultural heritage I was instilled with at home, I am unsure if my South Asian heritage influenced my behavior in school. Based on my memories, most of how I thought and behaved was comparable to my White peers. I tried my best to fit in and make friends. However, one area of my life I struggled in was my schoolwork.

Since childhood, my parents always had high standards for our academic achievement, which is a common aspect of Asian immigrant families (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). However, I often did not meet those standards. My twin brother on the other hand, was always a great student. As a result of my mediocre academic achievement, I frequently bared the brunt of my parent's frustration. My parents taught me that Indian people are supposed to achieve good grades so they can do well in school, go to college, and eventually get a good job that will allow them to sufficiently take care of themselves and their family. The notion of going to college was never just an option. Rather, it was expected as a part of the natural progression of an Indian person's educational process. Just as I went to middle school after elementary school and high school after middle school, I was expected to go to college after high school.

When I began my college education, I did not realize how influential my cultural background was in my decision-making. I began my freshman year as a computer engineering major. My parents encouraged me to pursue this path, as they believed it was a safe career option that would allow me to have financial security. Growing up, I was always inundated with stories of how becoming a doctor or engineer are the two major career paths Indian people will choose. Part of this choice may be due to the highly lucrative nature of these careers and the success that first-generation South Asians have experienced as a result of being in such careers (which in turn have allowed individuals of this population to lead financially comfortable lives) (Traxler, 2009). Stereotypes about becoming a doctor or engineer often became a joke between my Indian friends and me, even in college. However, halfway through my sophomore year, I was miserable as a computer engineering major.

Since I was so unhappy, I decided to change my major to psychology due to my love of learning about others. However, my parents were concerned about what kind of job I might attain after graduating college with a psychology degree. As a result, they encouraged me to pursue a career as a psychiatrist, which would require going to medical school. As a result, I decided to become a premed student, thus fulfilling a common stereotype about Asian Indian American career choice (Bhat, 2005; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). I remained a premed student for the remainder of my undergraduate career. However, everything changed during the last semester of college.

One evening, I was having a conversation with my closest friend during my undergraduate years. A high school valedictorian and bona fide genius, my friend was slated to graduate a year early. During our conversation, he told me he felt his sister

would live a happier life than he would because she enjoyed her life on her own terms by living it her own way, whereas he felt he was simply “doing the Indian thing, where I’ve done well in school and now I’m supposed to go to medical school”, thus appeasing the expectations and norms that are often perpetuated in the culture. Ten days after this conversation, he committed suicide.

After my best friend’s passing, I immediately began questioning the notion of doing the Indian thing. Questions I posed to myself included: Why did he feel the need to act Indian, and what does doing so entail? Furthermore, how has the notion of doing the Indian thing influenced how my identity and the identity of my Asian Indian American peers developed? I began to question my ways of knowing. I wondered why I often felt the same compulsion my best friend felt to fulfill expectations that were often unique to South Asian culture. I decided to question my parents about much of what I was taught about Indian culture. I found members of my culture would often become upset with me when I questioned or criticized certain behaviors and norms related to Indian culture. They would sometimes respond by saying “You’re Indian! Act like it!” or they would express in some way that I should be prideful of my culture. Similar discomfort or anger would ensue even in discussions with my Indian American friends. I began to notice members of my cultural community seemed to feel obligated to adhere to the norms and expectations often perpetuated through generations.

This dissertation is born from my desire to understand how cultural norms influence the way in which Asian Indian American college students behave. My cultural background had a significant impact on how I made decisions in college even when I did not realize this to be the case. Losing someone close to me forced me to examine how

having a dual cultural background influenced my life. I realized the level of influence that the norms and values instilled in me from Indian culture and American culture drove much of how I made decisions about just about any major aspect of life. It is unfortunate that a significantly adverse life event is what helped me become conscious of the subconscious influences of the different cultural norms that are instilled in Asian Indian Americans such as myself. As a Ph.D. student, extensive review of the literature showed me that there is minimal substantive research on the Asian Indian American population, particularly in comparison to the broader Asian American population or other minority groups in the United States. Through this dissertation study, I aim to bridge the gap in the literature in hopes that this research will contribute to the betterment of the Asian Indian American college student experience and their lives in general.



## **DEDICATION**

To my friend, Sagar Faldu, thank you for helping me wake up, find my way in life, and stay true to myself. This doctoral degree is as much for you as it is for me.

To my parents, Smita and Manoj, I've lived a privileged life because of both of you and I cannot express how eternally grateful I am for everything you have done for me. Thank you for your undying support in my pursuit of a career and life that is a bit outside of the mainstream.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The journey to a Ph.D. is an arduous one. There is no amount of gratitude that can really exemplify how grateful I am for the support and facilitated growth I have experience due to the individuals I have been fortunately enough to be supported by on the way to completing my doctoral degree.

First and foremost, I want to thank my parents, Smita and Manoj, for giving me a comfortable life and instilling me with a deep appreciation for education. As a child, I hated school and I know I frustrated both of you countless times because I never performed to your standards. I hope that doing well in graduate school (both times) is enough to make up for all of the headaches I caused you during my younger years. I wouldn't have made it this far without the two of you. Thank you for everything. Also, I think it is pretty safe to say that you got your point across about how important education is in life, since I have earned a doctoral degree in something education related.

To my Aunt and Uncle, Raksha and Mayur, thank you for the kindness and hospitality you have shown me during my time in Maryland. When I moved to Maryland four years ago, you told me to treat your home as my own and you have since fed me more meals than I could count. Your support has made being a Ph.D. student less difficult and you have made my time here in Maryland thoroughly enjoyable.

To my friend, Sagar Faldu, I wish you were here to see this. I don't really know if I ever would have found my way in life without you. To think, being a resident assistant brought us together. The same experience would eventually help me find my way to a career in Student Affairs. I miss our conversations about life, Indian and American

culture, and the future. Our conversations ultimately served as the impetus for this dissertation. This Ph.D. is for you as much as it is for me.

Finally, I want to thank my Ph.D. advisor, Dr. Julie J. Park. I still remember meeting you at an ASHE conference and feeling like I was meeting a celebrity. I appreciate the experience and knowledge you gave me through the fellowship, the research team for your NSF grant, and class. It thoroughly prepared me to conduct this study and write this dissertation. Having the opportunity to be advised by an authority of research related to Asian Americans has been an honor. Thank you for your support through this entire program. Furthermore, I would like to thank the rest of my dissertation committee, Dr. Kimberly Griffin, Dr. Julie Park (Asian American Studies and Sociology), Dr. Bridget Turner Kelly, and Dr. Jing Lin, for their support in helping me complete my Ph.D. through serving on my dissertation committee. I would also like to thank the faculty of the Student Affairs Concentration for awarding me the Mac and Lucille McEwen Research Grant to help me fund this study.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The 2017 American Community Survey and the 2010 U.S. Census indicated that 5.4 million South Asians reside in the United States (“Demographic Snapshot”, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Between 2010 and 2017, the South Asian population grew approximately 40%. Their size and rate of growth has made the South Asian population the largest and fastest-growing Asian subpopulation in the United States (Loya et al., 2010). As the South Asian population continues to grow, the number of South Asian American students in higher education will likely increase. Of the U.S. South Asian population, the Asian Indian American (Asian Indian American) population is the largest—and largest growing—Asian subpopulation. Asian Indians comprise approximately 84% of the U.S. South Asian population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Yet, the experiences of these individuals are relatively unexplored by scholars and practitioners at U.S. higher education institutions. To understand the experience of Asian Indian American college students, it is important to understand the history of the Asian Indian population’s immigration to the United States. The following sections of this chapter address background information on the U.S. immigration history of Asian Indians. Additionally, this chapter will include information on Asian Indian Americans in higher education and the model minority myth.

### **Background and Context**

#### **Immigration History of Asian Indians to the United States**

People of the Indian subcontinent first arrived in the United States in 1898 (Ibrahim et al., 1997). These first Asian Indians came to the country as laborers who hoped to earn enough money to send back to India to help their poor families. However,

Americans did not receive Asian Indians in California (where they first arrived) well. As a result, laws were passed barring South Asian families from moving to the United States and joining family members who were already here. However, the legal precedent, *Bhagat Singh Thind v. The United States*, was a ruling made by the United States Supreme Court, which solidified the laws which barred South Asians from obtaining citizenship, ownership or purchasing of property, and marrying outside of their race (Ibrahim et al., 1997; Lee, 2015).

During the 1940s there were approximately 2,500 people of South Asian origin living in the United States (Ruzicka, 2011). Most of these immigrants were Sikh men from the region of Punjab, India who came to the United States to work on farms, lumber mills, and railroad systems in California (Lee, 2015; Ruzicka, 2011). The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 allowed people to immigrate to the United States if they fit into preferential categories. Preference was given to people who were educated professionals in the science, engineering, math, or medical fields (Ruzicka, 2011). Under this act many South Asians were also able to come to the United States to reunite with their family members. Indians migrated to the United States with what is generally considered to be a higher level of human capital when compared to other immigrant groups. Indian immigrants came to the United States having a strong command of the English language due to English colonialism and they secured higher paying jobs as skilled professionals (Rahman & Witenstein, 2013). During the wave of immigration following the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, Asian individuals tended to migrate to the United States often with higher levels of education (Jiménez et al., 2017; Lee & Zhou, 2015). This type of immigration is considered to be “hyper selective,”



since legislation specifically targeted and encouraged immigration of highly educated migrants in very specific professions (Lee & Zhou, 2015).

Though most Asian Indian immigrants emigrated directly from India, many others immigrated to the United States from England, Africa, and the Pacific Islands. Much of the variation in location from where Asian Indians emigrated was a direct result of the colonial histories of these regions (Ruzicka, 2011). Between the 1960s and the 1990s, the South Asian population grew by 900% (Leonard, 1997). Even with this tremendous growth, the presence of Asian Indians in American colleges and universities, their development during postsecondary education, and their overall experience in higher education, is poorly understood.

### **Asian Indian American Higher Education Enrollment**

Research on Asian Indian Americans is sparse (Bhat, 2005; Kanagala, 2011; Ruzicka, 2011; Samuel, 2019; Traxler, 2009). Since the Asian Indian American population comprises a significant percentage of the U.S. population, one can expect Asian Indian Americans comprise a significant percentage of college student population in the country. It is well documented South Asian families strongly value education and thus, South Asian parents often have high achievement standards for their children (Asher, 2008; Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004; Kodama & Huyhn, 2017; Rahman & Witenstein, 2013). South Asians view being highly educated as a marker of being successful in one's host country (Rahman & Witenstein, 2013). Being educated is viewed as a means to fulfill one's family obligations and promote the prestige and pride of one's family. High academic achievement is seen as a means of boosting the reputation of oneself and one's family, particularly in collectivistic cultures (Hickey, 2006). Asian

American families often see higher education as a means to gain upward economic and social mobility (Kodama & Huyhn, 2017; Poon, 2014). Since Indians comprise approximately 84% of South Asians in the United States (“Demographic Snapshot”, 2019; Rahman & Witenstein, 2013), this phenomenon and perception likely applies to many Asian Indian Americans in the United States.

A significant factor that influences the success of Asian Americans in higher education may be family socioeconomic status (Lee & Zhou, 2014; 2015). Since the hyperselectivity of immigration in the mid-1960s resulted in a significant number of highly educated Asians migrating the United States, these individuals brought a wealth of social and cultural capital (Lee & Zhou, 2014). The children of these immigrants may likely benefit from the intergenerational transmission of tangible and intangible social and cultural capital resulting in a socioeconomic advantage, benefiting them in their educational and career attainment (Lee & Zhou, 2014).

Though the literature is unclear on the influence of religion on education and career aspiration attainment, data may point to values instilled through religion having some influence on educational and socioeconomic achievement. Specifically, this may be exemplified by the high levels of socioeconomic and educational status of Hindus. DeSilver (2014) indicated that Hindus are considered to be the most educated religious group in the United States; 77% of Hindus in the United States have a bachelor’s degree and 48% have attained a graduate degree. American Hindus are considered to have the highest income levels, with 43% of them earning \$100,000 per year or more DeSilver (2014). In contrast, the rate of Christians earning \$100,000 per year or more in the United States is 16%. This higher level of income is frequently attributed to the Asian

Indian American population's (most of which is Hindu) interest in pursuing high-paying career in the fields of medicine and engineering (Asher, 2008; Rahman & Witenstein, 2013). However, the 1965 immigration policy changes that gave preference to individuals who had professional backgrounds or higher education in these fields (Samuel, 2019; Shrikant, 2015; Lee & Zhou, 2015) has likely driven the perceptions of Asian Indians and those of other Asian backgrounds as being "naturally more interested" in these lucrative fields or naturally having an affinity for professional success overall. Often, the success of Asian immigrants is used to criticize and reinforce stereotypes about Black Americans and their perceived struggles or lack of success (Bauman & Saunders, 2009; Poon et al., 2016; Prasad, 2000).

Though Hinduism is not the only religion followed by those of the Asian Indian American community, the majority of Asian Indian Americans are Hindu (Kurien, 2001; Pew Research Center, 2012). Thus, the percentage of Hindus in the United States holding undergraduate and graduate degrees is likely statistically representative of the Asian Indian American population. Though the population heavily values higher education, there is minimal research on Asian Indian American college students, particularly in comparison with other minority student populations in the country (Iwamoto et al., 2013; Samuel, 2019). Of the research that exists on Asian Americans as a whole, Asian American students in postsecondary education have been largely misrepresented. This is largely due to enrollment and retention research often grouping Asian American students with White students due to the "model minority" stereotype (Kodama et al., 2002; Museus et al., 2013; Poon et al., 2016; Ruzicka, 2011).

### **The Model Minority Myth**

The model minority myth is a racial stereotype that depicts Asian Americans as a hardworking, high-achieving, minimally problematic racial group (Dhingra, 2008; Poon et al., 2016; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). This myth perpetuates a perspective that Asian Americans are highly educated and successful as a result of pursuing lucrative career paths in medical fields, engineering, or business (Ruzicka, 2011, Traxler, 2009). The model minority myth also characterizes Asian Americans as passive, minimally communicative, and unlikely to cause any sort of civil or political unrest (Dhingra, 2008; Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002; Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011). Due to the model minority myth, the struggles Asian Americans encounter when trying to manage conflicting cultural identities goes mostly unnoticed by many, including policy makers, legislators, higher education professionals and scholars (Farver et al., 2002; Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011). The perception Asian American students are largely successful in postsecondary educational settings has led to a lack of interest in studying students who identify with specific Asian subgroups (Chang, 2011; Museus et al., 2013). The South Asian American subgroup that is a part of the broader-encompassing Asian American population has suffered from this disinterest, particularly its college student population.

Asian Indian American college student development has not been researched as thoroughly as the broader Asian American group (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). The majority of research on Asian Americans tends to emphasize the experiences of East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Koreans) Americans. Still, Asian Indian American students are just as important to understand as a student of any other background (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). The experience of Asian Indian Americans in higher education can be complex.

From a young age, these students are often expected to integrate the expectations and values of their ethnic heritage (South Asian culture) with the majority culture (White or Eurocentric culture) (Bhat, 2005; Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). This integration process can have a significant impact on the lives of South Asian American college students. For example, the aforementioned process especially influences Asian Indian American student mental health, as trying to integrate two sets of sometimes contrasting cultural norms and values into one's identity can exacerbate acculturative stress (Miville & Constantine, 2007 & Patel, 2010). More on acculturative processes and other relevant issues for Asian Indian American student development will be discussed in the literature review section of this proposal. The complicated lives of Asian Indian American students must receive more attention from scholars and practitioners in higher education, so Asian Indian American students' needs can be accommodated more effectively.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The few researchers who have conducted research on South Asian American students highlight how South Asian American students are challenged by traditionally White student organizations, such as Greek life, as well as participation in ethnic groups on campus, such as an Indian Students Association (Patel, 2010, Ruzicka, 2011; Soin, 2015; Traxler, 2009). Attempting to mix traditionally White experiences with experiences that are typically associated with South Asian or Asian Indian American ethnic identity and psychosocial development can cause stress and difficulties (many of which White students do not experience). These stresses and difficulties can adversely impact South Asian American college students' mental health (Miville & Constantine, 2007). The

integration of two cultural backgrounds, a process known as *acculturation* (Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009), can be especially difficult when the norms and values of these two backgrounds are somewhat opposing in nature. Asian cultural norms tend to be viewed as collectivistic, where interdependence, deference to authority, and focus on family needs are prioritized (Kodama et al., 2002). In contrast, White or Eurocentric cultural norms are viewed as individualistic, where independence, autonomy, and personal needs are touted (Kodama et al., 2002). Patel (2010) signified acculturation can be challenging to South Asian American person's *Desiness*—a term typically associated with a sense of closeness or belonging to one's South Asian cultural heritage (Patel, 2010)—because students may feel a desire or pressure to adhere to South Asian cultural norms, values, and expectations, while also being interested in integrating aspects of their individualistic host culture into their identity or self-concept (Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009).

The lack of research on the South Asian American population (and particularly Asian Indian American student population), combined with the model minority myth, may drive a lack of understanding about the experience these individuals have in college. The aggregation of South Asians with those of other Asian backgrounds (or even White students) makes it unclear as to how Asian Indian American students' life challenges may vary from their peers of other Asian ethnicities. The available aforementioned research shows that Asian Indian American students, like students of any other minority group, experience challenges in higher education. The mental health, wellbeing, and the success of these students is at stake as a result. Acculturative stress and the repercussions of this stress can be detrimental to the wellbeing and success of South Asian American and

Asian Indian American students (Farver et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011). Yet, these students may find the services offered at the post-secondary institutions to be insufficient in addressing their concerns, as student affairs professionals may lack understanding of how to navigate the complex yet unique identities and experiences of Asian Indian American students (Traxler, 2009). Without more research on the Asian Indian American population to educate professionals in higher education, detriments to Asian Indian American students' overall college experience may go unabated and cause significant suffering amongst these students.

The process of developing and navigating identities and self-concept is known as *psychosocial development* (Kodama et al., 2002). Though some researchers have provided important insights on Asian American college students' psychosocial development (Kodama et al., 2002), very few have offered insights into the psychosocial development process of Asian Indian American college students specifically. This lack of understanding may result in Asian Indian American students not receiving the support they need to succeed in higher education and develop their identities in a manner that does not induce or aggravate mental health or wellbeing issues due to acculturative stress. Thus, more research on how Asian Indian American students develop and make decisions while in college is necessary to prevent or mitigate such issues.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this dissertation study is to examine how Asian Indian American students' decision-making and psychosocial development occurs when these individuals experience the influence of different cultural norms. This study will focus on how the more collectivistic expectations, values, and norms many Asian Indian American students

experience in their upbringing interact with aspects of the more individualistic aspects of American culture. Specifically, this study will observe and identify how these norms and value systems influence Asian Indian American students' major life choices, particularly related to the college experience. How do these students decide which set of cultural norms to adhere to when these sets of norms may conflict at times? This study will provide insight regarding how such decision-making processes unfolds during the undergraduate years for a sample of Asian Indian American students attending the University of Maryland. I aim to only use one site to collect data in order to avoid the need to account for geographic differences during analysis. However, should recruiting participants at the University of Maryland be less fruitful than anticipated, I will use Rutgers University as a backup institution for recruitment.

Additionally, through this study, I will aim to identify if there are any distinct differences in the Asian Indian American student psychosocial development in comparison to the broader Asian American student population. Much of the prominent literature and understanding of this population's development is typically framed through the understanding of the broader Asian American racial group, which focuses heavily on students of East Asian backgrounds (e.g., Kim, 1981, Kodama et al., 2002). Much of this literature will help guide this study, but there could be key differences that may surface in the examination of the Asian Indian American development process. The results of this study will contribute to a narrowing of the gap in the body of literature on this population and topic. An increase in literature about these students may provide a means to enhance the understanding that higher education and student affairs professionals have about this population, thus helping these professionals address the needs of Asian Indian American



students with greater proficiency.

The research questions that will be examined in this dissertation study are:

1. What are key aspects of Asian Indian American students' lives that influence how they think about American, Indian, and Indian American cultural norms?
2. How do these cultural norms influence the way in which Asian Indian American students make decisions related to their college experience and major life choices?

These questions will provide significant insight into the decision-making and development processes of Asian Indian American students in the United States.

### **Significance**

The research questions posed in this study recognize the complexity of Asian Indian American individuals' identities. Though this study will use current Asian American psychosocial development and success frame models (Kodama et al., 2002; Lee & Zhou, 2014) and research for guidance, this study also recognizes that such models may not be entirely adequate or specific enough to completely apply to the Asian Indian American college student population. The significance of this study to the broader body of research is that its specificity to the Asian Indian American population will shed light on a population that scholars have neglected. There are significant bodies of research on the larger Asian American population, but most of the research focuses on those of East Asian descent. Though there are likely many similarities between East Asians and Asian Indian Americans, this dissertation study will provide insight that will not simply rely on scholars making the assumption that the experiences of Asian Indian American individuals are the same or at least somewhat similar to Asian Americans of East Asian

heritage.

If research on the Asian Indian American student population were to develop sufficiently, a key group of people who would benefit professionally are student affairs professionals. This is because student affairs professionals who work with or support Asian Indian American students would have better insight on how to help Asian Indian American students in a culturally sensitive manner. Of the limited perspectives offered on the advising, developmental, and mental health support of the Asian Indian American population (e.g., Traxler, 2009; Tummala-Nara & Deshpande, 2018), it is clear student affairs professionals are woefully underprepared to work with Asian Indian American students. The advice they may provide during advising sessions may be ineffective due to a lack of understanding about how Asian Indian American decision-making processes around advising and institutional resource usage occurs (Traxler, 2009). Student affairs professionals may not understand the culturally relevant factors that influence this process and the challenges these students may face as a result. The lack of understanding student affairs professionals may have about Asian Indian American students may result in Asian Indian American students feeling discouraged from utilizing university resources all together (Traxler, 2009): Students who are struggling with deciding on a major or career path may avoid using academic advising or career advising services.

A key functional area within student affairs that would benefit from this dissertation research is counseling and mental health services. Stigmas surrounding mental health and counseling are highly pervasive in Asian cultures and Asian American communities (Pishori, 2015), including U.S. Asian Indian American families, communities, and individuals (Nagaraj et al., 2017). Thus, understanding the Asian

Indian American student experience—particularly experiences and factors related to acculturative stress—might help institutional mental health professionals with providing services in a way that may be more effective for the Asian Indian American student population. Since the Asian Indian American population has a significant presence in colleges and universities throughout the country, it is likely Asian Indian American students are facing many of the same stressors and difficulties other college students face. However, Asian Indian American students have the additional acculturative stress from having an identity that is more complex than the majority White population. This stress could mean Asian Indian American students may experience more mental health concerns than their White peers. Additionally, since Asian Indian American students are less studied in comparison to many other ethnic minority college students, institutional professionals may not have sufficient knowledge about how to navigate the cultural nuances and the resulting unique challenges Asian Indian American students may face. Thus, this dissertation research would provide mental health professionals at colleges and universities the insight they need to better help the Asian Indian American student population.

What may likely benefit the aforementioned scholars and professionals is a stronger understanding of how Asian Indian American students learn to integrate differing sets of cultural norms into their identity. This study will provide a deeper understanding of the influence of cultural norms for Asian Indian American students in ways current research does not delve into.

## Key Terms

Throughout this dissertation, there are a number of terms that may not be part of a reader's common vernacular or lexicon. These section focuses on identifying and describing these terms.

**South Asian American:** The term “South Asian” refers to people who are (or have parents or ancestors who come from) Indian, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, or Nepal. A South Asian American refers to a person who was born and raised in the United States but has primarily South Asian ancestry.

**Asian Indian American:** An individual who identifies as Indian because their parents are from India, but the individual in question was born and raised in the United States.

**First-generation:** An individual who immigrated to the United States.

**Second-generation:** A person who was born and raised in the country where they reside, but their parents immigrated from another country.

**Desi:** A colloquial term for a South Asian person who lives in a non-South Asian country.

**Cultural Norms:** “Rules and expectations of behavior and thoughts based on shared beliefs within a specific culture or social group.” (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2018, p.

1)

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this section, I provide an overview of literature that focuses on the experiences of Asian Indian American and other South Asian American college students. Though I drew from literature specific to Asian Indian Americans and South Asian Americans, the bodies of literature specifically focused on these populations are severely limited in quantity. Thus, I consulted with research that had been conducted on the broader Asian American racial group, as there would likely be aspects of other Asian American subgroups that have comparable experiences and outcomes to Asian Indian Americans. The key themes addressed in the literature review presented in this chapter are acculturation, bicultural identity, intergenerational disparities, family and gender-related perspectives, mental health and counseling, Asian Indian identity formation, creating and upholding cultural norms, and Asian Indian American religious identity.

### **Acculturation**

Acculturation is a process whereby ethnic minorities adapt to the culture of their host country (Farver et al., 2002; Ghuman, 1994; Mehta, 1998; Raman & Hardwood, 2008; Sodowsky & Carey, 1988). For example, Asian Indians in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom are faced with trying to balance or integrate the culture associated with their ethnic background (i.e., Indian culture) with the host culture (Farver et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011).

Acculturation can happen in four primary ways for second-generation Asian Indian Americans. First, they may *assimilate* to a culture by solely trying to adhere to the norms and expectations of the dominant culture (Farver et al., 2002). In the United States, the majority culture refers to the White/Eurocentric culture that is often referred to as

“Western” in nature. Second-generation Asian Indian individuals who aim to assimilate may try to sever ties with the culture associated with their ethnic or racial background. The second way in which an Asian Indian American person might experience acculturation is through *marginalization*, whereby an individual will reject both their host culture and their ethnic/racial culture (i.e., they do not like either side enough to want to strictly identify as either) (Farver et al., 2002; Farver et al., 2007). The third method of acculturation is *separation*. An Asian Indian American individual engages in separation when they choose to closely identify with their ethnic or racial culture and reject the culture of their host country (Farver et al., 2002; Rahman & Rollock, 2004). This phenomenon may occur if Asian Indian Americans experience discrimination from outgroup members (Dhingra, 2008). The last way an individual may experience acculturation is *integration*. An Asian Indian American individual may develop biculturality by maintaining adherence to some aspects of their ethnic or racial group culture, while selectively integrating aspects of the broader majority’s host culture into their identity. Acculturation is often a complex process (Farver et al., 2002; Rudmin, 2003). Integration is considered to be the most successful acculturation style for second-generation Asian Indian Americans (Rudmin, 2003). This is because integrated immigrants as a whole seem to experience lower levels of acculturative stress and have fewer mental health issues (Lincoln et al., 2016).

Early hypotheses on acculturation considered the process to be linear (Olmedo et al., 1978). However, more recent studies on Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern immigrants and their children have clearly highlighted that the process is multidimensional (Farver et al., 2002; Schwartz et al., 2010). The complexities of

acculturation and the often-uninformed ways by which immigrants may navigate such complexities may lead to experiencing challenges that may facilitate social and cognitive developmental growth (Farver et al., 2002). This growth may be particularly true for Asian Indian adolescents in the United States. Thus, it is important to explore and understand the impact of intergenerational disparities between second-generation Asian Indian Americans and their immigrant parents. It is also important to consider other comprehensive models when thinking about acculturation and its influence on second-generation individuals from immigrant families.

Some of the more prominent literature focuses primarily on the assimilation process in the broader acculturation process. Notably, some scholars have conducted research on a phenomenon known as *segmented assimilation* (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Portes et al. 2005). Segmented assimilation is a concept that encompasses different parts of American society where an immigrant or their children may assimilate and what factors may influence this process (Portes et al., 2005). Specifically, the process is known to be affected by racially driven discrimination, inequality in the workforce, and the affinity for an immigrant population to live in or near an inner city (Portes et al., 2005). Segmented assimilation has three key outcomes for second-generation individuals: “upward assimilation, downward assimilation, and upward mobility which is combined with persistent biculturalism” (Waters, et al., 2010, p. 2). However, this process is paired with three different ways in which second-generation immigrant children may interact with their parents. These three ways are *consonant*, *dissonant*, and *selective acculturation* (Waters et al., 2010).

Consonant acculturation is the process whereby immigrant parents and their

children will assimilate to American culture at an even rate to one another, eventually abandoning their native language and the ways of their ethnic heritage (Waters et al., 2010). This mutually supportive process allows the second-generation individual to gain upward mobility relatively easily with the help of their parents. The dissonant acculturation process happens when a child learns English and adopts American ways more quickly than their immigrant parents (Waters et al., 2010). This process is considered to be downward assimilation because it tends to involve less support from one's parents or community (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Waters et al., 2010). Selective acculturation, which is the third process of segmented assimilation, results in biculturalism and upward assimilation. This process entails children and their immigrant parents steadily learning American ways while still remaining attached to their ethnic heritage and community. In this process, deference to parental authority still exists, children are bilingual to a significant degree, and there is minimal intergenerational conflict (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Waters et al., 2010).

In addition to the effects of race and ethnicity on aspects of segmented assimilation, gender can have an impact. Researchers have noted gender can interact with race, influencing the level of economic inequality women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds may face (Nawyn & Park, 2016). One study by Park et al. (2015) indicated second-generation women may experience better status attainment than their mothers and male family members or peers. However, this study also indicated the earning potential of second-generation women was lower than men. More studies on gender differences in segmented assimilation would be useful in bolstering understanding of how intersecting identities



can affect second-generation students.

Though Farver et al.'s (2002) work on acculturation and Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Waters et al.'s (2010) work on segmented assimilation are important in explaining the adjustment or acculturation processes of immigrants and their children, Farver et al.'s (2002) research on acculturation has specifically been conducted on Asian Indian immigrants. Thus, its applicability in understanding the population of interest for this dissertation study is especially appropriate. Segmented assimilation research has not had much focus on South Asians or Asian Indian individuals. There is some research on segmented assimilation on the broader Asian American population (Zhao & Xiong, 2005), but such research may be considered dated at this point and there may be significant differences in how Asian Indians assimilate compared to other Asian subgroups. Since segmented assimilation research on Asian Indian Americans is severely limited, it is less clear whether segmented assimilation would be a concept that would apply to second-generation Asian Indian Americans and their families as easily as it may apply to other racial or ethnic groups. Based on Farver et al.'s (2002) work, the segmented assimilation concept of dissonant assimilation perspective may be applicable to Asian Indian American students and their family, since Asian Indian American parents strongly discourage becoming too "Americanized," yet Asian Indian American students may assimilate or integrate to a significant degree (Dasgupta, 1998; Farver et al., 2002). Selective acculturation may be applicable as well (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Waters et al., 2010), as it may result in biculturalism while still staying strongly connected to one's ethnic identity.

### **The Bicultural Identity**

Bicultural competence is a key part of Asian Indian American college student identity development (LaFromboise et al., 1993). To be biculturally competent is to be able to live in a context with two cultures without having to compromise one's sense of racial or ethnic cultural identity (Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002; LaFromboise et al., 1993). Six different components comprise bicultural competence: (a) understanding cultural values and beliefs, (b) having a positive attitude toward the majority host culture and the ethnic minority culture, (c) believing as though one is able to function efficaciously in a dualistic cultural environment without compromising one's own cultural identity, (d) being able to communicate effectively, (e) exhibiting behaviors considered culturally appropriate, and (f) establishing and being grounded in social networks in both groups (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Wei et al. 2010). The aforementioned components highlight the presence of a host culture and an immigrant's own ethnic culture and having to navigate differences between the two cultures.

Research on biculturalism has often highlighted how those who identify with two different cultures balance their biculturalism (Hong et al., 2000). However, few studies explicitly label the phenomenon. Hong et al. (2000) were among the few to do so. Specifically, they recognized a phenomenon they referred to as *cultural frame-switching*. This phenomenon occurred when bicultural people shifted their perspective depending on the contexts they were in. The resulting identity salience was consistent with context at hand if a person had a strongly integrated bicultural identity. For example, when a bicultural person was faced with a situation more unique to American (i.e., Western) culture, there was a strong likelihood they would respond in a way that was highly consistent with the attributes most consistent with American culture (Haritatos & Benet-

Martínez, 2002; Hong et al., 2000). If they were faced with a situation related to their ethnic minority background, they would respond in with the norms and expectations of their other cultural background. The opposite was true if a person had not sufficiently integrated their bicultural identity (Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002; Hong et al., 2000). In other words, in an American cultural context (i.e., when they were surrounded primarily by their White peer and colleagues), a bicultural person was most likely to respond and act in ways that exemplified their ethnic cultural identity. Conversely, they were likely to respond in a way that was consistent with Western culture when they were immersed in an environment more aligned with their ethnic background (Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002; Hong et al., 2000).

The research on cultural frame-switching is important, but has often lacked diverse perspectives. Hong et al.'s (2000) and Haritatos and Benet-Martínez's (2002) research specifically focused on Chinese Americans and their bicultural identities. I found their articles appropriate to evaluate, since Chinese Americans share similar cultural orientations (e.g., collectivism and individualism) to Asian Indian Americans. Their experiences may be somewhat comparable due to sharing the overarching identity of being Asian. However, identity components of Asian Indian American individuals could affect their lives differently than how components of a Chinese American's identity effects Chinese Americans. Our understanding of these differences is significantly limited due to sparse literature on the Asian Indian American population, particularly the college-going population. The little literature on this population that does exist has highlighted the role biculturalism has played in Asian Indian American students' lives. These students often feel compelled to enact South Asian values and norms, but they also

wish to incorporate their American identity (Brettell & Nibbs, 2009; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009).

### **Intergenerational Disparities**

Of the few studies on South Asian American college students that exist, a significant percentage highlight the pervasiveness of intergenerational differences in perspectives and preferences between U.S. first-generation and second-generation South Asians. The two quotes that follow are from Agarwal's (1991) study and are highly representative of the divide between two generations of Asian Indian Americans specifically:

What we immigrants care about most is what will become of our children. Will they keep their Indian culture? Do I care about putting an Indian in Congress or finding a suitable Indian boy for my daughter to marry? I obviously care more about my children. (p. 28)

This quote is from an Asian Indian immigrant mother. The following quote, on the other hand, is from her Asian Indian American daughter: "I did not ask to be born here. When my parents first decided to come here, I don't think they stopped to think about how their kids would develop" (Agarwal, 1991, p. 31).

The first quote represents the perspective many Asian Indian parents have about preserving their traditions, culture, and belief system through future generations (Agrawal, 1991, Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009; Soin, 2015). According to parental accounts given during studies, the vast majority of first-generation Indian parents promote the expectations, norms, practices, and values experienced during their upbringing in their South Asian country and largely expect their children to follow their

teachings (Agrawal, 1991; Ruzicka, 2011). However, in contrast, the quote of the second-generation student depicts the perspective many second-generation Asian Indian Americans have about the pressures they face in the context of balancing the traditional expectations of Indian parents, while developing an individualistic identity as a person who is immersed in an American environment (e.g., through school or spending time with non-South Asian peers).

Asian Indian children who were born to immigrant parents often struggle to balance home life with college life, family expectations versus community and peer expectation, and innumerable identities, as there are different expectations and desires between generations on how individuals of South Asian backgrounds should conduct themselves (Kanagala, 2011; Rahman & Witenstein, 2013; Ruzicka, 2011). One of Ruzicka's (2011) participants poignantly explains:

We are the first generation [to be born and raised] in America. So we're that group who has to adjust between our parents' mentality from India and coming here, and making them happy and showing them that we're successful, but at the same time, taking that opportunity that we're given in America and doing what we want to do and still being successful... It goes both ways. Finding a balance. (p. 233)

The above account highlights that because being bicultural is often poorly understood due to insufficient history of like-individuals; in the span of American history, Asian Indian immigrants have only resided in the country for a relatively short amount of time (Iyengar, 2014). Therefore, the depth of understanding of this population is less than that of other populations who have been in the country longer (Iyengar, 2014). This lack of understanding translates into Asian Indian American students frequently feeling as if they

do not receive proper guidance as to how to balance these dualistic, often opposing cultures (Dutt, 2009).

Asian Indian American families consider family conflict to be of significant concern. These conflicts arise because Asian Indian American adolescents and young adults fight for their autonomy but are often pressured to appease the expectations of their parents and traditional Indian culture (Bhat, 2005). Second-generation Asian Indian Americans evaluate and question the values and norms perpetuated through parental expectations and actions (Bhat, 2005). As they do, Asian Indian American parents frequently express dislike and resistance to the difference in autonomy and freedom young Asian Indian Americans experience through their immersion in American culture. Asian Indian American immigrant parents expect deference to authority, but often find their children want to behave—or are already behaving—in ways parents may not approve (Bhat, 2005; Kodama et al., 2002). Whereas Asian Indian cultural values tend to revere obedience of one's elder's wishes and interdependence with other family members (Bhat, 2005), individuality and being self-sufficient are key aspects of Western cultures. These aspects seem to be disliked by Asian Indian American immigrant parents (Agarwal, 1991; Bhat, 2005).

Many second-generation South Asian Americans consider themselves to be a part of an experimental generation (Dutt, 2009). These second-generation individuals often believe they do not have role models who can give advice on how to manage South Asian and Western cultural identities (Dutt, 2009; Ruzicka, 2011). They often compartmentalize their actions and beliefs to manage the differences between their two cultural identities (South Asian and American). When in the midst of their parents or

other family members, they may act in ways that are considered more traditionally South Asian. When at school or spending time with peers, they will likely exhibit individualistic tendencies (Agarwal, 1991). Kanagala (2011) found that though some of the identity expectations were often imposed by others, some South Asian American students self-imposed expectations, thinking their parents wanted them to behave a certain way when this may not have been true. Other times, students engaged in behaviors they were confident their parents would not approve of (e.g., alcohol consumption, premarital sexual activity) (Kanagala, 2011). Navigating the differing expectations between South Asian culture and American culture is especially challenging for female South Asian American students due to the often-targeted, potentially sexist expectations they face which may exacerbate intergenerational tensions (Chung, 2001; Samuel, 2019; Soin, 2015 Yoon et al., 2019). Many Asian Indian American college students have reported feeling as if there is a generation gap, as they have often experienced difficulty in reconciling Asian Indian immigrant parental expectations with the desires of their Asian Indian American second-generation individuals (Bhat, 2005).

Intergenerational issues between Asian Indian parents and their children are complex and can positively and negatively influence relationships (Ruzicka, 2011). This is particularly evident in research related to South Asian mothers and their daughters (Ruzicka, 2011). Negative outcomes may arise when daughters engage in activities their parents may not approve of (e.g., dating). In contrast, the literature also indicated South Asian female students may develop a close relationship with their mothers, as they may commiserate in the commonalities of their experiences as South Asian women. For example, they may discuss issues of sexism both of them agree on and develop a strong

bond as a result. Transmission of culturally related values and ideals were the primary ways the mother-daughter relationship was influenced (Ruzicka, 2011).

The female participants in Ruzicka's (2011) study exhibited dissonance in decision-making processes, as their ideals often conflicted with their mothers' expectations. South Asian students consistently reported feeling guilt when their personal actions and decisions contradicted their parents' expectations (Rahman & Witenstein, 2013). Identity development of female student participants was also affected by intergenerational issues (Bhat, 2005; Dutt, 2009; Kanagala, 2011; Rahman & Witenstein, 2013). For example, South Asian female college students with feminist attitudes might have more trouble with identity development due to the patriarchal and misogynistic norms of South Asian cultures. This is because the feminist attitudes of a second-generation South Asian American can contradict the patriarchal and misogynistic preferences of their parents (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). This questioning of beliefs can strain the relationship an Asian Indian American student has with their family. Though the literature on intergenerational issues is insightful, there are some shortcomings that need to be addressed in future research.

There are multiple limitations of the studies that were reviewed for this section on intergenerational disparities. These studies failed to address the impact location might have on students. For example, the South Asian American students who participated in a study in New Jersey—where there is a significant concentration of South Asians—may have exhibited different behaviors than South Asian American students from the Midwest or East Coast (Leonard, 1997). Furthermore, gender may have played a role in how intergenerational differences affected South Asian Student's development. Additionally,



none of the studies addressed the perspective and influence of fathers' on the lives of students. This limitation is particularly surprising since South Asian cultures are mostly—if not entirely—patriarchal (Dutt, 2009; Kanagala, 2011; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). Thus, the influence of South Asian fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and other key male South Asian community members needs to be addressed in future South Asian American college student population studies. There was also minimal research related to second-generation Asian Indian American males. Considering the heavily patriarchal nature of Indian culture (Dasgupta, 1998; Ibrahim et al., 1997; Rahman & Witenstein, 2014; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009), gender differences are clearly pervasive in Asian Indian American communities and these differences have a demonstrable impact on Asian Indian American college students.

### **Family and Gender-Related Perspectives**

Family and gender are likely to be the most salient identities among Asian Indian Americans. Considering the collectivistic orientation of Asian cultures, it is expected that family will have a strong influence on Asian Indian American students' lives (Hui, 2014; Kodama et al., 2002; Liang, 2014; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). Gender roles are often a point of contention between first- and second-generation U.S. Asian Indian Americans (Dasgupta, 1998; Rahman & Witenstein, 2014). There are some distinct differences between how Asian Indian American men and women are expected to behave and live their lives. This section on gender-related perspectives addresses two topics especially prevalent in the lives of Asian Indian Americans: (a) career development, and (b) dating, marriage, and other family matters.

As indicated previously, stemming from the patriarchal nature of South Asian cultures, Asian Indian American parents often believe providing for a family and being the head of a household is primarily a man's responsibility (Liu, 2002). Career expectations are likely among the most influential aspects of an Asian Indian American person's life which parents may influence over. Others—such as siblings, extended family members, and community members—may also have influence. Students may feel as though they must heed the expectations of their family (Bhat, 2005; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). This is especially true if a student exhibits low levels of acculturation (Castelino, 2004; Leong & Chou, 1994).

Career-related pressures from family members can make students feel they are restricted from pursuing majors and careers in fields in which they may have skills or interest. As mentioned previously, this can likely result if such fields may not fall in the purview of cultural norms or expectations (Bhat, 2005; Dutt, 2009; Traxler, 2009). Parental expectations may conflict with the individualistic institutional messages students hear about exploration of career options and major choices (Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Poon, 2014; Soin, 2015; Traxler, 2009). As a result, South Asian American students often do not use advising services for informing their decisions on major or career choice (Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Traxler, 2009). These students treat their family as a substitute for advising services, since their family may be heavily involved in advising students about what major or career paths they should pursue.

Within South Asian cultures, it is often perceived that pursuing lucrative career paths is more important for men (Bhat, 2005; Liu, 2002; Ruzicka, 2011; Soin, 2015; Traxler, 2009). Therefore, men may face more pressure to pursue careers in science,

technology, engineering, and math (STEM) or the health professions (Bhat, 2005; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). This pressure results from the view that these careers lead to high pay, and thus, financial security for oneself and one's family (Bhat, 2005; Samuel, 2019, Soin, 2015). Evidence suggests South Asian American student commitment to a career choice may even occur without any prior broad exploration, particularly if they do not question their parents' attitudes, values, and expectations (Dutt, 2009; Traxler, 2009). If Asian Indian American students attempt to opt out of an acceptable major or career path, they may experience discouragement from their parents. Their parents may even threaten withdrawal of financial support for their college education, as many Asian Indian immigrant parents financially support their children through college (Bhat, 2005).

Women are also encouraged to pursue careers in the same fields as men but are often told to consider how their career might impact their ability to have and raise children and take care of other family responsibilities (Traxler, 2009). This is because Asian American women are inundated with notions that they are expected to become wives and eventually mothers (Kodama & Huyhn, 2017; Yang, 2014). Traxler's (2009) study included a female student's perspective of why choices in higher education can be dependent on gender:

In South Asian families it's usually the boys who are pushed more through education because the idea is that for women, it's good for them to be intelligent, but it's not like they're going to have to really support themselves because they're definitely getting married, and it's the husband's primary job to support the woman, and it's not her primary job to have to support herself. (p. 112)

Male student perspectives, which were not considered in Traxler's (2009) study, would have been useful in determining if male perspectives and expectations in South Asian culture are similar to those of women. Still, in conjunction with supporting a family, promoting and preserving culture and traditions is largely perceived as a woman's responsibility, as women are perceived to be more likely—and are expected to—pass on traditions and culture to their children (Liu, 2002; Rahman & Witenstein 2014; Ruzicka, 2011). South Asian American women are at higher risk than men of experiencing conflict with their parents (Ruzicka, 2011). However, the area where gender may be most influential is academics. Findings have indicated male South Asian American students have experienced more conflict than female South Asian American students on academic matters with their parents (e.g., difference in opinion on which major to choose, which career path to pursue, expectations for grades).

Regardless of gender and conflicting desires, South Asian American students may often say to student affairs professionals and faculty that they wish to honor their parents' and family's preferences and wishes, even when students disagree (Kodama & Huyhn, 2017). Student affairs professionals may often encourage Asian American students to prioritize individually developed academic and career preferences over those of their family. However, this advising approach tends to have limited success with Asian Americans, since they have a stronger affinity for honoring family desires. Even those who ultimately make decisions that conflict with family preferences still continue to be mindful of familial expectations (Kodama & Huyhn, 2017; Poon, 2014; Samura, 2015).

Though South Asian American men tend to receive more pressure around decisions related to academics and career, women experience greater conflict on

sociocultural concerns, such as dating, marriage, and other family matters (Traxler, 2009). As previously indicated, these differences are attributed to the traditional expectations that South Asian men must provide for their family while South Asian women maintain the household and act as primary caretakers of their children (Kodama & Huyhn, 2017; Liu, 2002; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). Though South Asian parents strongly impose expectations for marriage and family life, South Asian American women may express disdain for these traditional gender roles (Rahman & Witenstein, 2014; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). Dating and relationships are especially a point of contention between South Asian American women and their parents (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009).

Second-generation South Asian female students and their first-generation South Asian parents often oppose each other in opinion on the topics of dating and marriage. South Asian parents often consider dating taboo and discourage their children from dating altogether (Kahlon, 2012; Rahman & Witenstein 2014; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). Dating is a complex process for South Asian Americans, as it can involve the use of intricate lies and secrecy to hide romantic relationships from their parents. Double standards may exist for women and men in South Asian cultures: Men are usually able to date with less concern about repercussions from their parents or the South Asian community (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009), though they can still face harsh repercussions depending on the context. However, there is little research that expounds on the differences with regard to how men experience dating and relationships in comparison to women. Most of the literature available (e.g, Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009) provides female perspectives that relay their perception about how South Asian men navigate

dating. There is lack of direct perspective from male South Asian research participants.

First-generation South Asian parents usually endorse the traditional notion that their male and female children should become sexually active only after marriage (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). However, second-generation South Asian students may be sexually active without their parents knowing it, and they may even openly discuss sexuality with their peers. South Asian American college students often want to experience romantic relationships in college, but they may express guilt about dating if they are doing so without their parents' permission (Kahlon, 2012; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). Research related to Asian American women indicates that second generation Asian American women may date and marry outside of their race or ethnicity at a higher rate than first generation Asian immigrants in the United States (Jiménez, et al., 2018). Jiménez et al. (2018) indicate that this trend of intermarriage is considered a key marker of assimilation and may be driven in part by the desire to escape the traditional norms and expectations of their ethnic culture.

Available research on the second-generation South Asian American population covered key differences on expectations based on gender (Kahlon, 2012; Rahman & Witenstein 2014; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). However, there are two important perspectives that are lacking. First, gender non-binary South Asian Americans are woefully understudied in comparison to South Asian Americans who adhere to the gender-binary. Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of first-hand accounts or data on the expectations South Asian fathers have for their children, specifically with regard to gender norms. This is particularly surprising considering the heavily patriarchal nature of South Asian cultures (Liu, 2002). Agarwal (1991) included some perspectives from

South Asian mothers on how they approached raising their children. These accounts showed little about how South Asian mothers or fathers expected sons to behave, why they had such expectations, and what motivates such expectations. Some Asian Indian American female students may notice a significant difference in how South Asian male students are treated in comparison to the female South Asian students with regards to family rearing. For example, one of my participants from my pilot study in 2019 shared the following story:

I was having dinner at one of my auntie's houses the other day, and she was like "So what's your plan? What are you doing?" I was like, "Oh, I just declared in accounting, I want to get my CPA and all that." She was like, "Oh, that's a really good career field for women," I was like, "Auntie, it's a good career field for men too."

Outside of the few testimonies from Asian Indian mothers, most of what has been written on South Asian parental expectations on raising a family has been interpreted through the lens of students. What is clear based on the literature presented in this literature review is that family has tremendous influence over the lives of Asian Indian American college students.

Again, family can have tremendous influence on an Asian Indian American college student's life, as U.S. Asian Indians place a heavy focus on the pursuit of higher education (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009; Kakaiya, 2000; Kanagala, 2011). Whereas White or Eurocentric culture views attending college as a time for self-actualization and developing autonomy (Kodama & Huyhn, 2017), South Asians—particularly South Asian parents—may not recognize the undergraduate journey as a time for students to

develop independent perspectives or finding one's own passion. Gupta (1999) explained:

Within the South Asian cultural understanding, identity is already determined by the relationships that exist within the family and the larger cultural community. In traditional South Asian households, the shift from childhood to adulthood is not about the business of separation or individuation. Rather, it is about the clarification of one's many roles within the family and the acceptance of greater responsibility for one's place within that structure (p. 40).

As expected based on the strong family orientation South Asian people revere, this quote exemplifies how going to college is seen as a way to develop the skills or means to contribute to family needs and successes, rather than a way to develop an individualistic mindset or identity. In fact, South Asian American college students may face increased pressure for conformity from their family and cultural community if they choose to embrace the individualistic norms of personal and academic exploration American institutions often promote (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009).

The cultural contradictions between the individualistic American environment and collectivistic South Asian cultural expectations can be consequential for South Asian American students (Dutt, 2009; Ruzicka 2011; Traxler, 2009;). South Asian students often strongly prioritize pursuing practical majors that will lead to gainful employment, which means they may choose to pursue a career in a field for which they have no passion (Kodama & Huynh, 2017). If South Asian American students choose to pursue a career that aligns with cultural stereotypes related to South Asian culture (e.g., medicine or engineering) but are not succeeding in their college coursework, they risk dismissal from the institution (Ahmed, 1999; Kodama & Huyhn, 2017; Traxler, 2009). This type of



failure can cause students to experience severe damage to their self-concept, strain on family relationships, and further reduced academic options (Mortenson, 2006; Traxler, 2009). Substantial literature has been reviewed in this section on difficulties posed due to culturally fueled family expectations. However, there are gaps in the literature on how family might influence other aspects of South Asian American students' development or overall college experience.

Few of the studies discussed in this section indicate how family might support their children in college outside of giving career advice or paying for their education. It is unknown if and how Asian Indian families might encourage or support their students' involvement on campus. Available research minimally covers the experiences of Asian Indian Americans in student clubs and organizations. Furthermore, little is known about their experiences in residence halls. There is also minimal research related to their experiences once they move on to graduate school. A significant portion of Asian Indian American college students will eventually attend graduate or professional schools (Escueta & O'Brien, 1991; DeSilver, 2014). Thus, garnering insight on their experiences in graduate school may further contribute to the knowledge base on the Asian Indian American population.

Finally, research that highlights how South Asian American students use resources and services on campus is lacking. Traxler (2009) indicated South Asian American college students rarely used career advising or academic advising services to help with career decision-making. However, little is known about whether they use these services or other services for other reasons. Perhaps these students might use academic advising to determine what courses to take to cover general education requirements or

use the career services center to develop a resume. It may be possible various cultural or familial expectations may discourage South Asian American students from using resources that may enhance their college experience, but no research has examined this phenomenon. Research on this subject may help student affairs practitioners and higher education professionals learn how to tailor resources and services for this population. Better tailored support services may help mitigate some of the mental health issues South Asian American students may experience.

### **Mental Health and Counseling**

The Asian Indian American population's psychological wellness is understudied compared to other U.S. ethnic and racial minority college student populations (Loya et al., 2010; Ruzicka; 2011; Traxler, 2009). Part of this might be due to a disinterest in using counseling services, thus making South Asian American student mental health difficult to study (Inman et al, 2014; Loya et al., 2010; Pishori, 2015). Stigma in the South Asian community toward persons with mental health issues likely deters South Asian students from seeking treatment for their psychological health (Arora et al., 2016; Han & Pong, 2015; Loya et al., 2010). A student's South Asian cultural background can affect their decision-making in relation to seeking counseling:

Several cultural factors central to Asian identity in general and South Asian identity in particular have been identified as key avoidance variables that interfere with the help-seeking process, including societal stigma and avoidance of shame, discomfort with self-disclosure outside the family, emotional restraint and self-control, and social conformity. (Loya et al., 2010, p. 485)

The collectivistic orientation of South Asian culture may also negatively influence a South Asian student's desire to seek counseling:

A collectivist orientation, entailing beliefs about the role and importance of extended family, honor, interdependence, obedience, and filial piety; suggests that discussing problems with persons outside the family, such as counselors, is a breach of family loyalty. As such, it would be highly stigmatized, bringing shame to the individual and the family. (Loya et al., 2010, p. 485)

South Asian students are continually trying to negotiate family dynamics and gender roles (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Differences in family dynamics and gender roles are usually due to differences in perspectives between different generations. Intergenerational conflict is a primary source of stress for South Asian American students. Examples of different aspects of life where disagreement between generations may occur include language differences, financial difficulties, and lack of social support (Tummala-Narra & Deshpande, 2018). These differences are likely due to the difference in speed in which a first-generation South Asian acculturates to U.S. culture, versus the speed at which a second-generation South Asian American acculturates (Farver et al., 2002; Tummala-Narra & Deshpande, 2018). These differences in acculturative speed result in South Asian American college students having to frequently contend challenging and stressful situations, which may fuel mental health problems.

Research on mental health among South Asian immigrants and their second-generation children highlight that depression rates among this population

can be higher than their White peers (Tummala-Narra, 2018). South Asians in general are at higher risk of experiencing depression, suicidal ideation, and self-harm (Sen, 2004). This especially rings true for South Asian women and South Asians with disabilities, as their rates of depression can be close to two-fold higher than White individuals (Tummala-Narra, 2018). Tummala-Narra's (2018) study has also shown Asian Indians may exhibit a higher level of depression than other Asian American subgroups. This is presumably because South Asian women and South Asians with disabilities experience more acculturative stress and hardship. As a result, when compared to South Asian men, suicidal ideation is an increased risk for South Asian women. In fact, South Asian female immigrants have higher suicide rates than South Asian immigrant men (Chu et al., 2011).

Major concerns for South Asian American student mental health are becoming evident in university settings; this is because South Asian American students face issues related to their academic work, managing family expectations, and facing challenges in their personal and social lives (Arora et al., 2016; Han & Pong, 2015; Inman et al., 2014). Descriptive analyses on South Asian American students' academic decision-making have exemplified that they risk inciting conflict with their parents, especially if their decisions contradict established sociocultural and academic cultural norms and expectations; this conflict may lead to exacerbated mental health issues (Rahman & Witenstein, 2014). The intergenerational conflict from the contradictions between a South Asian student's ethnic identity and their American identity can cause students to experience an exorbitant amount of stress (Kodama et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2005). The cultural friction can cause the psychological wellbeing of South Asian American students to be harmed (Karazs et

al., 2019). The stress resulting from the cultural divide can affect psychosocial development and academic achievement (Traxler, 2009). Therefore, monitoring South Asian American student mental health is of utmost importance. Gender differences can significantly impact South Asian American student mental health as well.

South Asian American women experience challenges related to issues of gender and race in their peer relationships, identity development concerns, and model minority myth pressures (Soin, 2015). Due to the challenges these students face, they often experience high levels of anxiety, by which South Asian American women may cope through excessive alcohol consumption and lying and hiding behaviors (Iwamoto et al., 2013; Soin, 2015). Excessive alcohol consumption to cope with stress and anxiety is not unique to South Asian American women; South Asian American men also engage in binge drinking as a way to mitigate stress and anxiety (Iwamoto et al., 2013). The complex lives, identities, and development of South Asian American college students signify an urgent need for more research on this population's mental health and how counseling services can be tailored and bolstered to be effective for them.

In addition to the more commonly thought of gender issues typically fueled by patriarchal beliefs (Tummala-Nara & Deshpande, 2018; Yoon et al., 2019), South Asian American college student may also experience psychological difficulty if they have an LGBTQ identity. This is because South Asian cultures, particularly elder members in South Asian cultures (e.g., parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles) are often strongly homophobic. In general, the South Asian community worldwide is less receptive to people having LGBTQ identities (Choudhury et al., 2009; Tummala-Nara & Deshpande, 2018). This can lead to marginalization from the South Asian community, which can lead

to aggravated mental health issues for LGBTQ individuals (Choudhury et al., 2009; Tummala-Nara & Deshpande, 2018).

There is a lack of research that evaluates effective methods to promote the use of counseling services among South Asian American students. It is unclear if these students are reluctant to see counselors who are outside of their own racial/ethnic community. It is also unclear how effective South Asian American counselors are in treating this population in the United States. There is also very limited research on effective counseling techniques that can positively impact South Asian American students specifically. Effective counseling and mental health management in this population may help these students manage the complex and sometimes conflicting nature of their bicultural identities. Though it is known mental illness afflicts the South Asian American population as it afflicts people of any other population, rates of mental illness within this population are unclear. This lack of knowledge is likely a result of the overall lack of interest in understanding the South Asian American population's psychological health. Assessing what mental illnesses afflict South Asian Americans and the rate at which this population experiences mental health concerns can be an important step to understanding how to help this population through their mental health challenges.

### **Identity Formation**

As previously highlighted, the identity formation process of the Asian Indian American individuals is complex. In order for Indian Americans to develop an identity that includes "Indian" and "American" cultural aspects, they must be immersed in a context where there is another culture that contrasts with their own (Farver et al., 2002; Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002; Patel, 2010). One of the most pervasive forces that

influences the process of this dualistic identity formation is the hegemonic force of the Eurocentric White culture (Shrikant, 2015; Shankar, 2008). There are two major schools of thought on how the aforementioned process may occur. One possible process is where Asian Indian Americans see conflict between their two identities by using Whiteness as a reference point (Ibrahim et al., 1997; Kibria, 1996; Kim, 1981). The other way is where Asian Indian Americans see their two identities as co-existing and Asian Indian Americans manage the salience of each identity based on context (Iyengar, 2014; Soin, 2015).

Asian Indian Americans often differentiate themselves from White Americans by exemplifying aspects of their lives that perpetuate the model minority stereotype (Poon et al., 2016; Shrikant, 2015; Traxler, 2009). These stereotypes, which are frequently enforced by the media, may include being submissive and nonthreatening (Poon et al., 2016). Asian Indian Americans also recognize they are commonly associated with specific stereotypes—such as how Indian people often work in the information technology field, win spelling bees, and more (Shrikant, 2015)—by outgroup people. Asian Indian Americans may even overtly discuss, joke about, and bond over these stereotypes with ingroup members. Asian Indian Americans often try to position perception of themselves by highlighting the most prestigious aspects of their culture and how these aspects fit into being American (Shrikant, 2015). Part of doing so is to emphasize the fact that they were born and raised in the United States, and therefore are not foreign (Iwamoto et al., 2013; Samuel, 2019).

Still, most Asian Indian Americans relish their racial and ethnic identities (Chacko & Menon, 2013; Shrikant, 2015). In their daily interactions with those of like-

identity backgrounds, they will attempt to maintain their racial and ethnic minority identities to uphold a sense of in-group solidarity (Shrikant, 2015). They will also try to differentiate themselves from natives of India to try to negate the forever foreigner myth (Iwamoto et al., 2013; Samuel, 2019; Shrikant, 2015). The affinity Asian Indian Americans have for upholding their racially or ethnically associated identity is born out of a desire to establish boundaries between their ethnic identity and the identity they have assimilated from the host culture (Shrikant, 2015; Trechter & Bucholtz, 2001). Such boundaries are developed based on differences in ideologies of the two different identities. An ideology is a common framework of social beliefs, which are organized based on communal interpretations of in-group practices (Peoples & Baily, 2006). The inculcation of sociocultural knowledge of Indian culture versus the dominant Western (i.e., American) culture leads to the development of a mixed ideology (Baig et al., 2014). This new ideology is born from wanting to differentiate from the majority White population (Patel, 2010). In other words, Asian Indian American identity is usually formed in opposition to the dominant White culture (Baig et al., 2014). This phenomenon leads to the enforcement of racial and ethnic pride and in-group solidarity (Shrikant, 2015; Woolard, 1985).

Brettell and Nibbs (2009) suggested that in recent years, South Asian American college students have been less likely to emphasize one identity over the other. Rather, they have attempted to incorporate their identities into their lives. For example, South Asian students may use the celebration of Diwali (the Indian new year) as an opportunity to participate in traditional South Asian dance performances on college campuses, which may be attended by other students, community members, and South Asian parents. These



performances may include dancing to traditional or modern Indian music, wearing traditional South Asian clothing, and engaging in Hindu prayer ceremonies. However, after the Diwali celebration, South Asian students may attend an after-party, which may include alcohol consumption and American style dancing—an event which excludes community members, and South Asian parents. These behaviors are a likely exemplification of how Asian Indian American students will engage in some behaviors that are congruent to their South Asian heritage, while finding ways to engage in behaviors that are congruent with American culture. Asian Indian American students may find other ways to integrate their dualistic identities. For example, Asian Indian American students may participate in traditionally White student organizations like fraternities and sororities (Patel, 2010). Still, they may also participate in student organizations that allow for supporting their ethnic identity development.

Time during college is considered to be an important, formative period for second-generation Asian Indian American students, just as it is for students of other backgrounds (Chacko & Menon, 2013). Asian Indian American students often feel a drive to find ways to stay authentically connected to their cultural identity when surrounded by members of the majority White student population. Part of desire may occur due to facing discrimination and *othering* by White students (Maira, 2002). As such, while in college, Asian Indian American students may join South Asian identity clubs and organizations on campus, such as an Indian students' association. These organizations give Asian Indian American students a safe space to explore their ethnic identity with others who share this identity (Dhingra, 2008). In addition to broader ethnic identity-based organization, Asian Indian American students may also participate in

organizations that are dance oriented. Two commonly known forms of dance in India that are especially popular with Asian Indian American students are garba-raas (a traditional Gujarati dance form) and bhangra, a traditional Punjabi dance form (Chacko & Menon, 2013). These university-based dance groups may participate in exhibitions and competitions all over the United States with other South Asian student organizations at different institutions, thus allowing Asian Indian American students to share in the comradery of ethnic identity development. Participation in ethnically affiliated student organizations have demonstrably positive effects upon Asian American college student outcomes (Bowman, et al., 2015).

Though many Asian Indian Americans show a significant interest in incorporating Indian and American culture into their identities (Devos, 2006), these students still exhibit a strong desire to association with their ethnic heritage. To further explain why this desire exists, one must understand how cultural norms and expectations come to exist and why they are sustained.

### **Creating and Upholding Cultural Norms and Expectations**

This section includes basic yet significant information on how cultures come to exist, how and why are perpetuated and defended, and how ethnocentrism can result from the intrinsic desire to assert one's beliefs over another. These concepts will incorporate ways in which identity and religion in Asian Indian Americans.

Cultures are communally created, constructed, and perpetuated (Peoples & Bailey, 2006). This argument could also be applied to the creation, construction, and perpetuation of religion. Cultures are comprised of beliefs and customs that are enacted by people of a specific group, which allows them to differentiate themselves from people

from other groups (Peoples & Bailey, 2006). For example, when we think of Japanese culture, we consider what beliefs and customs are typically associated with Japanese people and how they differ from other ethnic or racial groups. However, it is important to understand that cultures are learned primarily through the processes known as enculturation or socialization (Peoples & Bailey, 2006). In other words, cultures are not genetically determined or biologically acquired. Since cultures are socially learned, people in a culture can change their behaviors, values, and expectations. Yet, laypersons in a particular culture, or even a religion, may often believe that specific behaviors are expected or required of members who share their cultural identity (Brettel & Nibbs, 2009; Dasgupta, 1998; Loya et al., 2010). Some of the behaviors and expectations within an Asian culture may be driven by socioeconomic class. The hyper selectivity of Asians immigrating to the United States has brought about a set of expectations and different forms of capital which may be transmitted from immigrant parents to their children (Lee & Zhou, 2014). These behaviors and expectations may be perceived as normal for a culture if perpetuated for a long period of time.

There is significant research that extols how people appreciate, cultivate, and defend their values and beliefs about life and the world they live in (Duckitt, 1992; Greenberg, et al., 1997; Lerner, 1980; Wickland & Gollwitzer, 1982). Over the decades in which Asian Indians have resided in the United States, they have vehemently attempted to hold on to the identity which they associate with Indian cultural heritage (Dasgupta, 1998). In fact, Asian Indian parents may often express concern that their children are becoming too Americanized (Dasgupta, 1998). Social science researchers have identified one of the most basic human motivations to include a “desire to promote

the beliefs and values of one's culture, often at the expense of other—manifested as ethnocentrism or prejudice” (Greenberg et al., 1997, p. 61).

The phenomenon of ethnocentricity is especially observable among Asian Indian American families. Loya et al.'s (2010) quote of the Indian mother stating how she wanted to see her daughter keep with Indian culture is a perfect example of this phenomenon. This perspective highlights the need to understand why the Indian mother feels her daughter should do so. Additionally, it is important to identify what underlying psychological mechanisms drive a first-generation Indian parent to consider behaving outside of the established or expected Indian cultural norms to be wrong. If a person is immersed in two different cultures and develops a dual or multicultural identity, learning how they make decisions about which cultural expectations to adhere to and exemplify may allow student affairs professionals to help Asian Indian American students more effectively. Significant research related to immigrant experiences and biculturalism discuss that ethnocentrism can impact the identity development of bicultural individuals and immigrants.

### **Asian Indian Americans and Religious Identity**

Another key aspect of an Asian Indian American person's cultural identity is religion (Joshi, 2006). Religion is less frequently discussed in matters related to cultural identity and ethnocentrism, but religion is a highly salient identity among Asian Indian Americans (Farver et al., 2002; Joshi, 2006; Kurien, 2007). Asian Indian immigrants may even exhibit higher levels of religiosity in comparison to Asian Indians who live in India (Williams, 1988). Religious adherence serves to reinforce an Asian Indian American person's ethnic identity (Farver et al., 2002, Robinson, 2005). Religious involvement may

also strengthen the ethnic identity of Asian Indian American children, bolster psychological wellness and resilience, and foster perpetuation of traditional Indian values outside the home (Farver et al., 2002). Indian families in the United States may have their children attend religious Sunday schools or get involved with the local temple in some way to bolster their religious connection (Kurien, 1998). Religious adherence in the Asian Indian American community can result in developing a separated style of acculturation, which involves rejecting the host country's dominant cultural belief system for that of the traditional Asian Indian cultural norms (Farver et al., 2002). Thus, religion may play a major role as to how college students navigate the expectations of their ethnic culture versus the expectations of the host culture (i.e., American culture).

Immigrants and second-generation individuals who share an ethnicity and a religious identity may form ethnoreligious communities on campus (Park, 2012; Park & Dizon, 2017). For example, Korean Americans who are also Christian have developed fellowships on college campuses. Similarly, South Asian Americans may form a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or other religion-based student organization. One issue resulting from the deep association that South Asians may have with their religious identities is that their religion may become racialized (Joshi, 2006). In other words, a group of people can be characterized and identified primarily by their religious identity as if religious identity is synonymous with ethnic identity. Joshi (2006) explains that these mischaracterizations of South Asians happen due to popular culture and the American media's misportrayal of South Asians.

Though some information is known about the influence of religious identity on South Asian Americans, far less is known about how Asian Indian American religious

identities influence development or decision-making in college. Kanagala (2011) highlighted that his Hindu participants did not consider their religion to be a dominant part of their identities. However, his Muslim, Sikh, and Christian participants showed a strong attachment to their religious identities. Kanagala's (2011) study is among the very few studies that highlight the importance of religion in Asian Indian American students' lives. Additionally, in 2019, I conducted a pilot study on second-generation Asian Indian American college students that included three Asian Indian American female participants. Without any query on religion, each student brought up the impact of religion on their lives. I had not anticipated that religion would be an influence on Asian Indian American students' lives. My pilot study showed some influence of religion on how the participants formed peer groups. However, this pilot study did not provide in-depth insight on how religious beliefs and practices influenced development, decision-making, and overall college experience. Thus, there are significant limitations on understanding how religion impacts Asian Indian American students' lives due to the lack of available literature and substantial research on the subject matter. More research on religion in the Asian Indian American population would bring more clarity on the subject. Thus, in this dissertation study, I will attempt to shed light on how religion influence Asian Indian American students' lives.

The next section includes an explanation of guiding sensitizing concepts; these sensitizing concepts will be used to develop a theory from the data collected in this study. The specific sensitizing concepts chosen for this dissertation study explain how second-generation Asian Indian American college students may develop their complex identities, make decisions, and navigate their journeys through higher education.

## **Sensitizing Concepts**

The sensitizing concepts that will be used to guide the analysis and interpretation of the collected data will include an Asian American student psychosocial development model and the concept of the “success frame” among Asian Americans (Kodama et al, 2002; Lee & Zhou, 2014). Though other types of qualitative research may use a theoretical or conceptual framework as lenses to analyze data, grounded theory research uses sensitizing concepts to help guide the analysis process, as the ultimate goal is to develop a new substantive theory from the data (Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006). Blumer (1954) expressed concerns that social theories are often deficient in comparison to empirical quantitatively driven theories. Thus, he recommended the use of sensitizing concepts to help grounded theory users become aware of certain phenomena or concepts that they may wish to examine (Blumer, 1954). Doing so helps a grounded theorist’s data collection process become more intentional and focused (Blumer, 1954, Bowen, 2006). Since I am planning to use grounded theory methodology for my dissertation research, I will implement the aforementioned sensitizing concepts through my conceptual framework to guide my research. In the following section, I outline each key sensitizing concept and how I will use them in to analyze and explain the data that I collect for this dissertation study.

### **Asian American Student Psychosocial Development Model**

In many ways, South Asian groups demonstrate a worldview similar to other Asian subgroups (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009), valuing characteristics and norms like interdependence in family and deference to authority. Therefore, it may be reasonable to assume that psychosocial development models for Asian American students may apply to

Asian Indian American students as well, although this dissertation is also open to identifying ways in which Asian Indian American students may deviate from Kodama et al.'s (2002) model. Kodama et al. (2002) developed a model that explained the psychosocial development of Asian American students in postsecondary education, as many traditional student development theories developed over the past several decades did not adequately account for the unique factors that affected Asian American students' psychosocial development. Also, Kodama et al.'s (2002) study included participants who are South Asian American, thus making their psychosocial development model potentially applicable to the South Asian American population. Therefore, this model will be useful in guiding me when I analyze the data for this dissertation study and develop a new, more specific theory or model for Asian Indian American students.

The foundation of culture in the United States is primarily comprised of "Western values such as individualism, independence, and self-exploration" (Kodama et al., 2002, p. 46). These values are often reflected in traditional psychosocial development theories (e.g., Chickering's psychosocial student development theory). To better reflect the major facets of Asian American student psychosocial development, Kodama et al. (2002) identified two major influences on Asian American student psychosocial development: racial identity and traditional Asian familial and cultural values. Since Asian American students are a racial minority group, they are frequently in the midst of those who are part of the majority racial group (i.e., White students; Kim, 1981). As a result, Asian American students experience an increase in their racial identity salience (i.e., these students are more aware of their "Asianness," how impactful their Asian heritage is on



their lives, and how they may be perceived by others due to their physical characteristics), which can influence their lives in the university environment.

Traditional Asian American familial and cultural norms and values include collectivism, interdependence, prioritizing family needs over one's individual needs, deference to authority, and interpersonal harmony (Kodama & Maramba, 2017; Kodama et al., 2002). These norms and values often conflict with dominant Western culture values, which prioritize individualism (Museus 2014, Robinson, 2005; Yoon et al., 2019). Individualistic cultural norms promote individualism, self-actualization, and personal autonomy as major indications of successful psychosocial development. Asian American students' cultural identities and individualistic identities exert opposing forces on students that may negatively impact their development due to experiencing dissonance (Ibrahim et al., 1997). To accurately explain the many factors that affect Asian American student development, Kodama et al. (2002) developed a model with six major facets of Asian American student psychosocial development: identity, purpose, competency, emotions, interdependence versus independence, and relationships.

Kodama et al. (2002) describe identity development among Asian American students as an "increasing congruence between one's own sense of self and external feedback" (p. 49). Asian American identity development is a complex process which is highly contextual, multidimensional, and fluid (Accapadi, 2012). For many Asian Americans, race is a major part of their identity. In any context, Asian Americans are unlikely to separate race or ethnicity from the rest of their identity. Although attempting to assimilate conflicting cultural expectations can cause psychological distress (Chung, 2001; Samuel, 2019; Tummala-Narra & Deshpande, 2018), Asian American students'

identities can develop in a positive manner if students are able to effectively manage how each piece of their identity incorporates into their self-concept, that is, finding the best balance between the two cultures.

Purpose is a factor that Asian American students have often derived from the cultural pressures that are imposed upon them. When considering the context of postsecondary education, “purpose is often closely connected with the issue of academic achievement” (Kodama et al., 2002, p. 52). Asian American students often identify their purpose for attending college as the pursuit of a lucrative and prestigious career that will result in garnering respect from their peers and financial security for their families (Castelino, 2004; Gupta & Tracy, 2005; Kodama et al., 2002; Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). Doing so would appease the expectations of the students’ parents and culture. Concern for financial security and prestige of one’s profession drives many South Asian Americans to pursue majors and careers in the sciences, healthcare, engineering, and business (Kodama et al., 2002; Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Poon, 2014; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). However, South Asian American students who lack interest in these fields may face difficulty in selecting another career path if it falls outside of the purview of familial expectations.

Developing competency, for Asian American students, is a task that primarily focuses on intellectual and interpersonal development, particularly in the university and family contexts (Kodama & Maramba, 2017; Kodama et al., 2002). Asian American students are less concerned about developing physical or emotional competence. Asian cultural values dictate that emotional discipline (i.e., restraining emotions) is important when interacting with others. Navigating others' emotions is an important competency for

Asian American students to develop, since parents will often employ shame or guilt to influence their children's actions. Restraining one's expression of emotion is also considered a key aspect of fostering a harmonious family dynamic (Triandis, 1995; Yoon et al., 2019). Relationships, particularly interpersonal relationships with family members, are a valued part of collectivistic Asian cultures. The behaviors and personality traits valued among Asians are cooperation, accommodation, patience, humility, nonconfrontation, respecting elders, and deference to authority (Hui, 2014; Kodama et al., 2002; Liang, 2005; Museus, 2014). Asian American students whose actions reflect these behaviors may be perceived by their family (and by other members of their culture) as having integrity. Furthermore, adhering to these particular behaviors and personal attributes promotes the interdependence that is an important part of Asian American cultural norms.

Interdependence is a central aspect of Asian cultures and Asian families (Kodama et al., 2002, Patel, 2007; Soin, 2015). Obligation to one's family takes precedence over individual needs, desires, and identity. Giving priority to family and cultural relationships will facilitate harmony among interpersonal relationships in the culture. Western ideals of college years and late adolescence as a time of individuation and separation does not fit the cultural expectations, values, or lifestyle of Asian Americans. However, to appease acculturative stress from the American environment, Asian American students often must learn how to view themselves as individuals when engaging with people outside of the family or Asian cultural environment.

South Asian students face many—if not all—of the same cultural expectations and pressures as members of other Asian subgroups. Much of the research conducted by

Traxler (2009), Ruzicka (2011) and others echoes the majority of what Kodama et al. (2002) detailed in their model. Therefore, the psychosocial student development model proposed by Kodama et al. (2002) is likely relevant to the Asian Indian American student population. Since Asian Indian American students still fall under the Asian American category, I will use this particular model in this study of second-generation Asian Indian American college student identity development as a sensitizing concept for my dissertation study. In other words, the model will help guide me in developing a theory on the decision-making processes and development of Asian Indian American students. In conjunction, I will use the concept of the success frame as an additional sensitizing concept to help guide the analysis of the data collected in this dissertation study. The use of these theories and models as sensitizing concepts will allow me to create and shape a theory that will help explain how the different cultural norms that Asian Indian American students experience may influence their decision-making and development.

### **Asian American Success Frame**

In addition to the Asian American psychosocial development theory, I will use the Asian American success frame as a sensitizing concept. When considering the educational experience of Asian Indian American students, it is important to consider how educational attainment is perceived and achieved in this population, and how such attainment is shaped by cultural norms and expectations. Beyond the literature that discusses how education is highly valued within Asian Indian American families, there is little that helps explain how such norms influence educational achievement among Asian Indian American college students. The Asian American success frame, developed by Lee and Zhou (2014), may help fill that gap.

The purpose of the success frame is to provide insight on how Asian immigrant children exhibit high educational aspirations and upward socioeconomic mobility, even if the families are of low socioeconomic status or have lower levels of middle-class cultural capital (Lee & Zhou, 2014). The authors highlight the involvement of two models within the success frame: the status attainment model and the cultural capital model (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Lee & Zhou, 2014). The status attainment model highlights that one's family socioeconomic status can be perpetuated into future generations (Blau & Duncan, 1967). The limited available research on South Asian students echoes that socioeconomic status can be transmitted from one's parents to their children (Traxler, 2009). This model also highlights the importance of individual effort and intergenerational mobility. That is, if a child has a parent(s) who is well educated and has a job that is considered to be high-status, the child is likely to reproduce the success of their parent(s).

The cultural capital model details why and how one's family's socioeconomic status facilitates such success (Lee & Zhou, 2014). Cultural capital refers to specific tangible resources, such as having computer at home, access to books and newspapers, and other informational resources. Cultural capital can also refer to non-tangible resources such as exposure to middle- and upper-class practices, habits, mannerisms, and dominant group values (Bourdieu, 1984; Lee & Zhou, 2014). Exposure to the aforementioned resources, values, and class structures can instill children with the capital that allows them to succeed socioeconomically.

Within cultural capital, one may examine ethnic capital (Lee & Zhou, 2014). Ethnic capital is specific to one's ethnic group and also refers to both tangible and intangible resources that facilitate academic success among immigrant children.

Examples of tangible resources may include jobs, housing, and educational resources like tutoring, after school programs, and college preparation courses. Common intangible resources may include strong high school rankings and school districts, pertinent information to bolster educational success, and more. The success frame highlights how parental expectations are of significant influence to Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant children (Lee & Zhou, 2014). Though Lee and Zhou (2014) do not include Indian immigrant families in their study, literature also echoes strong emphases toward promoting education (Asher, 2008; Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004; Kodama & Huyhn, 2017; Rahman & Witenstein, 2013).

When combined, the success attainment model and the cultural capital model perpetuate a success frame among Asian American immigrants. A frame is a “lens through interpret and make sense of their lives and social reality” (Lee & Zhou, 2014, p. 45). One’s frame can then influence expectations and trajectory related to different aspects of life. The most prominent aspect of life that is a significant part of the Asian American frame is education; specifically, receiving a good education. Receiving a good education in Asian American cultures is narrowly defined. Participants in Lee & Zhou’s (2014) study highlight the expectations Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents have for their children to achieve high grades, attend highly reputable universities, and pursue careers in prestigious and lucrative fields, such as medicine, law, and engineering. These immigrant parents also emphasize the expectation that their children should attain a doctoral degree and anything less may be considered insufficient or “nothing to brag about”. At minimum, going to college is considered an obligation, rather than simply an option for what to do after high school.

There is remarkable consistency in perception of the success frame among Asian Americans. Asian American immigrant children all recognize that their immigrant parents have the same high academic and career achievement expectations (Lee & Zhou, 2014). When study participants were asked about parental expectations, they all alluded to understanding that other Asian American families have the same expectations. This consistency in perception regarding the success frame highlights that Asian Americans are socialized into this framework. Lee & Zhou (2014) refer to this mindset as a form of ethnic capital. What makes the success frame especially interesting within Asian American immigrant communities is that similar levels of educational success are achieved in immigrant children, regardless of the socioeconomic background of their families. Asian American immigrant children from both wealthier and poorer socioeconomic backgrounds seem to attain a similar level of academic and career success. This success is attributed to their frame, which includes the influence of ethnic capital, which are the tangible and intangible resources that were previously discussed in this section.

The success frame highlights how Asian American immigrant children may find their way to academic, career, and socioeconomic success. However, not all Asian American immigrant children achieve in ways that are in line with the success frame as perpetuated by their families, peers, and other members of their Asian ethnic communities. Those who do not meet the expectations within the success frame risk becoming isolated from their ethnic communities (Lee & Zhou, 2014). For example, immigrant children who do not achieve a high grade point average; gain admission into a highly ranked college or university; or become a doctor, engineer, pharmacist, or lawyer,

may be subjected to the dismay of their parents and other ethnic community members. Affected immigrant adolescents and young adults may find themselves ultimately becoming significantly dissociated from their ethnic identity as a result. These individuals may express that they feel like failures since their reference point of comparison is the success frame which they have been socialized into by their Asian immigrant families. This sense of failure may be pervasive even if they are more successful than their non-Asian (e.g. White) peers (Lee & Zhou, 2014).

It is important to note that Lee and Zhou's (2014) success frame was developed through conducting research on Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants. As indicated regarding Kodama et al.'s (2002) Asian American student psychosocial development theory, since Asian Indian Americans share some cultural similarities with other Asian ethnic groups, there may be some likelihood that the success frame may be applicable to the Asian Indian American student population in some ways. This applicability is the reason as to why I plan to use the success frame as a sensitizing concept for this dissertation study. I intend to ask questions about how various forms of capital in the lives of Asian Indian American students may influence their decision-making, development, and overall experience in college. I want to understand how the cultural norms and expectations that are born from the success frame influence Asian Indian American students during their college years.

Student affairs research often examines how students' racial and ethnic identities influence students' experience in college (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Phinney, 1989, Torres & Hernandez, 2007). However, determinations on such influences often do not penetrate beyond the surface-level. In other words, we may learn about how identities of students



of color and students of marginalized groups influence their college experiences, but we fail to examine why students feel they need to adhere to or perpetuate norms and expectations of a particular identity at the most fundamental level (even if they may not want to at times), and how these specific phenomena translate into influence on students' development and decision-making in college. An excellent example of a student population in which such phenomena are clearly present is the Asian Indian American second-generation student population.

Asian Indian American students are often expected to adhere to their traditional Indian heritage, but they also attend American schools where they may absorb American culture (Bhat, 2005; Farver et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). At home, they may face pressure to adhere to one cultural system, as one's parents may indicate their ethnic culture is more superior or more correct than American culture (Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011). In the context of Asian Indian Americans, this possibly occurs because of the desire to believe one's ethnic heritage is superior to American culture. This phenomenon is known as ethnocentrism (Chung, 2001; Robinson, 2005) As stated previously, South Asian parents may even complain about their children becoming too Americanized if they display too many ideals that align with Western-centric cultural norms (Rahman & Witenstein, 2014; Ruzicka, 2011). Available literature does not clearly identify ethnocentrism as a significant component of the Asian American success frame. Perhaps an ethnocentric orientation may be part of the success frame lens as it specifically pertains to the Asian Indian American population. When developing a formal theory, I may consider using ethnocentrism as an additional sensitizing concept, should it emerge as a salient influence during data collection.

I am interested in studying Asian Indian American college students and how their sometimes opposing Asian Indian and American cultural norms, values, and expectations influence these students' decision-making and development processes in college. As discussed previously, I will use the success frame in combination with Asian American psychosocial development theory to guide my data analysis in this grounded theory study to develop a unique theory that fits the Asian Indian American college student population. Both sensitizing concepts will help me examine and evaluate what forces drive and influence decision-making and development in college. I will use these two sensitizing concepts together to guide my theory development because doing so will narrow my focus in observing specific cultural norms and forms of capital that influence the decision-making and development process of Asian Indian American students.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This dissertation study will use grounded theory to determine how cultural norms related to second-generation Asian Indian American student identity influence their decision-making and development in college. I have chosen grounded theory as the methodology for this study specifically due to my interest in constructing a theory that specifically for this population. My research questions are:

1. What are key aspects of Asian Indian American college students' lives that influence how they think about American, Indian, and Indian American cultural norms?
2. How do these cultural norms influence the way in which Asian Indian American students make decisions related to their college experience and major life choices?

A qualitative methodology is an appropriate choice to conduct this study because it provides a level of flexibility to explore various phenomena that quantitative research would not allow. Furthermore, qualitative research and methodology will allow me to employ my insider perspective to elicit the most relevant information related to the Asian Indian American college student experience. Furthermore, grounded theory research will allow me to develop a theory that can explain phenomena that are unique to experiences of Asian Indian American college students.

#### **Overview of Grounded Theory Methodology**

Grounded theory methodology was first introduced in the book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, by Glasser and Strauss (1967). Through this book, the authors aimed to rationalize generation and development of theory in qualitative research. Lack of

theory generation—among other aspects of qualitative research—is often why researchers in the hard sciences (e.g., biology, physics) ridicule social sciences as not being empirical (Blumer, 1954; Cho & Lee; 2014; Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Krefting, 1991). Some social scientists also echo this claim. However, Glasser and Strauss (1967) aimed to make qualitative research more empirical through creating and developing grounded theory methodology. They felt that qualitative research theories were speculative and deductive in a way that could only be taken into consideration during data analysis once all data were collected; they believed interplay and development of data during collection is just as important for data analysis as the data analysis process that usually comes after data collection. Their rationale is that this active and continual data analysis process from beginning to end makes qualitative research, through grounded theory methodology, more empirical (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). To be more empirical means to not be only grounded in logic, but also to be supported by direct observations and combined with theoretical frameworks (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Glasser and Strauss's (1967) provide logic and specifics for grounded theory methodology to legitimize qualitative research.

Grounded theory is used to develop theories that are grounded in data that are systematically collected and analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Tie, et al., 2019). Grounded theory uses an active process for theory development, where the researcher constantly examines similarities between data (i.e., similarities among different participants' experiences) as it is collected. The researcher will begin to formulate a theory based on emergent findings of similar phenomena between participants (Bowen, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Tie et al., 2019). These phenomena are typically actions,

processes, or interpersonal interaction among members of a group (Creswell, 2013). However, phenomena may change in response to different conditions (Creswell, 2013; Tie et al., 2019). As the data collection process continues, the researcher keeps modifying the prospective theory until data collection is finished. Interplay of participant and conditions of their experiences are examined as frequently as possible (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Tie et al., 2019). A technique for data analysis used in grounded theory methodology is often referred to as the *constant comparative method* because of the constant process of comparing participants' interview responses related to specific phenomena (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Tie et al., 2019). Phenomena are constantly being cross-compared between participants to help form a theory (or multiple theories).

Using this methodology often means that theory may be developed from initially gathered data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Researchers who use grounded theory methodology can expand and modify theories through incoming data. The goal of grounded theory research is to develop theory that closely reflects and explains phenomena exhibited in the data (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Tie et al., 2019). Furthermore, researchers can incorporate theories that they developed from their previous research into their current studies as long as theories are relevant. It is important that these theories are continuously rigorously checked with emergent findings as data collection occurs. Developing theories should continually be refined based on findings through comparisons of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Tie et al., 2019).

A key aspect of grounded theory is that the researcher will develop a theory through an inductive reasoning process (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Inductive reasoning entails recognizing themes, patterns, and various categories as they

emerge from data, rather than imposing them prior to collecting and analyzing data (Bowen, 2006; Tie et al., 2019). This methodology focuses on actions of the participant that occur in steps over a period of time. As the researcher examines these steps, a matrix is developed to organize how behaviors occur in phases. The process of memoing can be used, where the researcher actively writes ideas about data and how data may be analyzed (Creswell, 2013). They will ask themselves what a substantive theory could look like to explain observed phenomena, what a phenomenon's relationship is to reality or truth, and how it can specifically be related to participants' perspectives. Sensitizing concepts are used during data analysis and theory development to help bring attention to key phenomena and themes of interest (Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006).

Though development of theory is the differentiating feature of grounded theory methodology, grounded theory shares many elements with other qualitative methodologies, such as data collection methods (Bryman, 1984; Cho & Lee, 2014). For example, narrative inquiry research focuses on garnering and interpreting individuals' stories and phenomenology primarily focuses on the common experiences of people in a group (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory researchers may also collect and examine participant data in the form of participants' stories (Cho & Lee, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Tie et al., 2019). Grounded theorists are especially interested in looking at and attempting to identify common experiences. From a methods perspective, other similarities between grounded theory studies and other qualitative methods are the use of interviews, field observations, and many different types of documentation (e.g., autobiographies, letters, diaries; Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory research can also use mixed methods techniques (i.e., combine quantitative and qualitative methods in a study)

(Strauss & Corbin, 1994). At minimum, researchers agree that grounded theory methodology, like other qualitative methodologies, must include the perspectives of those who are being studied.

Grounded theory researchers also largely agree that qualitative research should try to follow the tenets of good research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). However, historically, good research tenets have been defined by those applied to quantitative research. Some of these key tenets include being able to gather very large data sets quickly, ease in analyzing statistically, more control over how data is collected, greater objectivity/minimized bias, strong generalizability, hypothesis confirmation, statistical significance, generalizability, reproducibility, consistency, verification and precision, and finally, quantitative research can be designed to test theory application. Researchers, policymakers, and legislators favor quantitative research for decision-making, due to the ability to reflect large demographics and populations (Kerlinger, 1959). In contrast, qualitative research follows different paradigms, different phenomena, and depicts knowledge in ways that are different from quantitative research methodologies (Mack, 2005).

Qualitative researchers focus on exploring phenomena open-endedly; taking the importance of context into account; eliciting rich descriptions from the participants; and transferability of phenomena to similar individuals, groups, or populations (Mack, 2005; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Furthermore, qualitative research gives importance to meaning making of participant experiences and observations. Though qualitative research's purpose is not typically focused on the development of theory, grounded theory methodology was developed to help close the gap between the differences of quantitative

and qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Researchers who use grounded theory consider it their responsibility to interpret and understand the individuals who are being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Grounded theorists accept and recognize their interpretive roles in the process of the methodology—they do not find it to be sufficient to simply report the perspectives of the people, groups, or organizations that are being studied. Interpretation of participants' experiences through application of a theoretical framework during data collection (and not just after collection is finished) allows for efficient verification and refining of findings, while determining the applicability of a theory that is actively being developed in the process (Mack, 2005; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015; Tie et al., 2019). The aforementioned procedure of verification also bolsters the density of the concepts that are derived from the active and systematic analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Tie et al., 2019). The density of concepts refers to the richness of descriptions developed from the active analysis process requires strong familiarity with the data; a more detailed description equates to stronger density of a concept.

Every part of grounded theory methodology is carefully planned and controlled (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The questions that are asked of the participants is generative in nature (i.e., allows the researcher to develop concepts), the sampling is intentional, the coding process is systematic, and this approach ultimately leads the researcher to the specific conditions and the consequences that arise from those specific conditions (Creswell, 2013; Tie et al., 2019). Users of grounded theory methodology will try to examine details of a participant's response on the micro and macro level to thoroughly examine how phenomena are developed and how they will manifest.



Grounded theorists will develop a theory in a methodical way. They will formulate different ideas and develop a flow of different components that will turn into a theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). A category will be selected to focus on for the theory and further categories will be formed to create a theoretical model. Categories are inductively developed and are similar to codes that are used in other qualitative methodologies that denote themes and phenomenon discovered through data analysis (Lewis-Pierre et al., 2017). There may be intersections of different categories. Researchers using this methodology may use diagrams or matrices to display how they have outlined the flow and function of the theory they are developing. A theory that emerges from this outline or diagram is an explanation that details why and how common processes identified among participants occur (Bowen, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Tie et al., 2019). A theory will include themes that appear frequently in the data and may be articulated through being organized into categories (Creswell, 2013; Kelle, 2010). The procedures for conducting grounded theory are designed to help the researcher garner as much information in a systematic way to answer their research problems or questions.

### **Procedures for this Grounded Theory Study**

Researchers who use grounded theory should ask focused questions that elicit details about the participant's experiences and identify the different facets or steps in how experiences have resulted (i.e., how did an experience unfold?) (Creswell, 2013; Tie et al., 2019). Thus, I asked second-generation Asian Indian American college students questions from an inventory that I developed (see Appendix B & C). I found it important to pay attention to what processes drove an experience of interest. I paid attention to any specific strategies or patterns that were part of the experiences these students described.

For example, if Asian Indian American students described being driven to get involved in ethnicity-based student organizations on campus, I examined what motivating factors drove these students to become involved in such organizations. These aforementioned questions, along with other questions related to identity, decision-making, and their college experience, were questions I asked during the study. I also asked participants to show me an artifact, such as a photograph or some kind of object, that meaningfully represents their connection to their Asian Indian American identity (Creswell, 2013).

For this dissertation study, I conducted two interviews of 10 second-generation Asian Indian American college students, all of which were audio recorded using the QuickTime software application on my Macbook Pro. Under normal circumstances, I would have given participants the option to participate in the interview in person. However, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted using an online video call platform such as Google Hangouts or Zoom. Each interview lasted up to 60 minutes. All interview recordings were sent to Rev.com to be transcribed. After transcription is complete, the interview transcripts were analyzed through a software program called Atlas TI. Atlas TI is specifically designed to allow for efficient qualitative data analysis.

I aimed to use one institution to recruit participants so that I could avoid needing to account for geographic differences. Specifically, I recruited undergraduate students who are enrolled at the University of Maryland, in College Park. I chose the University of Maryland as my study site because of how accessible it is to me since I am currently an enrolled graduate student and the institution has a large South Asian American undergraduate student population. I used purposeful techniques to recruit these students.

Specifically, I asked both Asian Indian and non-Asian Indian student affairs professionals at UMD to help me advertise to their Asian Indian American students to recruit. I also found listservs of student organizations on campus that were for primarily geared toward Asian Indian American and South Asian American students. Snowball sampling was another method I used recruit participants. I incentivized participation in my study to increase interest and motivation for participation by awarding each participant a \$30 Amazon Gift card after they finished participating in both interviews.

For students to qualify for this study, they were required to fulfill the following criteria: First, participants' parents must have immigrated to the United States specifically from India. Second, the potential participant must have been born and raised in the United States (i.e., they were born in the United States and all of their schooling from kindergarten through high school was in the United States). Finally, all participants must be traditional college-going aged (18–23 years), currently enrolled, degree-seeking, full-time undergraduate students. Six of my participants self-identified as female and four of my participants self-identified as male. Though I recognized that some Asian Indian American students could hold an identity beyond the gender binary, this study specifically examined those who were within the binary, as these students were specifically of interest to me. I aimed to have as even a distribution of participants based on the gender binary as possible to ensure that my study would have a greater degree of transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For triangulation (Creswell, 2013), I asked participants to bring an artifact (e.g., a photograph, object, poem) to their final interview that they felt exemplifies an aspect of their identity in a meaningful way.

In addition to triangulation and transferability, this study ensured trustworthiness through different means. Additional aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (Elo et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility is when there is confidence in the research findings due to plausibility and accuracy in participants' data (Polit & Beck, 2012). Since participants' responses were audio recorded, I was able to ensure the credibility of the data I collected (Polit & Beck, 2012). I also engaged in member checking by allowing participants to review the transcripts of their interviews to ensure they conveyed their perspectives in an authentic and accurate manner (Creswell, 2013). Dependability of the data is another aspect of trustworthiness that was promoted through member checking (Creswell, 2013; Elo et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability was also ensured through the collection of data from multiple participants who share a common identity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability was also bolstered in this study, as I sent the transcripts to a colleague to have the transcripts independently reviewed. The purpose of doing so was to make sure that the key themes and categories I derived during analysis were not simply figments of my bias or imagination (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I also believe it is likely that confirmability will be promoted through the process of having my dissertation committee review my findings.

Finally, reflexivity is a key aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity is the process whereby a researcher engages in self-reflection to check their own biases, preferences, and preconceived notions that may influence the way the data collection and analysis is

conducted. As an individual who shares a major identity characteristic with the participants (I am a second-generation Asian Indian American), it is highly possible that my own life experiences may have influenced how I perceived and interpreted the responses to the questions I asked the participants during their interviews. However, this insider perspective was useful, as it helped me interpret the participant responses in a way that allowed me to ensure response authenticity (Elo et al., 2014). My reflexivity statement, provided later in this dissertation, details how I plan engaged in data collection and analysis in a way that leveraged my insider perspective while bolstering my awareness of the biases and preconceptions I may have had related to the Asian Indian American experience.

Qualitative research processes recommend that a researcher should continue to recruit participants into a study until one attains saturation (Creswell, 2013). However, it is generally very difficult to ascertain if one has reached the point of saturation; it is often a judgement call the research must make (Hentz, 2019). The researcher must decide if they believe continuing recruiting participants is necessary by determining if they believe more information is needed to sufficiently develop a theory and ascertain themes or patterns from the data. However, the researcher must account for the possibility that they may experience difficulties in recruiting more participants. More participants will also lead to long analysis times, which is not considered ideal. The complexity of keeping track of different phenomena that appear in data during the continual analysis process may be challenging for researchers due to handling so many data points as a result of having an excessive number of participants (Creswell, 2013). However, a major advantage of qualitative research methods is that a researcher does not necessarily need a

large sample size. Participant recruitment can stop after the researcher feels they gathered enough data to sufficiently develop and explain themes and categories during analysis (i.e., saturation has been reached and therefore, there is no need to continue recruiting participants) (Coyne, 1997; Hentz, 2019; Marshall, 1996). Having reviewed literature relevant to qualitative methodologies, I determined that the 8–12 participant range was acceptable for a grounded theory study. Through the course of collecting data, I found that I reached saturation by the time I finished recruiting 10 participants. Additionally, reaching saturation was facilitated by the fact that I conducted two interviews with each participant instead of just one.

During this data collection process, I continuously wrote memos and analyzed the data to build a theory (Creswell, 2013). These memos were rudimentary initially but grew to be complex, dense, clear, and accurate as the data collection process moves forward. I will then employ a coding process that helped me form different categories for the information I have identified about the phenomena of interest in the data; this coding process is known as *open coding* (Creswell, 2013; Hernandez, 2009; Holton, 2007). Examples of codes included “independence”, “performing arts”, and “options”. Examples of categories included “autonomy” and “decision”. I then chose one category to be the center of the theory I develop. In the case of this study, the category I chose to be the center of my theory was “autonomy”. Other peripheral theories were developed in a process known as *axial coding* (Creswell, 2013; Holton, 2007). An example of an axial code is “evaluation”. Axial coding assists with supporting and forming the theoretical model being developed. Identifying the intersection of the different categories is known as *selective coding* (Creswell, 2013; Holton, 2007). The intersections were ultimately

what helped me comprise the formal theory for this grounded theory study, which I introduce in Chapter 5 of this dissertation (Creswell, 2013).

While examining the data in a continuous fashion, I began to formulate a diagram—known as a *logic* or *coding paradigm*—to highlight a central phenomenon (in the case of this study, the central phenomenon was autonomy) and explored the conditions around what caused this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I consulted with the sensitizing concepts of Asian American psychosocial development and success frame while engaging in this process to help me identify contextual influences and other intervening conditions to determine different influences that affected the central phenomenon and factored these influences into the diagram. Once I identified a central phenomenon along with what conditions and contexts may influence this phenomenon, I wrote an explanation, which can be referred to as a storyline process, that connected the different components of the theory together (Creswell, 2013; Tie et al., 2019). Doing so helps to determine what relationships different codes, themes, and categories have with each other.

Through the storyline process, a substantive-level theory has been articulated to communicate how the theory of interest may function in the Asian Indian American student experience (Creswell, 2013, Glasser & Strauss, 1967). A substantive-level theory is a lower-level theory that can be applied to a specific context that is being explored during the study (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Substantive-level theories differ from the greater theory of interest (i.e., not geared toward a more minor phenomenon in a specific lower-level context) in a grounded theory study, which is referred to as a *formal theory*. Since I have collected all of the data and have formed a formal theory, this study can be

considered concluded. In Chapter 5, I present my formal theory and model (Creswell, 2013). The model is accompanied with a description as to how it functions and how it should be interpreted. Grounded theory methodology uses a unique, intricate, and careful process that often makes it an attractive methodology for social science researchers. However, grounded theory methodology has limitations and challenges.

Unlike other methodologies, researchers who use grounded theory as their methodology of choice are required to have theoretical ideas at the ready so they can actively use such theories to analyze during their data collection process (Cho & Lee, 2014; Creswell, 2013). That is, researchers must have theoretical ideas in mind prior to the start of the study, or they must develop these ideas early during the data collection process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2013; Tie et al., 2019). I believe I was well equipped in this regard, as I reviewed literature relevant to the Asian Indian American population and I drew from my own life experiences during the data collection and analysis process. However, the requirement of having theories in mind may have been limiting in two ways. First, it is possible that I may have missed literature during my literature search from which I could have drawn inspiration for possible theories to keep in mind. Second, if there did not seem to be a pattern emerging to form a theory early in the data collection process, I might not have been able to develop these initial theoretical ideas and make connections with other phenomena throughout analysis. Thankfully, the data I collected was rich and I faced no issues regarding developing a formal theory.

### **Limitations**

Key limitations in this study include the lack of participants from other institutions and other parts of the country. All students in this study were enrolled as full-



time undergraduates at UMD and were mostly in-state students. I may have received different responses if participants attended different universities across the country. Therefore, the transferability of findings in this study may be limited; they may not be applicable to Asian Indian American students in different locations throughout the United States. Regional differences might shed light on experience of second-generation Asian Indian American students in college. Participants' lives and college-related experiences might differ depending on if they grew up in a place with larger Indian populations (e.g., certain areas of California or New Jersey), or if they grew up in overwhelmingly White rural areas.

Another limitation to this study is that it does not fully reflect the diversity within the Asian Indian American community. This study's participants did not have a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds. All participants seemed to come from families where at least one parent had a well-paying STEM career. While Indian immigrants have benefited socioeconomically from the hyperselective Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, Asian Indian Americans are diverse in their socioeconomic status and educational backgrounds, experiencing everything from upper class status to poverty (Takei & Sakamoto, 2011). While the majority of Asian Indian Americans in the United States are educated at the bachelor's degree level or above, approximately 30% do not have a college degree (DeSilver, 2014). Though this study is specifically designed to examine the experience of second-generation Asian Indian American college students, future research conducted on Asian Indian Americans in general should consider recruiting participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds to better reflect the population as a whole.

Additionally, all but one participant was pursuing a STEM career. The heavy representation of STEM students may exemplify a tendency of Asian Indian American students to gravitate toward STEM fields, as many South Asians tend to be strongly encouraged or even pressured to pursue lucrative STEM careers (Castelino, 2004; Gupta & Tracy, 2005; Kodama et al., 2002; Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Poon, 2014; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). However, the strong STEM representation sample in this study could also highlight a limitation with the sampling methods I employed. Future researchers may wish to consider diversifying their Asian Indian American participants by more purposely recruiting and selecting students from a variety of majors and career interests.

Where this study does reflect some diversity is through different geographically based Indian identities. Many Indians often prefer to differentiate themselves based on qualifiers such as specific location from where they or their parents immigrated from or their family's religious background. Asian Indian Americans in the United States include Punjabis, Gujaratis, Rajasthanis, Maharashtrians, South Indians, and others. Some participants chose to share this information, as shared in Chapter 4 and 5. Their religious backgrounds also cover most major religions, such as Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Islam (Dave et al., 2000).

Another limitation of this study is that it does little to take into account how experiences of Asian Indian American students who hold an LGBTQ identity might differ from those who do not have an LGBTQ identity. One participant, Raj, identified as gay. His parents were unaware of his sexual orientation. However, his sister and UMD peers were aware he was gay. LGBTQ Indian individuals, whether American or not, face

significant persecution from Indians across the world, due to wide-spread homophobia (Tummala-Narra & Deshpande, 2018). Thus, Indian LGBTQ individuals may experience the development and decision-making process differently than cis-gender and straight individuals. Raj's interview did not provide much insight about his decision-making or development as a gay individual. His interview also did not provide much insight regarding how Indian cultural norms influence the decision-making of LGBTQ Asian Indian Americans, outside of hiding one's sexual orientation. However, part of this lack of insight from this study may have been due to the fact that the study was not geared toward understanding and asking questions about experiences of Asian Indian American students who also identify with an LGBTQ identity.

One major entity that was not discussed by participants is caste. Caste is a social hierarchy system that is a construct of Hinduism and has its primary presence in India (Dave et al., 2000). The system is comprised of four primary levels (listed in descending order): "Brahmins were responsible for religious matters; Kshatriyas were the warriors and rulers of kingdoms; Vaishyas were the merchants and farmers; and Shudras were the so-called "untouchables," who performed the menial jobs in society" (Dave et al., 2000, p. 74). The purpose of the caste system was to uphold control social class stratification that benefitted and sustained positive benefits for some and negative experiences for others (Sankaran et al, 2017).

It is not entirely clear why none of the participants seemed to highlight influence of caste in their lives. One key reason could be because not all of my participants identified as Hindu. I had participants who also identified as Jain, Christian, Muslim, and some participants did not identify with religion at all. Thus, it could be possible that

matters related to caste were never taught or discussed in several participants' households. This in turn could presumably have led to the absence of caste influence or thought on matters related to caste in their lives. None of the literature that I reviewed in Chapter 2 mentioned the influence of caste on second-generation Asian Indian Americans. The lack of discussion regarding caste throughout the literature available related to the Asian Indian American population might signify minimal explicit influence of caste in Asian Indian American students' lives. Still, it is a limitation that I as an interviewer did not raise it in interviews as a possible influence for some students.

Finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have had some influence on the development and decision-making of students in this study. Two students in this study were full-time first-year students at UMD. They were taking classes online from their homes (i.e., not living on campus) at the time of the study. As such, these students may not have had the same kind of college experience as the older students in this study. Both of these students were involved in a UMD computer science student organization, but all of their engagement with the organization was remote. Thus, their experiences might have influenced findings in a way that would have differed if they had joined and participated in the student organization physically on campus. How the older participants were affected by COVID-19 is unclear. All of the older students in this study were also taking classes from home (or living close to campus but taking courses online) and engaging in student organizations virtually. However, they had previously lived on campus, taken classes in person, and had participated in student organizations by being physically present. The experiences the older students talked about during their interviews leaned heavily on their past experiences in college, whereas the two first-year

students were unable to lean on campus-based experiences. It is unclear how living at home during the global pandemic may have influenced their connection to their family while being interviewed. It may certainly be possible that students who did not live on campus by the time they participated in this study may have had differences in their college experiences.

### **Guiding Paradigms for Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory researchers often employ the use of guiding paradigms to help with structuring the data analysis and theory development processes (Ponterotto, 2005). The guiding paradigm I used in my dissertation study related to Asian Indian American college students was social constructivism. I used this lens because of how the vast majority of any culture, including Asian Indian culture and American culture, is socially constructed (Peoples & Bailey, 2006). Researchers use social constructivism to examine knowledge, meaning-making, and understanding of the world, which they consider to be jointly developed by individuals (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Since I was interested in understanding how the Asian Indian cultural norms and the American cultural norms influences the decision-making and development of Asian Indian American college students, I identified social constructivism to be the most appropriate guiding paradigm for my study.

Culture, context, and the individuals who comprise cultures and contexts are important in understanding how a society constructs knowledge (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997). The foundation of social constructivism is established on the assumptions people have about knowledge, reality, and how learning occurs (Amineh & Asl, 2015). This paradigm recognizes that realities do not exist in advance, are not

constructed by one individual, and are constructed by human interactions. Members of a group or a society invent and perpetuate the characteristics of their culture together; social constructivism also indicates that a reality cannot be made before it is socially invented (i.e., one individual does not construct reality; Amineh & Asl, 2015). Social constructivism is also helpful because of the multitudinous subjectivities that likely influence participants' interpretation of culture and social expectations. Reality, a culture in a reality, and meaning-making that occurs in a culture is developed by people interacting with each other in an environment they are all a part of (Amineh & Asl, 2015; McMahon, 1997). People in a culture will learn about norms and expectations through meaningful engagement with others through social activity, interaction, and collaboration (Amineh & Asl, 2015; McMahon, 1997).

The tenets of social constructivism allowed me to properly examine the facets of my Asian Indian American participants' lives that influenced their understanding of cultural norms and how such cultural norms drive decision-making behaviors. Social constructivism tenets will also help me determine how such a cultural belief system influences their overall development in college. Social constructivism is likely the most appropriate paradigm to use for my study because I aim to construct a theory about how Asian Indian American cultural norms are developed and how they influence students' decision-making and development in college. Since cultures and belief systems are socially constructed (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997), implementing a social constructivism lens in grounded theory methodology made sense. In addition to utilizing a guiding paradigm, this research will be informed by my own experience as an Asian Indian American.

## **Reflexivity Statement**

My positionality and the lens I used to conduct and analyze this dissertation study stems from the struggles I have experienced throughout my life thus far as an Asian Indian American. Many of these struggles were born from the dissonance I experienced through having multiple identities as both Indian and American. Conducting this study allowed me to observe, uncover, and identify the influences of Asian Indian American cultural norms and expectations on Asian Indian American college students. I was especially interested in examining the impact of norms from Asian Indian and American cultures on the decision-making process, identity development, and psychosocial development in the context of higher education. To better understand my motivation for studying Asian Indian American college students, I have reflected heavily on my own experiences as an Asian Indian American, which I recounted in the foreword to this dissertation.

Much of my epistemology has been developed through being instilled with knowledge about my cultural heritage by my family. However, A major portion of my way of knowing has also been developed through other life experiences, such as attending American schools. My guiding epistemology was a lens that was comprised of two major sets of cultural norms: Asian Indian, and American. My lens helped me navigate the complexities of acculturation throughout my life. I believed the process for developing one's way of knowing might be similar for others (South Asian and non-South Asian alike). Critical thinking allowed me to recognize how I came to develop my ways of knowing. Being conscious of my behaviors and asking myself why I thought or behaved the way I have has facilitate my epistemology. I came to realize what level of

influence my epistemology had on my behavior and how I saw the actions of others. One major challenge I may face while I continue the development of my epistemology is how my lens and experiences as an Asian Indian American could influence the way I continue to develop my way of knowing. In the context of conducting my study, I recognized the need for engaging in critical analysis to discern between my personal beliefs, ideals, and what I observed and learned during data collection. Doing so has allowed me to better assess the results of my research.

As a researcher becomes immersed in the data collection process, there is a tendency for one's subjective perspective to influence how the researcher interprets data (Birks et al., 2008). As a second-generation Asian Indian American, I recognized that my identity may have influenced how I conduct my dissertation study and how I interpreted my data. As an insider to my population of interest, I wanted to make sure participants' stories were told in their most original and accurate form. The benefit of my insider perspective was that I was able to leverage my own experiences as an Asian Indian American to ask pertinent questions to probe for information related to specific phenomena that were relevant to the topic of my study. For example, I used the experiences I had with my family to guide questions about what their family dynamic was like when they were growing up. I was also able to think about the challenges I faced in college related to the struggles of my identity as an Asian Indian American and I used those struggles to guide my inquiry. I believe it is likely that my background as an Asian Indian American individual made my participants feel more comfortable with sharing details about their lives, which allowed me to build good rapport. For the sake of developing the knowledge base related to the Asian Indian American student population,



I made sure the data I collect was interpreted as accurately as possible to the best of my ability; understanding the nuances of the culture helped me engage in the analysis process with a significant degree of proficiency. However, being an insider to one's study population may have had disadvantaged as well.

My own experiences as an Asian Indian American person might have biased or limited some of my perspectives. These biases could have influence how I interpreted the data collected in this study. Biases might have led me to try and interpret things in a way that could fit an unconscious narrative, or it may have led me to try and disconfirm evidence. I tried my best to recognize that a participant's life experiences could be substantially different than my own. Their upbringing and family life may have been different than mine. Their college experiences may be different than mine. Considering the pervasive influence of gender on the lives of Asian Indian American individuals, the life of a second-generation female participant and their college experience may have had larger discrepancies from my own experiences. While I expected to find some similarities, I kept myself open to discovering the differences participants might convey. I especially wanted to make sure I was accurately interpreting the stories they shared with me. I took significant steps to make sure my participants' accounts are analyzed as accurately and fruitfully as humanly possible.

Part of how I bolstered the minimization of my subjectivity and biases is through asking open-ended questions where participants will be asked to "tell me a story about..." or "tell me about a time where..." about different types of decisions they have made or experience they had. By asking questions in this way, I minimized me leading the conversation in a biased way. Participants chose to share their responses in ways that

were most accurate and comfortable to them. Once I collected and transcribed the data, I attempted to engage in peer debriefing by sending the interview transcripts to a trusted colleague. Peer debriefing was useful, as a “disinterested” third party can examine the data and give their interpretation regarding what they may see in the data (Creswell, 2013).

Another way I ensured participant data were analyzed deeply and accurately was through the process of memoing. As discussed previously, I engaged in the memoing process throughout the data collection and analysis process. Memoing is a process where the researcher takes notes during data collection and analysis to reflect and examine how the researcher engages with the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The memoing process can help bring to light any biases and preconceptions I may have of the Asian Indian American students I will interview. The process of memoing helped minimize the assumptions I made about participant responses by forcing me to be conscious of different interpretations I made, thereby increasing the likelihood that I interpreted and represented their responses in an accurate way. Separating myself from the data in this way helped promote analysis of the data in a way that ensures that participants’ stories were being told in a way that honored their experience and the point they are trying to convey. Memoing is a key process that is frequently used in grounded theory research (Birks et al., 2008), which made using this technique highly appropriate in this study.

## **CHAPTER 4: Findings**

The purpose of this social constructivist grounded theory study was to investigate how cultural norms influence the development and decision making of second-generation Asian Indian American college students. Specifically, this study focused on key aspects of participants' lives and how they influenced their thinking on American cultural norms, Indian cultural norms, and being Indian American. Additionally, this study aimed to explore how these norms influenced choices participants made during college and in life in general. The following research questions provided the basis for this study:

1. What are key aspects of Asian Indian American students' lives that influence how they think about American, Indian, and Indian American cultural norms?
2. How do these cultural norms influence the way in which Asian Indian American students make decisions related to their college experience and major life choices?

I recruited 10 second-generation Asian Indian American college student participants. All of these students were enrolled as full-time students at the University of Maryland (UMD) at the time of their interviews. Six of them were female identified, while four of them were male identified. Ultimately, the findings of this study are derived from the experiences of participants and the meaning made from their experiences. This information provides an important foundation for the emergent theory (which I detail in Chapter 5) based on the lived experiences of the study participants.

In this chapter, I review key themes and findings that emerged from data by providing in-depth descriptions of participants' experiences and perspectives. In the coming paragraphs, I first discuss themes related to Indian cultural norms, including

family, religion, college experiences, and gender. I then discuss themes related to identity salience and building a hybrid Asian Indian American identity. Next, I address how participants framed American cultural norms as being defined by the concept of autonomy, and document examples where autonomy influenced decision making. I then address additional findings around decision making as related to major life decisions. In the final portion of this chapter, I provide details on artifacts each participant shared during the final interview, and discuss how artifacts reflected cultural norms and/or experiences related to making decisions. The information that emerged during data analysis allowed me to develop a theory that helps address the research questions I posit in this dissertation. The following information is used in Chapter 5 to outline a working theory related to the lives of second-generation Asian Indian American college students.

### **Influences of Indian Cultural Norms: Family, Religion, College Experiences, and Gender**

I first asked participants about their experiences related to their Indian identity. On the one hand, their ethnicity made it undeniable that they were of Indian descent. Indian people tend to have phenotypic characteristics which clearly distinguishes them from people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Beyond the phenotypic expression of being Indian, there were different cultural norms that participants recognized as being frequently expressed in Indian culture as related to family, religion, cultural engagement during college, and gender.

#### **Family**

Congruent with much of the currently available literature (e.g., Bhat, 2005; Rahman & Witenstein, 2013; Ruzicka, 2011), family was the most prevalent theme to

arise from the data during analysis. All interviewees provided information about their family background, specifically as it pertained to their parents and siblings. Some participants shared information about relationships with other family members, such as grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. The most common findings in this study relate to how family members instilled cultural values and educated students about Indian heritage; and how they influenced students' educational journeys in their K–12 years, religious interests, and college-going processes.

### ***Relationships with One's Parents***

During interviews, I asked participants about relationships with parents. Unsurprisingly, when asked about who influenced participants' cultural identity throughout their lives, all participants indicated their parents had the most influence. For example, Mira, a female second-year student majoring in mechanical engineering, stated,

Definitely first and foremost my parents, because they're the ones who obviously were my initial teachers about my background and they always. . . . We eat Indian food at home a lot or we listen to Indian music and they took us to temples growing up and still do that and visiting my family in India. So they're always ones telling me stories about their lives in India or just introducing us to key components of what it's like to be Indian.

Most other participants indicated a similar sentiment or explanations about parents being the most influential people on cultural identity. Thus, family was a key aspect of participants' lives that influenced how they thought about Indian cultural norms.

When specifically asked about relationships with mothers, what I heard frequently was how mothers were strongly influential people in their lives or that participants had

and continued to have very close relationships with their mothers. Anita, a female second-year student majoring in physiology and neurobiology, said,

She's my best friend. She's taught so much. She teaches me how to cook. She taught me how to read and write. When she came here, she didn't know English at all, or anything. And so, she's one of my biggest inspirations because she's always able . . . She made a life here, and a really good life.

Fatima, a female second-year student double majoring in biology and psychology, stated,

I love my mother very much. I always have. I think she's a little bit overprotective, but I never really used to understand why. But growing up, I think I kind of understand why a little bit better now because from her perspective, she was kind of moved to a new country, and she obviously was very anxious about living in a new place, new people. She was at home all the time, so I understand why she's kind of defensive and protective. She's very emotional, which I think I understand too. So I feel like I kind of grew up to understand why my mom acts in certain ways, and so I feel like I can communicate with her maybe a little bit better than some of my other friends with their parents because I know that communication is a really big problem from what I've seen with my other Indian friends and their parents. I know my mom loves me a lot, and I love her a lot. I feel like if there was something that I had to talk to her about, I could, even if it's a little bit touchy, because there's a lot of taboo things in Indian culture.

Some participants provided accounts of how mothers shaped their personalities.

Mira indicated,

So something that I guess I've noticed, especially in the past 2 months, is that

she's definitely been a huge influence of my personality. So my mom is definitely a very headstrong person. She's not afraid to say what she believes. She's a very opinionated person. I think I got a lot of those characteristics from her. So I think it definitely leads to interesting clashes sometimes, but for the most part, I wouldn't be anywhere near the person I am without her influence. So she's definitely taught me a lot about strength and standing up for myself and certain values like that.

Mothers often were stay-at-home parents. Some mothers worked part-time while raising children or worked when children were older and more self-sufficient. For example, Fatima indicated, "My dad would work, and my mom stayed at home with us for a few years. Then they both started working."

Anita indicated her father was "the worker in the family." She said, "When I was a kid, especially, he wasn't at home a lot because since we had just moved here, he had to be at work a lot." Other participants shared similar accounts of their family dynamic, indicating that their fathers were the primary income earners in their household. Faraz, a male first-year student who has not yet declared a major (though he was planning to major in computer science), said during his younger years his father worked long hours at a gas station his family owned. In more recent years, Faraz's father owned his own information technology consulting firm. In general, participants, male or female, indicated they had good relationships with their fathers. The level of closeness to one's father varied among participants.

One exception to the working dynamic of participants' families is Cinthya, a female third-year student majoring in physiology and neurobiology. Cinthya's mother

was a doctor and her father was a software engineer. Cinthya indicated growing up, her mother worked more than her father. Her father was home much more than her mother. Cinthya's mother was a doctor and Cinthya wanted to go to medical school after graduating from UMD. When asked about what made her want to become a doctor, she specifically talked about how her mother being a doctor inspired her. Somewhat opposite to how other participants described their family dynamics, Cinthya indicated her father, who still worked as a software engineer, was the one who was home more during her younger years because her mother worked longer hours as a doctor.

Some participants gave significant amounts of information on how their parents influenced their upbringings and personalities. Male participants indicated they had good relationships with their mothers, but the level of description they provided about their relationships with either parent was not as in depth as descriptions or stories female participants shared. The lack of content of male participants' relationships with their fathers could be due to their fathers working a lot when they were growing up. For example, Faraz said: "I think I know my mother a lot more because she was around at an earlier age a bit more than my dad was because my dad was so busy with work." Still, participants mostly expressed they had positive relationships with their fathers. Most fathers were described as supportive and caring, though some were described as reserved in emotion. Raj's experience with his father was slightly different. Raj said,

My relationship with my dad is a little bit more complex. I think it's more internally my feelings of it than anything that exist. I'm gay, but I'm still in the closet to my parents. So I don't feel like that would affect my relationship with my mom, but with my dad, it's never been a super emotionally strong



relationship. It's always been like, I tell my dad about school, academics, work, and then we bond over like sci-fi. We have two shows that we watch together. So, we don't communicate very much, but he's the one who teaches me things. He taught me how to drive. He taught me math, but I still feel like there's something that could be there, and I'm still scared of when I eventually do come out of closet.

Raj's account of his relationship with his father is mixed. He expressed his father was more emotionally reserved and that he was concerned about what his father's reaction would be if he came out as gay to his father. Since individuals of LGBTQ identities often experience persecution and rejection in Indian culture (Tummala-Narra & Deshpande, 2018), including sometimes by one's own family members, hiding his identity as a gay man likely influenced Raj's life in some ways. At the very least, Raj had been limited in his ability to express himself in a fully authentic manner in front of his parents. All of this likely reflected how heteronormative behaviors and expression are a pervasive cultural norm in Indian culture, considering how "traditional" patriarchal gender roles have been strongly perpetuated in societies throughout history in India and within Indian communities in the United States (Tummala-Narra & Deshpande, 2018). Thus, Raj had to modulate his behavior when at home. Conversely, Raj indicated that he was openly out at school. His peers were aware of the fact that he is gay. Other than being able to be out to his peers on campus, Raj did not indicate how being gay influenced his college life.

Being out at school may signify the presence of an American cultural norm, in that it is more culturally acceptable to be gay in American culture. Raj did not discuss much of his experience as an out gay individual on campus. Presumably, if he is out and

has positive interactions with his peers, he may feel comfortable with his identity as a gay man. However, this comfort did not seem to translate to his home environment.

Ultimately, not being out to his family members did not seem to stop Raj from staying connected to his Indian cultural roots.

Regardless of being gay and hiding it from his parents, he still engaged with his father in other substantial ways (e.g., discussing academics, work, and television shows they both enjoy). Raj indicated that he is not entirely sure how his parents would react when he eventually informs them of the fact that he is gay. He mentioned that he thinks his mother would take the news better than his father would, suggesting that his mother might be more culturally flexible than his father. Why this might be the case is not clear. Raj's mother's possible willingness to accept Raj's identity as a gay man might highlight a stronger emotional connection between him and his mother in comparison to him and his father. Aside from Raj's experience as a gay male Asian Indian American, it was unclear if differences in fathers' behaviors influenced how participants thought about Indian cultural norms, or how cultural norms may have influenced participants' college experiences or major life choices.

### ***Relationships with Siblings***

When participants were asked about relationships with their siblings, they did not have much to say. Some participants had siblings who were somewhat close in age, while others had a much larger age difference. What was striking was that participants provided little information about their relationships with their siblings, even when asked further probing questions. Thus, I was unable to ascertain if sibling relationships had any observable influences on participants' understanding of American, Indian, or Indian

American cultural norms or life choices.

### ***Relationships with Other Family Members***

In addition to asking about parents and siblings, I asked probing questions about extended family relationships because literature on South Asian families indicated households often include extended family members (Chacko, 2009; Chaddha & Deb, 2013). However, only one of the participants (Faraz) indicated they had a grandparent living with them. He did not provide much substantive information about how his grandfather influenced his life, with one notable exception related to the artifact Faraz shared with me during his second interview; I discuss the artifact and its significance later in this chapter. Most participants were mixed in their responses related to how strong their relationships were with cousins, aunts, and uncles. Answers ranged from indicating cousins, aunts, and uncles lived in the same state as participants, in other states, in India, or other countries. Participants largely expressed having some kind of relationship with their extended family, but the strength of those relationships varied among participants. Therefore, it is unclear if relationships with extended family members overseas had any influence on how participants understood Indian, American, or Indian American cultural norms, or on how participants made decisions.

### ***Instilling Cultural Values and Knowledge About Heritage***

One of the most important findings from this study was that family had a significant role in instilling in participants cultural values and understandings about norms and traditions related to Indian culture. Participants shared a few important ways in which their parents instilled and enforced cultural values and norms in their household growing up. Anita shared her mother taught her about Jainism, an ancient Indian religion.

Her mother also instilled in Anita an interest in Bollywood, the Indian equivalent of Hollywood. Bollywood movies, music, and dance were a significant part of Anita's life. Her mother also taught her Hindi. Anita shared at home she was only allowed to speak Hindi, not English.

Not being allowed to speak English at home was not a common occurrence among other participants. However, the expectation of deference to their parents' authority and preferences was. Diya, a female second-year student majoring in public health sciences, talked about what life at home was like:

Not that I see my parents as being super strict or overbearing. But just when you're living at home, if I ever have plans with people, I have to run it by them.

Or if I'm planning on using the car, then I have to just let them know and ask them. Or curfews and things like that. So it's nice to not have those in place, because I know I can take care of myself, even though I know it's out of concern.

When asked why they thought their parents may have enforced deference to authority and other cultural norms that participants were not fond of, many participants indicated they were products of what their parents were taught growing up. Their parents were simply using the methods they endured as children to instill expectations in and manage behaviors of their own children. For example, Sima, a female second-year student majoring in physiology and neurobiology, stated, "Growing up, the way my parents raised me. They've raised me how they've been raised, in their culture, like with how my grandparents raised them, which are according to, like, South Indian values." Sima also stated,

I believe in general, it's hard for parents to change their outlook on things because

like they're old and like they've grown up believing a certain set of ideals or basically their minds are more set in stone. So it's hard to come to an agreement or a middle ground when it's like that.

Sima demonstrated an understanding of where Indian culture norms may have come from: She identified norms and expectations of Indian culture were passed down and taught through the family.

Many participants brought up how at least one of their parents may have had a more “traditional” mindset. When asked about what they meant by traditional, they talked about expectations related to adherence to religious practices, common patriarchal gender norms such as wearing clothing perceived as “modest” or learning how to cook (only female participants brought up the latter). Based on the information shared during interviews, it seemed the expectation of deference to parental authority was a key tool parents used to instill and enforce expectations related to cultural norms. Some participants talked about how respecting elders was a value their parents instilled in them.

However, not all methods of instilling values and knowledge about Indian cultural heritage were “authoritarian” in nature. Participants’ parents often wanted them to cherish their cultural heritage through participation in Indian holidays and festivals. A prominent and well-known example of such a holiday or festival is Diwali, the Indian New Year. Indians often come together to celebrate the new year through food, dancing to Bollywood or classical Indian music, and wearing Indian clothing. For example, Anita indicated she “did Bollywood dance,” which her mother taught her, from a young age. She also “listen[ed] to Bollywood music more often than [she listened] to English music.” All participants who discussed parents’ encouragement of engagement in cultural

activities, holidays, or festivals, had only positive things to say about these forms of cultural engagement. Indian festivals, Bollywood movies and music, other types of Indian music (e.g., classical, fusion), traditional Indian clothing, and dancing are heavily celebrated parts of Indian culture. Thus, it is unsurprising that my participants' parents taught their children to love the aforementioned parts of Indian culture.

An emergent theme from the data included participating in performing arts as children. For example, growing up, Anita's mother taught her to sing classical Indian songs. She indicated she also listened and continued to listen to Indian music more than she did American music. Another example is Sima, who spent many of her younger years performing Bharatanatyam, an ancient form of classical Indian dance (Bhanumathi, 2019). Bharatanatyam takes approximately 5 years to master and may culminate in a special "graduation" recital known as an Arangetram (Bhanumathi, 2019). The level of dedication required to master classical Indian dance forms may exemplify a positive commitment to an aspect of Indian cultural identity. Many of the students interviewed for this study continued to participate in dance or singing organizations at UMD, indicating doing so out of a desire to stay connected to their cultural heritage. Ultimately, as I will explain in further detail later, students found participating in performing arts organizations bolstered their cultural identity and connected them with others who were interested in doing the same. Considering the somewhat common responses participants had around matters related to Indian cultural celebrations and performance arts, it seemed parents instilling participants with knowledge about Indian holidays and celebrations was a significant way that participants learned about Indian cultural norms. The enjoyment of celebratory or performance aspects of Indian cultural holidays and Bollywood may have

influenced participants' decision making on how they stayed connected with their cultural heritage in college.

## **Religion**

Among the different aspects of culture participants talked about during their interviews, religion came up as a major aspect of what they considered to be an important part of Indian culture. However, the degree to which religion influenced students' lives varied. For example, Anita expressed Jainism was a deeply significant part of her life. Her parents instilled in her the knowledge related to Jainism and encouraged her to get involved with Jain Youth of the Capital (JYOC), a temple-based Washington D.C. youth organization. Anita was also involved in a national organization called the Young Jains of America (YJA). Both of these organizations allowed Anita to build social connections with other Jain second-generation Indian Americans. Anita's engagement with her Jain faith happened primarily outside of her college experience.

Raj, a male third-year student double majoring in accounting and operations management and business analytics, felt Indian cultural identity was intertwined deeply or even synonymous with religion:

If somebody says cultural identity, what I think of is like a mixture of both my Indian heritage and my Hindu religion. So I explain to them, we celebrate Hindu holidays and we follow the traditional Indian customs on those things. But it also is like. . . . Sort of traditional Indian customs aside from religion, respecting my parents, all the things that we're taught from when we're little about family customs and respecting your elders and things like that. . . . I've actually been thinking recently about how those two kind of things connect. So they go kind of

hand in hand, both being Indian and then also practicing Hinduism. I think those are the two things that have shaped me a lot since I've grown up, even though I may not have realized it. So, regardless of any other aspects of my identity, I think those two are the biggest ones that have affected me.

Similarly, Krish, a male first-year student who had not declared a major but was planning on majoring in computer science, held a perspective on religion (though, according to him, he was not religious). He thought of religion when people talked about Indian culture, specifically holidays, celebrations, and festivals associated with different parts of Indian religions or culture. He stated, "[Partaking] in Indian festivals and Indian prayers and everything like that, I think you can be considered Indian." It was unsurprising that some students treated Indian religions as almost synonymous to culture due to the phenomenon of the racialization of religion (Joshi, 2006). However, Krish did not consider himself to be religious. Regardless, Krish seemed willing to enjoy cultural celebrations regardless of his non-affiliation with a religion.

Jay shared a similar perception of Indian culture as Krish did regarding perception that Indian culture is strongly associated with religion along with common celebrations and festivals. Cinthya, a Christian, also indicated religion was a major part of her life:

For my faith, I definitely yeah, it has been a really big part of my life. Not just cause my parents were Christian and because I was brought up in the church, but I think because I kind of made the faith my own, like after I got to college. And so, yeah. I mean, I think that my faith gives me a really good, I don't know. Like, I mean it gives me, it gives me hope, but I guess the other thing is also that I feel like whenever, if there is anything difficult I have to do, I guess, because of my



faith, or something that is like hard, or uncomfortable for me, I know that

whatever, like work, or I guess like majors I'm doing, isn't going to be in vain.

As described in her quote, her faith gave her a sense of hope in tough times and provided her with a sense of meaning in what she did in life. Cinthya's connection to her faith led her to join Cru, a UMD Christian campus ministry and student organization. Cru includes a suborganization called Design, which is specifically an organization for desi Christians. Design has allowed Cinthya to connect and build community with others like her on campus.

I'm in a campus ministry named Cru and me and my friends we had been in it for about 2 years. . . . We were all pretty familiar with it and everything, but then we heard about a cultural branch of crew called Design, which is for South Asian Americans.

Beyond matters of faith and worship, Cinthya spent time studying with members of Design. Cinthya's experience with Cru and Design are what she shared when I asked about her favorite experience in college thus far. It seemed likely that Cinthya's faith drove her to decide to join Cru, and her connection to Indian culture likely drove her to join Design. Thus, it seems clear that Cinthya's decision making about her on-campus student organization involvement was heavily influenced by her cultural identity as an Asian Indian American.

When asked about religion, Faraz indicated he was Muslim and that he spent much of his childhood going to a mosque on weekends. He still went to a mosque. He said his religion had primarily been limited to helping him "find a set of ideals or values to live by." He saw his religion as something that helped him think about "the end goal of

life.” His involvement with his mosque also helped him feel connected to a community of others like him. However, it is unclear if he experienced racialization related to his Islamic faith as some other participants did for their own religions.

Though some participants indicated religion was a significant part of their identity, other participants indicated they were not very religious. Some participants indicated their religious adherence was limited to celebrating religious holidays and the various events that might occur in honor of those holidays, such as Diwali. Another popular Indian holiday is Navratri, a Hindu festival that spans across nine nights (Ahuja, 2013). The celebration of Navratri typically includes a night of Garba dancing, a traditional Gujarati dance form (David, 2010). Some of the cultural experiences often associated with Indian religions inspired participants to get involved with relevant student organizations in college. Traditional and Indian fusion dance styles are a hallmark of some South Asian student organizations. Multiple participants of this study were involved in these organizations. These participants shared how their involvement in Indian dance organizations helped them stay connected to their cultural heritage. There are 10 student organizations on campus that are specifically geared towards Indian college students. Involvement in these different organizations varied across participants.

### **College Experiences: Cultural Engagement and Community Building**

Another major influence on participants’ Indian cultural background while in college was their participation in performing arts groups on campus. Anita, Fatima, Mira, Diya, and Jay were involved in an Indian acapella team on campus or a dance team that engaged in Bollywood fusion or classical Indian dancing. Jay was involved with a South Asian interest fraternity on campus, where he had been involved in Indian dance

performances. Some of these participants indicated they were involved in both. Some indicated they were also on the executive board for a group that planned and hosted an Indian dance competition on campus. During interviews, participants who discussed their involvement indicated they decided to become a part of these organizations because they wanted to stay connected to their cultural roots and to a community of people like them. For example, Mira said,

I'm on a South Asian acapella team, but that team is primarily Indian and all [inaudible] so obviously not all of us are from the same part of India, so it's definitely a mix of backgrounds, but at the same time, a lot of us have similar experiences. And at the end of the day come from same cultural identity and we eat the same foods, had the same lifestyles growing up, etc. That's one thing that's definitely helped. Also I'm a part of a couple of South Asian or South Indian, not South Asian, sorry, arts. It's a dance competition as well as an acapella competition, two executive boards for during competitions. So also just learning how to put together an event while also keeping cultural values in mind, probably.

Mira also discussed how being in community through South Asian organizations on campus helped her find a venue where she could relax and feel herself:

I think that for one, because I think until college, I never had a large group of Indian friends, especially at school. At school I had a few Indian friends here and there, but I never went to school with a lot of Indian people. So finding those larger groups of Indian people through these organizations has definitely been a new experience. And it's allowed me to sort of, I can make more references to

movies or TV shows that we have in common or make jokes in Indian languages that my other friends wouldn't understand. So in a way it's allowed me to sort of relax and sort of be more Indian than I can be around other people. It's like a nice kind of like. . . . When I'm at other places, I'm usually sort of looking, listening to other people's stories and learning about other cultures, to be able to come back to a group of all Indian people who I already have a lot of shared experiences with, it's just easy to sort of be natural and relaxed there.

Engagement in culturally related organizations is unsurprising, as some participants had been engaging in performing arts from a young age. Mira's examples highlighted how engagement with other Indian Americans on campus showed her how she and her peers perceived aspects of Indian and American culture. In fact, her feelings about being able to be natural and relaxed among her fellow Indian American peers may have exemplified a common understanding among Asian Indian Americans—that Asian Indian Americans can spend time with each other and just “be themselves” with those who have experiences and identities in common. In other words, an aspect of being Indian American—as opposed to just being Indian or just being American—may involve having to modulate between cultural norms and behaviors in some environments but being able to rest with other Indian American peers.

### ***Other Campus Involvement Experiences***

Most students in this study were engaged with Asian Indian American peers in three significant ways. The first way was through a university-run learning community program. Multiple students talked about the UMD Integrated Life Sciences (ILS) program at. ILS is an honors-level living-learning community program based in a

residence hall on UMD's campus. The program is geared toward careers in science and healthcare. This program is diverse in nature, but participants indicated a significant share of students who were enrolled in the program seemed to be Asian American, including those of East Asian and South Asian racial and ethnic backgrounds. The larger presence of Asian Americans in ILS could potentially be due to the population's affinity for STEM careers. It is likely that the snowball sampling method helped me recruit a few participants who were enrolled in this program. Many ILS students took classes, did homework, and studied together. The ILS program experienced a sense of community with peers of Asian Indian American and other backgrounds. Participants did not indicate the ILS program had any major influence on their perspectives of Indian or American cultures specifically.

The second way in which Indian peers engaged with each other was through participation in Indian dance or acapella-related organizations. Multiple participants indicated they were on the board of a major Indian dance competition that took place at UMD. The dance competition included participation from Indian dance teams from across the United States. Some participants also mentioned the Indian acapella team that sometimes traveled across the country to participate in exhibitions or competitions. The influence of participation in the performance arts organizations was clear—participants garnered a sense of community with other fellow Asian Indian Americans and bolstered their connection to their Indian cultural heritage.

The last way in which some participants engaged with their Indian peers was through student organizations that were not performing arts specific. For example, Jay, a male fifth-year student double majoring in electrical engineering and computer science,

was part of a South Asian interest fraternity on campus. Membership in his fraternity allowed Jay to connect with other Asian Indians and other non-Indian South Asians on campus in a way that provided brotherhood (as is the mission of most fraternities). To stay connected to Indian culture, Jay and his fraternity engaged in occasional dance performances and celebrations of major South Asian holidays (such as Diwali). Though Jay is a member of a South Asian interest fraternity, Greek organizations on university and college campuses are traditionally predominantly White (Patel, 2010). Jay's participation in an organization both South Asian oriented and traditionally "White," maybe aptly summed up Jay's thoughts on his hybrid identity:

I identify as, obviously, Indian American. Obviously I was born in the United States and so I grew up with a lot of Americanized Indian values. Obviously I wasn't aware of how straight things are back in India. My parents are very, I wouldn't say, different flow of how they conveyed a lot of meaning and messages to me in regards to who I was as a person. They did the very best to show me what my roots were and keep me in line with those while also still trying to . . . . We were in America so trying to do our best to be an American, I suppose, as well but at the same time, they were very focused on who I should be as Indian, especially as a Hindu person following my religion very strictly and also just following the culture itself very strictly. I mean like going to temple consistently or even Sunday school, learning about Indian history and who really Indian Americans were in regards to the transition from India to being an Indian in America. Yeah, I would identify more obviously as an Indian American, some more Americanized to the use of Indian culture and just a broader understanding

of who I am in regards to being an Indian.

Jay defined what being Indian American entailed from his perspective. He recognized a desire and appreciation for staying connected to his Indian roots, but Jay went on to talk about the importance of his individuality by discussing noncultural aspects of his life:

I would say culture is a big part of my life but really, I think the noncultural things I do are even more significant to me and the reason I say that is not because culture isn't important to me, but more importantly just like culture is more significant to everyone and, really, it can define you but when you're typically viewed as someone who's an Indian American, there's so many Indian Americans in America, a lot of people outside of you have a very broad perspective of who an Indian American is and so they typically generalize you and group together. For me, it's like when I break from that mold, it really actually lets me define my identity to other people and I feel the same way, not really just about what other people think, I feel like I've done so much for my culture and I have so much of my culture in me but I also like to focus on the fact that my culture doesn't define me. I can do other things and still be defined as an Indian American. That's kind of my big things that me doing non-cultural things or things outside of the culture can really help define my own path and who I am specifically instead of just generally falling into our culture.

Jay clearly found involvement and pursuit of experiences outside of things associated with Indian culture to be of the utmost importance. He seemed to want to be connected to his Indian cultural background, but he also wanted to differentiate himself in the culture as someone being "outside the mold." Presumably, he was referring to having his own

unique interests and identity. As previously indicated, he chose to differentiate himself through his personal interests, such as playing football or volunteering for the UMD football team.

Another example of participants engaging with Indian peers in a nonculture-based organization was Faraz and Krish's participation in a campus hackathon group. A hackathon group is computer science related. Students help develop software at quick speeds during specific events. While Faraz and Krish are in the same organization, they made no mention of each other and if they engaged socially with one another or other members of the hackathon organization. Therefore, it was not clear how participation in this organization might have influenced the way they perceived Asian Indian, American, or Asian Indian American cultures or how these cultures influenced their participation in this organization. Krish did mention once COVID-19 was no longer a problem and he was living on campus, he would look to join an Indian student association.

### **Influence of Gender on Lives and Perceived Cultural Norms**

There were some differences participants noticed about how gender influenced their lives. Female participants highlighted some expectations around Indian culture and gender. For example, Fatima brought up the stereotype that Indian women are expected to learn how to cook. Anita, who wants to go to medical school and become a surgeon someday, brought up how gender influenced their decision making about their career paths. She stated,

I think for a while my mom was trying to convince me to change. Like, I want to be a surgeon and that's like the most intense thing I could've chosen. And she was trying to convince me for a while to like, "Oh, just be a pediatrician." Or



like, “Be an eye doctor.” Or something like that. Just so I’d have time to raise a family.

Anita highlighted a sexist bias common among members of the South Asian community about the role of women in society and in their families (Ibrahim et al., 1997; Traxler, 2009). Because Indian and other South Asian cultures often perpetuate the expectation that women are supposed to be the primary caretakers for their families, it was not surprising to hear Anita share a similar perspective on how an Indian cultural norm may have influenced her decision making related to her career. Indian women often face expectations of focusing on motherhood and being subservient to their husbands through the institution of arranged marriage (Accapadi, 2011; Ruzicka, 2011). The expectations Anita and possibly other female participants faced might be a remnant of cultural norms related to arranged marriage, especially if participants’ parents had arranged marriages. However, female participants in this study still felt comfortable with making their own career-related choices. The ability to make a choice counter to sexist expectations could have been a byproduct of social class privilege for some participants (Lapour & Heppner, 2009).

Fatima felt gender influenced much of her life and her decision making during her K–12 years, especially in social settings. She felt girls were expected to dress certain ways, wear makeup in certain ways, and were addressed in ways that made girls feel uncomfortable (e.g., being called “honey” or “sweetheart,” she said, by male teachers). However, her experience in college was different:

I actually think it’s been better in college. Just because I’m not being watched by anyone really. I can wear whatever I want to a lecture. I’ve never been told to go

change or anything. In general, I found that my male peers in college, especially being in the program, ILS, a lot of them are maybe just a little more smarter and understanding so they do treat us, girls, as equals. And I think there's a majority of girls in my program, anyway, so they're outnumbered. But, in my program, specifically I've never felt like I was less than a guy. Our professors have been really good in the program. Even in general, in my other classes, I've never really felt I was doing worse than a guy or being treated differently. Most of my professors have been very open minded too at UMD, which is really nice.

Similar to Anita, Fatima recognized she had dealt with sexism. However, she did not indicate the sexism she faced had anything to do with the fact that she was Indian.

Male participants brought up few concerns about performing in alignment with gender expectations. Raj mentioned he felt gender norms in his family exerted pressure on him when deciding on a major:

My dad comes from a long line of male engineers in his family. And then my cousin is going to be majoring in computer science. So when I was choosing my major, I think I told you last time, I changed right before I applied, because I thought I had to be an engineer or be a computer scientist. So I was conflicted, because I know my dad wanted me to continue the line of [men who share my last name], but I was like no. So that. And also I think that aside from my family and my culture, I think just being a guy makes it a lot easier to do the things that I want to than it would be if I were a girl.

Raj felt pressure to become an engineer due to his male family members being engineers, and Raj almost became an engineer as well because of this influence. However, he

ultimately chose to major in accounting and operations management business analytics. His father approved of his majors, as his father perceives both of his majors as practical; Raj's father wanted his son to major in something that required "technical" skills. Beyond Raj's example, no other male participants felt their gender affected their decision making in any aspects of their lives.

One interesting find was that parents tracked the movements of two participants using GPS tracking via a phone app. Both of these participants were women. Neither participant discussed whether or not being tracked specifically had to do with their gender. These students noted they still engaged in regular social behaviors while in college, such as going out with friends to bars, restaurants, or other social venues near campus or in Washington, D.C. Occasionally, their parents would ask why they were at a particular location for extended periods of time. They sometimes justified or fabricated reasons as to why they were out late and not in their residence hall on campus. None of the male participants indicated they were subjected to tracking.

The experience and aspects of life described in the preceding sections of this chapter all influenced how participants built their cultural identities in one way or another. In the following section, I summarize and provide examples of how participants perceived and built their cultural identities.

### **The Influence of Identity on Cultural Norms: Building a Hybrid Identity**

During interviews, I asked participants, "Can you tell me about what your cultural identity is and how you would describe it to someone?" The purpose of asking this question was to ascertain if participants might have had stronger salience with one part of their cultural identity over another. There were two findings for this question. Four

participants identified more with their Indian cultural identity. The remaining six participants identified as Indian American, indicating that their cultural identities were a hybrid of both. What follows are examples of participants' responses about their cultural identification.

### **Greater Salience of Indian Identity**

When asked about how they would describe their cultural identity to someone else, Anita said "I would usually say North Indian, I'm Rajasthani. . . . Usually I factor in religion somewhat if I think they'll know what I'm talking about so I'll usually say Jain, but . . . yeah." Anita's quote seemed to demonstrate a stronger salience of her Indian identity, as she talked specifically about what part of Indian she draws her heritage from and she also brought up her connection to a uniquely Indian religion. Raj and Sima shared their identities in a similar way. Sima said that she identified as South Indian and Hindu. Raj said he identified as Indian and Hindu. I did not expect participants to share both their ethnic background and their religious background in answering a question about how they would describe their cultural identity to others. However, participants sharing their religious background in conjunction with their ethnic identities can sometimes be expected due to the common phenomenon of racialization of religion (Joshi, 2006). This phenomenon seems to be prevalent within Indian religious backgrounds, such as Hinduism or Jainism. Faraz was the only participant who identified as Indian and did not provide a religion when asked about his cultural identity. However, he did discuss being a Muslim during other parts of his interview. In total, the four aforementioned participants primarily identified as Indian, whereas the remaining participants identified as a hybrid Indian American.

What was interesting to find in participants' responses was that the aforementioned participants did not provide much substance in their responses beyond what has been previously discussed. Perhaps participants who primarily chose to identify as Indian might not have felt a need to discuss much further. However, in contrast, most participants who identified with the hybrid cultural identity of Indian American provided more information and context to prove or justify their decisions. Their examples are shared in the following section.

### **Hybrid Indian American Identity**

Diya provided the most descriptive and apt response of any participant when I asked participants to describe their cultural identities:

I would describe myself as Indian and Indian American. My entire family is from India. My parents were born and brought up there, but my sister and I were born and brought up here in America. So it's definitely a hybrid of the two cultures.

My family has a lot of aspects of Indian culture. We eat a lot of Indian food, celebrate Indian holidays. My family is in India, but I also consider myself to be very American, very westernized, as people would say. I definitely grew up with a lot of American values that are similar to my peers and other American teenagers.

So it's a constant struggle of balancing those two.

Diya highlighted aspects of her Indian roots but also discussed how she was a hybrid in conjunction with her American background, thus making her Indian American. She specifically pointed out that she grew up with many American values similar to her non-Indian peers who are also American. Similarly, Mira said,

I'd say that I definitely identify as an Indian American and having both strong Indian and American cultural influences in my life. I think definitely having been raised with very strong Indian cultural values, I'm very in touch with my Indian culture, but I definitely am always open to learning about other cultures and embracing an American cultural side as well.

Again, like Diya, Mira discussed the importance of her Indian cultural heritage but pointed out she also had influences from American culture in her life. The prevalence of both Indian and American cultural experiences seems to lead Mira to have the hybrid identity of Indian American. Cinthya similarly stated:

I'd probably say like I'm Indian American because yeah. I don't know. I feel like it definitely is just not one or the other. And also, just like growing up around white people has made me feel like I'm a little bit Whitewashed in some aspects, so I'd probably say I'm Indian American.

Cinthya pointed out her identity was not just one or the other because she has been around or immersed in both Indian and American cultures. Her use of the term "Whitewashed" may have signaled she understood much of American culture is centered around Whiteness or colonialism.

As discussed previously, another participant who identified as Indian American in this study was Jay. Jay talked about how he was born and raised in the United States and thus, he "grew up with a lot of Americanized Indian values." He went on to describe how his parents showed him what his roots were by having him attend Hindu Sunday school, learn about Indian history, and more. Jay also described that his parents did what they could to "keep him in line" behaviorally, alluding to his parents' preference for behaviors

that more strongly exemplify the norms and values of his Indian cultural heritage.

However, he has also talked about how since he was born and raised in America, he did what he could to “be an American”. During other parts of his interview, Jay talked about how he had a stronger affinity to his American background, explicitly talking about how he was Americanized (as discussed above), how he likes the freedom to make choices on his own even if they contradict his parents’ preferences, and how his love of football is uniquely American. However, ultimately, Jay recognized himself as Indian American.

Finally, the last two participant who identified as Indian American were Krish and Sima. Krish and Sima did not have as much to say about their Indian American identity as the other participants. Krish stated, “I’d say I am an Indian American. Not the Native Indian American, because often that’s confused with, but I’m an American that’s Indian.” His reflex to differentiate between Native American and being Indian American is not unheard of. In fact, I chose to use the term Asian Indian American for this dissertation study as the primary identifier for my population of interest as opposed to simply calling them Indian American to avoid the mix up that Krish described. Sima simply stated:

I think culturally I identify kind of half and half with being Indian and American.

So if I describe myself to someone, I would say that I’m Indian but I obviously have a lot of American tendencies. I still celebrate a lot of Hindu holidays with my parents and stuff and I understand the culture and I speak Telegu too, so I understand the language.

Though all participants included their Indian identity in their cultural identification (whether solely or mixed with their American identity), no participants indicated they were “just” American. In other words, no participant solely claimed to be

American without bringing up their Indian background. Even if a participant may have shown a strong affinity for their American background and ideals, it seemed no participant ignored they were also Indian. Ultimately, such a phenomenon could come down to the mere fact that participants cannot stop the phenotypic expression of their ethnic background. In other words, their skin color, or even their names may set them apart from White Americans, thus somewhat requiring participants and Indian Americans in general to hold on to their Indian identity. However, I did not see any prominent disdain from participants about their Indian heritage, so all participants may have had no problem identifying with Indian culture to a significant degree.

From the previously provided information and throughout participants' other responses, it became clear that participants, especially (but not exclusively) the ones who identified as Indian American as opposed to just Indian, built their hybrid identities over the span of their lives through exposure to Indian and American culture. For example, Diya, Mira, Cinthya, and Jay's responses on how they identify culturally highlighted they attained their understanding of Indian culture and norms through family experiences. Additionally, participants garnered their understanding of American cultural norms through their experiences with their non-Indian American peers and through immersion in American schools and elsewhere. Participants specifically created the hybrid Asian Indian American identity by trying to incorporate and balance two identities. As Diya indicated, it may be a challenging task to balance Indian and American identities. To do so, participants would make overtly conscious and unknowing unconscious decisions about their preferences for nearly any aspect of life. The next section of this chapter highlights areas of life where Indian and American cultural norms had significant



influence on their decisions throughout life. The process of their decision making significantly contributed to the formation of their hybrid identities as Asian Indian Americans.

### **American Identity: Defined by Autonomy**

Although no participants identified solely as “American” (versus “Indian” or “Asian Indian American/Indian American”), the most frequent value and norm participants discussed related to American aspects of cultural identity was the general concept of autonomy. *Autonomy* refers to “the right or condition to self-govern” (merriam-webster.com, 2021). To govern oneself could also be described as engaging in independent decision-making or having the freedom to make choices based on one’s personal interests. The aforementioned descriptions of autonomy closely describe the prominent cultural norms of individualistic cultures. Individualistic cultures, such as American culture, place a strong emphasis on independence and personal happiness (Kodama et al., 2002; Museus, 2014; Robinson, 2005; Yoon et al., 2019). In contrast, traditionally collectivistic cultures, such as Indian culture, place a greater emphasis on deference to authority, interdependence, and placing the happiness of others over one’s own happiness (Kodama et al., 2002). In the following paragraphs, I provide multiple examples of how participants demonstrated a greater affinity for behaving autonomously.

Although autonomy was never a word that was explicitly stated, words like “independence,” “individualism,” or “freedom” were. I chose autonomy as the word to best describe the behaviors participants described because it was clear students valued being able to act in a way true to their personal desires and beliefs. Expression of autonomy specifically came up during participants’ interviews when they were asked

what it meant to them to be American; participants responded by saying things related to individualism. For example, Anita stated,

More just like freedom, independence, even just from family. Sometimes my parents will say things like, “Oh, you’ll still be living with us.” Whatever. No, like I won’t. Or even for going to school, when we were discussing where I would be going to school, out of state versus in state, they were like, “Oh, you’re a girl, you can’t do that.” And I was like, “Why? That’s normal here.” So kind of just centering around the independence thing.

Anita’s quote seemed to show she understood American culture norms (e.g., “freedom, independence, even just from family”) and some norms more prevalent in—though certainly not unique to—Indian culture (e.g., adherence to sexist norms). In answering my question, she seemed to demonstrate her family and Indian and American cultural norms were what influenced how she thought about different aspects of her dual cultural identity. The way in which these norms influenced how Anita made decisions seemed to be that she compared the different expectations and cultural norms in her life and she chose what she preferred.

Anita also seemed to allude to an understanding of the sexism that is deeply rooted in Indian culture (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009), which in turn influenced the decision making of Asian Indian Americans in her and her parents’ generation. Sexism embedded in Indian culture seemed to be an aspect that influenced the way she thought about Indian and American cultures and about being Indian American. She seemed to recognize Indian culture had sexist norms but that American culture differed in some ways. This understanding seemed to manifest through Anita’s comparison and

evaluations of both her Indian and her American perspectives. She was able to see clear differences between the two cultures. The contrast between cultures allowed Anita to choose from a range of different behaviors to enact, as she determined which norms she preferred. Anita demonstrated a preference for the freedom and independence more typically associated with American and other Western cultures.

Diya also talked about independence and differences between norms instilled in American and Indian families:

I think the first thing that comes to mind honestly, is independence, especially within American families and cultures. I think kids are seen as grownups, independent or given more freedom as they grow older, which I'm not sure if that translates as clearly in an Indian family, since you're in your family until you get married, right, and then you start your own family. Whereas I know something that I think my parents struggled with is getting used to that independence. And when my sister and I were driving and I had the car and we had to set curfews and stuff. That was definitely something that was different.

Other participants similarly alluded to the ability to make independent decisions, some of which were not often considered to be acceptable in Indian culture. For example, two major aspects of life which participants discussed as things they hid from their parents were alcohol consumption and dating. All participants who discussed alcohol consumption indicated they did not tell their parents that they consumed alcohol. These participants indicated their parents were against them consuming alcohol and they were very worried their parents would be livid if they found out. These choices that students were making against their parents' desires seemed to highlight a desire to assert

individualistic choices and autonomy in the decision-making process.

However, being asked about their American identity was not the only time participants brought up autonomy. When asked about their favorite part of college life, participants discussed the freedom to make their own choices, live at their own pace, and do things on their own terms. Diya stated,

I think my favorite part of college life is living independently, and being able to be on my own and make my own decisions. I feel like a little mini adult. It's nice that, my friend likes to describe college as maximum freedom, minimum responsibility. It's nice in the sense that I can decide, I make my schedule for the day, I feel like I'm in charge of myself. But I'm not stressed out about anything more than school. You know, I don't pay taxes or anything. That's what I would say.

Diya's point on making her own decisions and having maximum freedom, along with everything else she mentioned about her favorite part of college life, seemed to allude to the possibility that when at home, she may not have had much autonomy in the decision-making process or other freedoms. Feeling as if she might not have as much freedom in the decision-making process at home could be due to the influence of deference to authority that is a hallmark of Asian cultures. At home, Diya may be beholden to her parents' desires and preferences for how she behaves or lives her life. Similarly, Jay pointed out,

Living not at home has really given me a lot more freedom to do things. So, I'll tell [my parents] like, I'm going to do things. It's not really like, "Hey, can I go do this or? Like asking anymore now it's just like I'm an adult. I can go do these

things on my own now. Especially since I'm living on my own. So I mean, I still care for them very much and I still like tell them everything I'm doing. I have no reason to hide stuff from them, but it's now it's just like, I'm making a lot more of those decisions on my own and like ask them for permission to do a lot of things.

Jay, like Diya, also recognized that because he was away from his parents in college, he had the freedom to not ask if he could do something. He was no longer bound by constraints of deference to authority when he was in college. Notably, Jay brought up recognizing how his parents felt about his decisions, which might have indicated he felt the "pull" of deference to authority. However, Jay was still willing to assert his autonomy to do what he ultimately preferred to do. Pointing out how his parents might react may have indicated Jay's understanding of how Indian culture tends to have an inclination toward deference to authority.

Cinthya shared a similar sentiment to that of Jay:

I would definitely say just the freedom that I got at college because I think once I had that and once I had just a little bit of space from my parents and everything, it was a lot easier for me to be motivated to do my work because then it was just like my time was all my own and I could really just make of it what I wanted and make sure that I got all my studies done, but then I still had time to hang out with my friends. So I think that I really benefited from just having some more freedom once I got to school.

Many of the other participants echoed the aforementioned participants. Some participants pointed out how this type of freedom or autonomy was not something they experienced at home, because they would likely feel compelled to adhere to many of their parents'

expectations. Though it was clear much of this freedom to make decisions seemed to be attributed to American ideals, not all aspects of having greater autonomy may have been unique to being American.

Another example of an Asian Indian American participant asserting autonomy was Jay. Jay was a male Asian Indian American student who loved football. During his high school years, he played on the football team. In college, he served as a volunteer manager for the football team. His parents did not see value in volunteering for the UMD football team and discouraged his football-related activities. His parents felt volunteering for the football team was a waste of his time, and that such time would be better directed toward his academic pursuits. However, Jay indicated it was a choice he made for himself, regardless of his parents' opposition. Considering deference to authority may significantly influences how Asian Indians make decisions (Hui, 2014; Kodama et al., 2002; Liang, 2005; Museus, 2014), asserting autonomy in his decision-making process may have exemplified the influence of American culture's individualistic approach on Jay. Jay was willing to transgress the common norm of deference to authority to fulfill an interest he had passion for, even when his parents disapproved. His description of understanding he made this transgression seemed to exemplify he understood what norms might be considered more Indian versus what was considered more American.

The level of autonomy Asian Indian American students might have asserted varied between participants and might have been contextually dependent. Some students felt they had no problem making decisions, putting their own preferences ahead of their parents' in any given situation. These participants indicated their parents understood they were their own person, and they would often make decisions independently, regardless of

parental preference.

Though there were times when Asian Indian American students chose to assert their autonomy, there were instances when these students chose to do what their parents wanted over their own preferences. For example, Krish indicated the only time he chose his own preference over those of his parents was when he chose what college to go to. Krish was from California and his parents expressed a preference for him to attend a different university. However, Krish felt he wanted to choose a different institution because the institutions his parents preferred were not to his liking. Beyond his choice of university, when asked if there had ever been times when he made choices that conflicted with his parents' desires, he said no. He explained because of everything his parents had done for him in life and all of the different ways they supported him throughout his life, he felt he could not go against their wishes. Otherwise, he shared, "I [have] not. That's, honestly, the only time because my parents are extremely supportive about pretty much everything that I do, so they have never had that issue. It was just that one time in college choices."

In the preceding paragraphs, I shared examples of participants asserting autonomy. The purpose of shedding light on the topic of autonomy was to highlight the understanding of how norms of Indian or American cultures might have influenced the decision-making process of participants.

### **Decision-Making Related to Going to College, Choosing a Major, and Career**

A significant purpose of this study was to determine how cultural norms influenced the way in which Asian Indian American students made decisions related to their college experiences and major life choices. During their interviews, it became

evident that participants' biggest life choices specifically pertained to college. This trend made sense, since they were close to or in their late adolescent years when they made college related decisions (i.e., they were young), it is unlikely that participants ever had to make decisions more important than going to college. During their interviews, participants talked about the factors that bolstered their likelihood of getting into a good college, what they chose to major in, and what career path they wished to pursue. Thus, in this section, I describe the experiences and cultural norms involved in participants' decision-making processes around planning for college, choosing a major, and choosing a career.

### **Influences of Cultural Norms on Planning for College**

One of the most prominent findings in this study was that every single participant aimed to go to college after high school. When participants were asked about post-high school plans, every participant conveyed that their parents expected them to go to college or that they expected themselves to go to college. When asked if alternative plans were ever considered (i.e., something other than attending college after high school), all participants indicated the expectation was that they were to attend college. It seemed college was considered to be a part of the natural progression in life. Just as students went to middle school after elementary school or high school after middle school, they simply went to college after high school. Most participants indicated their parents highly valued education, and thus, participants choosing to pursue higher education reflected their parents' values. Considering the emphasis Indian parents place on further education, going to college is a prominent cultural norm in Indian culture (Asher, 2008; Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004; Kodama & Huyhn, 2017; Rahman & Witenstein,



2013). Indian families impressing upon participants the expectation of going to college after high school was likely what was most influential in getting participants to choose attending college as the next major step in life.

All participants and their parents considered high school to be the time to prepare for college. Students in their K–12 years engaged in various extracurricular activities to bolster their college applications. To ensure success in their educational endeavors, multiple participants consistently used tutoring services, such as Kumon, or used online resources such as Khan Academy. Some participants also used SAT preparation courses. Participants' parents did not hesitate to pay for their child's use of tutoring services or preparatory courses for standardized testing to bolster their academic and standardized test taking successes. Ultimately, participants used their time and resources in high school to ensure they would attend college. They made it clear there were no other options being considered that could be an alternative to college. In addition to their parents' desiring that their children go to college, most participants expressed they also wished to go to college. Again, through norming attending college as the next step in life after students complete high school, participants' parents likely helped participants focus on mapping out what they needed to do to get into a good college. Part of the expectations and focus on going to college may have resulted in parents encouraging or requiring their children to be involved in high school clubs and organizations to bolster the extracurricular activities they could list on their college applications. Thus, the influence that the norm of attending college may have had on participants is that they likely made decisions in a way that sought to support their chances of getting into a good college.

The preceding paragraphs in this sub-section described how Indian families have

normed expectations related to going to college. Lee and Zhou's (2014, 2015) concept of the "success frame" explains how the norm of going to college has become so engrained in Indian culture and Indian communities in the United States (Lee & Zhou, 2014; 2015). As they note, immigration policies in 1965 and onward largely favored highly educated individuals. Many Indian immigrants came to the United States and experienced career and socioeconomic prosperity a result of a hyperselective immigration process. Thus, many immigrants, including Indian immigrants, developed a perspective that Lee and Zhou (2014; 2015) refer to as the "success frame", which meant defining success as attending a reputable college or university and then working in a high-status profession after graduating (Lee & Zhou, 2015). Thus, it makes sense that Indian immigrant parents would go to such great lengths to normalize attending college to ensure their children will have successful lives like those of highly educated Indian immigrants.

### **Influences of Cultural Norms on Choosing a Major and Career**

During their interviews, participants highlighted their decision-making process related to their major or career choices. How participants' chose a major fell into three categories. First, family members may have influenced participants as they decided which major or career path to choose. Second, participants may have chosen a career or major based on their own personal interests, although these interests were likely shaped by broader social forces like the "success frame" (Lee & Zhou, 2015). Finally, a participant may have chosen a career due to pre-college exposure experiences. Participants' career choices were all STEM related. After explaining the influence of family, personal interests, and pre-college experiences on participants' decisions related to major and career, I explain what broader social forces that might be responsible for the

cultural norms that resulted in all of the participants choosing a career in STEM.

### ***Influence of Family on Major and Career Decision-Making***

Among those who were influenced by their family was Cinthya, who was inspired by her mother, brother, and friends to become a doctor.

Well, I'm hoping that to attend med school after college. And I'm not sure exactly what specialty, but I know that one that I'd want to learn a little bit more about is psychiatry just because . . . Well, my mom is a doctor, my brother's in med school right now. And so some of our friends, we know some other doctors have specialties, but I don't really know any of her friends who were psychiatrists. I haven't really been exposed to that field, but that's one that I want to learn more about.

However, Cinthya's decision to become a doctor might have also been influenced by a lack of exploring other options:

I felt in sophomore year, high school, around that time I was thinking about what kind of field I wanted to study. I was like, "Okay, well, I basically have two options. I can do something engineering, software engineering or something that. Or I can do medicines." I was like, "I don't really like engineering so I'm just going to do medicine."

During her interview, Cinthya did not elaborate on why she felt she only had two options. Her mother was a doctor and her father was an engineer, and thus, her exposure to those two fields might have led her to evaluate her options in a limited capacity. Cinthya's example indicates the presence of parental influence in her decision-making process in regard to her career choice. Parental influence, which likely manifests as deference to

authority to some degree, on career choice seems to be a prominent cultural norm that influenced my Asian Indian American participants.

Diya's family also influenced her decision-making related to her career choice. She aims to go to medical school one day.

.... my mom is a doctor. And actually, my mom's entire side of the family is made of doctors.... My mom, her brother, his wife, my grandparents, so many doctors everywhere. It was funny because when I was a kid, she was like, "You should be a doctor." And I was like, "No mom, I'm definitely not going to be a doctor, that's way too boring."

In her recent years, Diya changed her mind about not wanting to become a doctor after she saw the impact her mother had on people's lives. As a public health major, Diya feels like she can connect with her mother and have conversations related to health and medicine. She also indicated that her father is an engineer and that "I think my family's had a very strong influence on [me]. Again, being a STEM major, I can't tell if it's nature versus nurture." Diya's observation about nature versus nurture regarding choosing careers in STEM is interesting, as she seems to insinuate or implicitly understand that choosing a STEM career may be a culturally specific norm for Asian Indians in the United States. It is likely the broader social forces related to hyperselective immigration of highly educated STEM professionals, as discussed earlier, played a role in instilling Diya with her understanding of how Indian Americans have become so STEM focused. Ultimately, Diya's experience showed that family influence played an important role in her STEM career interests and choices.

Similar to Cinthya and Diya, Sima's family influenced her career decision

making. Sima also shared that she wanted to go to medical school. She stated her mother being a doctor influenced her to become a doctor, but that she only really knew two career paths: doctor and engineer. Her mother was a doctor and her father was an engineer.

Yeah, so seeing my mom being a doctor, my mom is a doctor and my dad is an engineer. So those were the two careers that I was most familiar with. Or my mom being a doctor had pushed me towards the medical field as well. I think they also had those hopes for me, but they never really pushed me too hard. They never forced me. They gave me a fair amount of freedom. Obviously there are certain careers that I don't think they'd be okay with. Traditional careers that are not as safe or wouldn't make as much money, they probably wouldn't have been okay with that. But since I was deciding between things like medicine or I was also interested in law and computer science, since they know those are all good careers. They gave me the freedom to kind of make that decision for myself.

Sima's account of her consideration of different career paths exemplified a mix of the influence of her parents, the lucrativeness of career paths, and also personal interests (i.e., computer science and law). As previously indicated, when she considered different career paths, at least for some time, Sima considered careers she felt she had an interest in. She ultimately chose a major that may have aligned more closely with her parents' desires. A participant behaving in a way that aligns with their parents' desires seems to strongly point to the presence of a cultural norm related to Indian culture, specifically the norm of deference to authority (Inman et al., 2007; Kodama et al., 2002). Though her parents were not strict, the influence of the deference to authority norm common in Indian and

other Asian cultures still seemed to be influential. Sima seemed to have thought about different career options, but she also mentioned how her parents would not have liked her to choose a career that might have poor job security or low pay. Thus, the influence of the deference to authority norm on her career decision-making process might have been more subtle, but still present and effective.

Another example of the influence of family and the deference to authority norm was Raj's experience with deciding on a major and career. As discussed previously, Raj initially thought he should become an engineer due to having multiple male family members who were also engineers. He eventually changed his mind and decided to major in accounting and operations management business analytics. Raj's parents approved of him majoring in accounting and operations management business analytics because of the technical nature of the majors. "They definitely have drilled in me that I need to have a technical background," Raj said during his interview. Krish was also similarly influenced by his parents. Krish indicated he was genuinely satisfied with his choice to major in computer science and that he did not "feel forced into [the] field [of computer science]." However, he had felt he would like to become a teacher someday, but his parents had expressed that they believed "teaching is a stupid job." They said Krish "should consider a real [job] instead." Though Krish claims to be genuinely satisfied with pursuing a major and career in computer science, it is possible that parental influence and the cultural norm of deference to authority steered Krish away from another career he might have liked more. Clearly, Krish's parents' statement was deeply problematic and even paradoxical, given their strong valuing of education. In the discussion, I will elaborate further on why they may have made such comments.

Jay was another participant who highlighted the influence of his parents on his decision-making with regard to his major and career. Jay indicated:

My mom, since I was the first child, she really honed in on the science aspects when I was growing up. So I mean, doing times tables and on car rides anywhere we went or just like doing different homework. She would give me [more work to do] over the summer when we didn't have homework. Her and my dad would print out these massive packets of math and science that I would have to like read up on and just answer. And [my mom] would check that I did every day, but also like, I mean the classic Brown thing, like doing Kumon. So I was a Kumon kid for so many years as well. And so that really pushed me towards the math and science side for sure. And it definitely pushed me to where I am now just being able to focus in on more on the math and science side.

Jay indicating “the classic Brown thing, like doing Kumon” signified Jay’s understanding of what he believed to be an Indian cultural norm: Indian people utilize tutoring services to bolster academic success, perhaps also a reflection of the success frame (Lee & Zhou, 2014). Jay did not discuss why his parents were so specifically focused on math and science. It is possible that the predisposition and interest in the STEM subjects could be due to broader social forces, such as hyperselective immigration in the United States, which may have resulted in the norm of Indian immigrants pushing their children to pursue STEM careers (Tran et al., 2018).

Parental influence regarding career choice was not always positive or constructive for all participants. Anita talked about how she wanted to become a surgeon some day and the response she faced as a woman in an Indian family:

I think for a while, my mom was trying to convince me to change. Like, I want to be a surgeon and that's like the most intense thing I could've chosen. And she was trying to convince me for a while to like, "Oh, just be a pediatrician." Or like, "Be an eye doctor." Or something like that. Just so I'd have time for to raise a family.

Anita discussed the expectations she faced, which were rooted in sexism commonly found in Indian culture. In Anita's case, the sexism discussed in her quote seems to have been instilled in her by a family member (her mother). However, it did not seem as if she planned to allow sexist cultural norms to change her mind about becoming a surgeon one day. Overriding common sexist Indian cultural expectations might exemplify the assertion of autonomy in Anita's decision-making process. Still, like the other participants discussed in this section, the norm of parental influence was present when Anita considered her decisions related to her career. Though Anita made her own choice, ultimately, her parents encouraged her to pursue some kind of a STEM career, showing how parental influence still affected her decision-making.

### ***Choosing a Major and Career Based on Personal Interest***

Choosing a major based on personal interest was another major method as to how students chose a major or career path. Faraz was a first-year student who was interested in majoring in computer science. His interest in computer science could be exemplified by his membership in a computer science student organization at UMD and also through the fact that he already had an associate's degrees in computer science. Faraz also had an associate's degree in business and he hoped to run his own software consultancy firm someday. Majoring in computer science at UMD was a personal choice for Faraz that was driven by his aspiration to own his own related business someday. Though Faraz



framed his interest in pursuing a major and career in computer science as a personal choice, it may also be possible that broader social forces influenced his decision-making process regarding his choice of a STEM career and major (Lee & Zhou, 2014). Another example of a participant choosing a career path out of personal interest is Fatima, who is majoring in biology and psychology and is interested in going to graduate school to become a clinical psychologist. She originally thought about going to medical school after finishing her undergraduate degree, but decided she wanted to pursue a career in something more psychology related. Though Fatima did not provide an in-depth description about how her interest in psychology came to be, she was the only participant to have openly talked about seeking therapy. It may be possible Fatima's experience with therapy could have influenced her decision to major in psychology and pursue graduate studies in clinical psychology.

### ***The Influence of Pre-College Experiences***

Finally, K–12 experiences influenced one participant's major and career choices. Mira was exposed to a STEM organization during seventh grade. The exposure led her to pursue a major and career in STEM:

For a few years, I think I told myself I wanted to be a doctor. It was probably more just my parents' influence because I didn't really know why, it was just all that I really knew. But then in about seventh grade, a friend and I went to a women in engineering career fair, expo type thing. That was when I understood what engineering was sort of in a more broader sense, and that made a lot more sense. It appealed to my creative side a lot more, and my tech side a lot more, and I realized that made a lot [of sense]. That actually sounded like something that I

wanted to do, whereas doctor was kind of like a filler. It was like, “I’ll be a doctor, I guess.” But engineer felt more like, “I want to be an engineer.”

Mira’s response highlighted the possibility of her parents initially having influence on her career decision-making. However, an exposure event altered her ultimate choice. She chose to pursue an engineering degree due to the exposure she received to a STEM-based organization during her K–12 years. However, other factors in Mira’s life had some level of influence on how she made her decision. First, she indicated she originally thought about becoming a doctor because of her parents. Then, she identified her lack of knowing about other career paths as an influence for what she initially chose. Finally, attending a STEM event helped her make an important life decision. Thus, family, lack of knowing, and exposure to new things also seemed to influence how she made her choice of major and career. Ultimately, exposure to a STEM related event is what prevailed in influencing her choice to become an engineer.

### **Summary**

As described in the paragraphs above, all participants chose STEM majors and career paths to pursue in and after college. Nearly all of participants’ parents encouraged their children to pursue a career in STEM. The affinity for STEM careers may not be simply a coincidence. Many participants’ parents immigrated to the United States due to the country’s hyperselective immigration laws, which specifically favored educated STEM professionals (Lee & Zhou, 2014; 2015). If Indian immigrants found success in the United States through immigrating here based on their STEM degree and professional backgrounds, it is understandable that participants’ parents may have steered their children toward STEM degrees and careers (Lee & Zhou, 2014; 2015). Participants’

parents likely felt that they were helping their children achieve success similar to or better than their own. Thus, participants' interest in STEM careers might be a result of the broader social forces related to hyperselective immigration that have persisted within the Indian community, resulting in the creation of a highly pervasive and widespread cultural norm (Indian Americans gravitating toward STEM careers). Some participants even mentioned they did not spend much time in their K-12 years exploring other options or were discouraged from doing so when discussing options with their parents that pertained to less lucrative careers. The discouragement participants faced related to pursuing non-STEM careers in favor of STEM careers likely bolstered the staying power of a cultural norm that has become strongly associated with Indian culture.

Regardless of the influence of cultural norms or broader social forces, ultimately, participants seemed to be comfortable with their decisions. It did not seem as if participants felt overly pressured into pursuing particular majors or career path, or resented parental influence. Still, the impact of external influences on participants, such as the preferences or suggestions of family members or exposure to events during participants' K-12 years, was undeniably a part of students' lives. The seeming lack of strong explicit pressure could also suggest students were comfortable with asserting some level of autonomy in their decision-making process. Thus, it could be that the norm or value of individualism or autonomy, typically considered to be Western or American, may have influenced participants' decision-making processes to some extent as well.

### **Artifacts**

In the next section, I describe and interpret the possible reasons as to why participants chose to show me particular artifacts, and how these artifacts reflect cultural

norms may have influenced why participants saw them as important. During their interviews, I asked participants to share with me an artifact they thought resonated with their identity in a significant way. The purpose of asking participants to share these artifacts was to engage in triangulation (Creswell, 2013). The greater amount of information I could ascertain about participants' lives, the greater the amount of insight I could garner about specific aspects related to Asian Indian American participants. Moreover, since a major purpose of this study was to better understand how decision-making functioned for students in this study, I aimed to examine how their decision making was influenced by cultural norms and key aspects of their lives when they decided on what artifact to show me. In the next section, I outline what artifact each participant shared, why they chose the artifact, and other relevant information about the complexities of the development and decision-making process of the Asian Indian American college students in this study. Over the course of the interviews, I found there were three major categories that participants' artifacts fit into: (a) culturally oriented, (b) individualistically oriented, and (c) split choice.

### **Culturally Oriented Artifacts**

Culturally oriented artifacts discussed in this section specifically highlight participants' connections to Indian culture. For example, Sima showed me a photograph of herself holding her brother when he was a baby. She explained she chose this photograph because family was a very important part of her identity and the artifact "caters more to the Indian aspect of my identity." She attributed her being family oriented to being Indian, as she found being family oriented was a common value in Indian culture. When asked whether she would have chosen something different if she was not

Indian, she indicated she may have:

I know the reason that I might be so family oriented is because how I was raised in the Indian household. And because that is something that in general, most Indians value a lot. So it is possible if I wasn't Indian that I would like have a different outlook, maybe.

Sima's recognition of differences in cultural aspects (i.e., likely choosing a different kind of artifact if she were not Indian) may have signified her understanding of where certain cultural norms come from and how they influenced her life. In this case, she seemed to recognize her family orientation was deeply rooted in Indian culture.

Raj showed me a collection of different types of greeting cards he had collected over the years. He explained,

I liked the idea of collecting cards because I got to see how my life changed over the years and like the friends that I went through. And I also consider myself an emotional sort of like nostalgic person. . . . I don't know if it's because of my family or because of Indian culture in general but, "Always cherish the people that you're close to and always cherish the moments that you have with people that you love." I think that sending cards is something that I've only seen a lot of Indian families do, send cards, I think from that aspect, but also because I'm not sure that if I was Indian, I would be as close to my family and close friends for this long of a period as I would have been if I was not.

The perceived tradition or norm of sending or receiving greeting cards was something that seemed to have been instilled in Raj by his family. Raj discussed a strong affinity to family and relationships with close friends. Through his response to my questions, he

clearly tied Indian culture to family orientation and related values, much like Sima did. However, Raj's comment about being unsure about how close he would be to family if he were not Indian might have exemplified his perception of what he understood about other cultures. His quote seemed to allude to thinking it was possible a non-Indian culture may not emphasize being family oriented as much as Indian culture did.

Mira shared a small deity statue of a Hindu goddess, Saraswati, who is known as the goddess of music and arts. Mira explained her name (her actual name, not her pseudonym) was another name for this goddess. Mira explained, "kind of what she represents of knowledge and the arts and culture and music are all very important identities or aspects of my identity that I kind of mentioned earlier." Based on the information Mira shared with me throughout her interview, it was clear that performance arts were an important part of her identity, to the point that it influenced her involvement in college. She was on the executive board of a dance competition hosted annually at UMD and she was also part of a UMD Indian acapella team.

Mira indicated she would have chosen a different item if she were not Indian, as a Hindu deity statue is deeply connected to Indian culture. Choosing something specific to her religion when discussing Indian culture may exemplify how racialization of religion (Joshi, 2006) can occur, since religion and culture are not intrinsically synonymous but are often conflated. However, knowing she would likely choose a different item if she were not Indian may have exemplified her understanding of both Indian and American cultures, as she would have had to compare different aspects of each culture's norms to determine why or why not one choice would be different in one culture versus another.

The artifact Diya shared was a box ladoos, her favorite Indian sweets:

I think, honestly, it really resonates with me because (a) it's Indian and I'm Indian, and then (b) food is a very important aspect of my life and I think food is meaningful, not only for my family, because meal times, and dinner, and food, that's how we spend quality time together. That's how I spend quality times with people. We're going to go out and get dinner. Let's go out and get ice cream. That's how I spend time with people that I love and that I care for. And I also think food has a very strong ability to bring people together. And I love cooking for my friends and my family. I love sharing that with people. And so, I felt like it was very appropriate to pick a sweet that I liked but also reminds me of my family and just people that I love.

When I asked participants to share with me an artifact that resonated with an important part of their identity, I did not lead students toward choosing something specifically about cultural identity. Diya's choice of an artifact specifically related to her Indian cultural identity likely spoke to her strong connection to Indian culture. Diya's interview highlighted family had a significant influence on her life. This finding was not surprising, as family is a value among the most salient of values for Asian Americans (Kodama et al., 2002). Family was a theme that consistently appeared throughout participants' interviews and artifacts.

The preceding examples of participants and their shared artifacts seemed to highlight the importance of their families in their lives. It was clear Indian identities, norms, and culture were a significant driver for their reverence of family. The depth of love and connection participants had for their family reflected what the current body of literature indicates—that being family oriented is a significant aspect of a collectivistic

culture (Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). One participant, Mira, also highlighted religion through her artifact, which reflects the phenomenon of racialization of religion is common in Indian culture (Joshi, 2006). Family and religion were two themes that had aspects of Indian culture that frequently appeared in this study.

Anita shared a photograph that was taken of her and her family when she visited Rajasthan, India. Rajasthan is where her parents and much of her family are from. In the photograph, she and her family are wearing traditional Indian clothing. She talked about how this artifact exemplified a place that was built by her ancestors. She felt her Indian identity was important to her, which is why she felt she wanted to share this artifact with me. However, she did express if she wanted to “show less” of her Indian identity, she would instead have chosen a small lantern she received for her volunteer work with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society:

I think if I weren't Indian or if being Indian wasn't as big a part of my identity, I would definitely choose something more individual . . . So this is a little lantern that I have and it says, 'Leukemia and Lymphoma Society Light the Night.' And so that's a campaign that the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society does every year to raise money for blood cancer research. And I actually did a campaign with them where we raised money for 7 weeks and it all went to blood cancer research. And so in 7 weeks I was able to raise \$10,000, I think it was.

Anita felt the lantern showcased something individualistic about her. She highlighted, ultimately, her Indian heritage had more weight if people asked about her identity, and she would likely bring up her family being important to her as a result: “being part of an Indian family, Indian culture kind of emphasize the family above everything aspect of it.”



Anita's discussion of her American identity being more individual and her Indian identity being more heritage and family oriented may have highlighted aspects of each culture (e.g., family, individualism) and influenced the way she thought about Indian and American cultural norms. Though aspects of Indian culture were brought up frequently during the artifact show-and-tell portion of participants interviews, autonomy and individuality were themes that also appeared frequently. The next section showcases information about artifacts that represented more unique and individualistic aspects of remaining participants' identities.

### **Individualistically Oriented Artifacts**

In this section, I highlight examples of participants who shared artifacts that specifically showcase something unique about them. I define individualistically oriented artifacts as those that are not likely to be influenced by their Indian identity. Individualistically oriented artifacts may specifically highlight the influence of American culture on participants' lives.

Fatima showed me a sparkling pink dress that she made when she was in high school. She explained she made this dress from scratch:

I think it's really important to me because that was kind of the time when me and my parents kind of realized that I'm capable of a lot. And I'm kind of independent. And I had the independence to do something completely by myself. And I made it. I designed it. I didn't have to worry about what my parents thought. I just made it for myself. I don't know. It was a very important moment to me, I think . . . I think part of what made this artifact so special was because it was kind of a token of my independence. And that's a thing that I feel growing

up in America you have a lot of independence if you're not from a culture like being an Indian culture.

Fatima also explained if she was not American, she thought she would not have chosen to show me the dress as the artifact that exemplified an aspect of her. She believed the difference in choice would be because being steeped in Indian culture would have resulted in her wearing some other kind of clothing that would be more appropriate based on her parents' expectations. Her assessment of why she would have chosen different may have exemplified her understanding of how cultural norms may differ between Indian and non-Indian cultures—that American cultural norms may allow for people to make individualistic choices more freely, whereas Indian culture may require deference to parental preferences.

The artifact Jay chose to show me was a football. He explained why he chose a football:

[It is the] biggest item that has really made a difference in my life because that's really what I think is what allowed me to break out from the basic Indian cultural mold that I was kind of in leading up to high school. Football really is what allowed me to branch out and go and try new things and go do other things and really that's just kind of how me in my, I guess, the more Americanized cultural view of it all but it kind of really just gave me the opportunity to be more free and make my own choices and kind of learn that my parents' choices don't necessarily have to be my choices as well.

Jay discussed the importance of having the freedom to make his own choices, even when such choices may not have aligned with expectations of his parents or those of Indian

cultural norms. Jay felt the football provided the strongest representation of his ability to traverse cultural boundaries to satisfy his interests outside of Indian cultural expectations. By recognizing the fact that he is Americanized he may be signaling he understood his assertion of an individualistic choice contradicted the norm of deference to authority in Indian culture.

The artifact that Cinthya shared with me was her journal. She explained her journal was something she felt embodied her genuine expression of herself:

I guess the reason is so special today is because probably just the part about being genuine, because I feel like even if I have. . . . If I don't want to talk to friends or I can't talk to friends on certain things, I know that that's a way that will be honest, I guess, and real about what's going on, but then I won't have to worry that other people are going to look at me differently or anything because only I'm seeing it. And then if I do share it with someone else then I'm sharing my inner most thoughts and feelings with them. So they must be very close for me to want for me to be comfortable with being so vulnerable with them.

Cinthya indicated the artifact she chose to show me would be different if she were not American.

I feel there are just certain topics that Americans are more open with or more aware of than the Indian community. And so I think the reason I picked up journaling was because I was in a culture that was telling me that it was okay to have certain feelings and that I should just process them in a healthy way. But I think that if I was in. . . . Maybe if I did just grow up in India then I probably. . . . I don't know. I think it would have taken me longer to find a healthy way to

process my emotions. I feel I probably would've just stuffed a lot of them down there; like suppress them and that definitely would have changed who I am.

Cinthya exhibited an understanding that Indian cultural norms tend to include stigmatization of mental health concerns and emotional expression (Loya et al., 2010; Myville & Constantine, 2007). She also recognized, comparatively, American culture is more open or accepting of expressing concerns about mental health or emotions. Cinthya also seemed to exhibit a thought process where she evaluated different aspects of Indian and American cultures by comparing one to the other. The differences in cultural norms pertaining to mental health seemed to influence how Cinthya may have made decisions related to expressing herself or sought healthy ways to process her emotions.

Krish's artifact was a picture he took of a page in what he referred to as his "stock journal."

So it's from my stock journal, and the reason it's important for me is because part of my identity is that whole capitalistic idea. So naturally stocks are something that I really enjoy playing with, and this is actually today's and today's increase and everything. And this is the best one I've had in such a long time. Actually, not a long time. I've only started stocks this year or this semester, but it beat my one from last time, which is 60%. So this is the one that I'm really proud of and is why I show it as an artifact.

Krish made it clear that his stock journal highlighted a unique but very resonant part of his identity. When asked about how his stock journal specifically resonates with him, he said,

Definitely my Americans side, and a bit of my Indian side, because it goes back to my identity or me identifying with the whole capitalistic idea. Right? So making money, always making a profit and always going up. So that's what resonates the most for me. . . . The stock market and making money is more of an American thing. And the way I see it is more of American, because it's more capitalistic based and capitalism is the core of America. In my opinion, at least.

Krish demonstrated a strong salience of his American identity through discussing his interest in matters related to the stock market and capitalism. He clearly indicated he found the stock market and matters related to capitalism to be strongly associated with American culture. Thus, Krish may have been making an inadvertent judgement about what he considered to not be—or at least minimally be—an entity or experience common to Indian culture. Krish's identification of the stock market as a distinctly American entity did not necessarily carry a positive or negative connotation. Rather, considering the stock market to be distinctly American may just be a difference that Krish pointed out. Krish's point on the desire to make a lot of money as being a more strongly American ideal may have been inaccurate, as South Asian families have a strong tendency to push their children to pursue lucrative career paths. The preference for lucrative career paths may be based on participants valuing job security, the desire to be financially stable, and the perception of prestige (Traxler, 2009).

### **Split Choice of Artifacts**

Of all of participants, only one participant insisted on showing me two artifacts. One artifact highlighted Faraz's connection to his American identity, while the other artifact highlighted his connection to his Indian identity. Since Faraz made a split choice,

I refer to the category I have placed him in as “split choice of artifacts”.

The first artifact Faraz showed me was the key to his first car, a 1993 Mazda Miata that he bought that was not working at the time of purchase. He purposefully bought a nonworking car so he could learn to fix it up. He shared,

It was a junk car, and I worked on it for about 2 months and I got it to run perfectly fine. And that was my first experience doing something on my own, troubleshooting, really being an adult in my opinion.

Faraz’s choice of the key to his first car could have been an exemplification of something unique or individualistic about himself, as he described the experience of fixing the car as his first time “doing something on my own” and “really being an adult.” His language reflected the concept of autonomy that participants often associated with American identity. The second artifact Faraz showed me was a ring that his grandfather gave him that specifically related to his Indian cultural heritage. He explained,

The ring, I think it symbolizes, “Remember where you’re coming from,” that, “Hey, you’re Indian at the end of the day.” And I don’t mean to be stereotypical or anything, but I think a lot of Indians lose their identity. For instance, in their fifties and sixties, they will. . . . I was playing with an individual who called himself Bob or something. I don’t remember his actual Indian name, but he was about 15 years old, and he was well-to-do, and he was sort of assimilated, I would say, because he wore typical golf gear, or typical tennis gear, the more country clubby gear, instead of what just normal people would wear. And you just tell sometimes people have assimilated to culture. And that ring, I feel like, is there to remind me that, “Hey, don’t assimilate, be yourself, don’t be afraid.” And, “Don’t

be afraid if you don't fit in," sort of stuff like that. And it reminds me that I don't really want to fit in at the end of the day because that's not who I am, it's not something that's important to me.

Faraz's act of choosing two artifacts may have highlighted he had an equal connection or commitment to both his American and Indian identities. His family, or perhaps specifically his grandfather, clearly influenced how he thought about Indian culture and his connection to the culture. However, Faraz's individual interest (i.e., fixing the car) may have come from a different source. In Faraz's case, the different aspects of his life, whether Indian, American, or otherwise, seemed to have influenced him in ways that did not interfere with each other. His choice of two artifacts might have exemplified he had reached the stage of *integration* in the acculturation process (Rudmin, 2003), balancing and incorporating both his Indian and American identities.

### **Brief Summary of Artifacts**

Interestingly, of the 10 participants in this study, participants were nearly split in half on what category their artifact fit into. Five participants shared artifacts they felt were more oriented toward aspects of their Indian heritage, whereas four participants chose artifacts that were more oriented toward individual interests. One participant, Faraz, wanted to show me two artifacts. Each of his artifacts seemed to relate to each of the identified categories respectively. Thus, he may have been signaling an interest or connection of equal strength to both of his cultural identities.

Artifacts presented during interviews, along with the rest of the information provided during participant interviews, provided important insight into experiences and opinions of each participant and, to some extent, a possible understanding of norms

associated with Indian and American culture respectively. Some participants identified if or how their artifact might have differed if they were not Indian or if they were not American—a judgement that required an understanding of what norms might have been considered more uniquely associated to Indian culture and what norms might have been considered more uniquely associated with American culture. Ultimately, the evaluation of each culture and each culture's norms may have helped steer participants' decisions about what artifact to present.

In the next chapter, I interpret and discuss the information participants shared with me throughout their interviews. Finally, I provide an overview of an emergent theory and a model based on the emergent theory that is grounded in participants' experience and themes and findings from this study. This theory will particularly pertain to the answering of the research questions posed in this study.



## **CHAPTER 5: Discussion**

“Research is me-search” is a phrase graduate students and faculty may hear in academia, which implies a researcher may choose to study something based on personal experiences (Gloor, 2014). This dissertation quite perfectly aligns with that notion. I conducted this research because I am a second-generation Asian Indian American individual and I have found there is not as much research on people like me as there is research on other student populations. The lack of research on Asian Indian American college students is not surprising considering they do not make up as large a percentage of the college-going population compared to other racial and ethnic minority student populations such as Black or Hispanic students. Still, Asian Indian American students are a significant population that values education tremendously, and therefore, many Asian Indian Americans go to college. Their proportionately smaller size (in comparison to Black and Hispanic students), along with other factors that are discussed in this chapter, are often the reason the Asian Indian American population is neglected in scholarly research. As a result, their development and experience in college is as not understood as well as students of other minoritized backgrounds.

In this study, I aimed to bring to light important aspects of the Asian Indian American college student experience of 10 second-generation Asian Indian American students who were enrolled undergraduates at the University of Maryland (UMD) at the time of the study. The questions I asked in this study aimed to provide insight that might answer the following two research questions:

1. What are key aspects of Asian Indian American students’ lives that influence how they think about American, Indian, and Indian American cultural norms?

2. How do these cultural norms influence the way in which Asian Indian American students make decisions related to their college experience and major life choices?

### **Aspects and Influences of Asian Indian American Students' Lives and Cultural Norms**

In this section, I discuss findings related to family, community and silent actors, K–12 education, going to college, choosing a major and career, being Indian and American, decision making, racism and discrimination, participants' artifacts, and Indian American culture. Throughout this section, I will also address and problematize perceptions or approaches related to racism and career choice.

#### **Family**

It is abundantly clear that family and school life are the two biggest influences on how Asian Indian American students think about the American and Indian aspects of their identities. Part of this study's purpose was to garner an understanding about what aspects of an Asian Indian American student's life influence how these students view Indian American cultural norms. It seems that Indian cultural norms were understood through the experiences and knowledge participants garnered through interaction with their families. All participants discussed how their parents instilled knowledge of their Indian cultural identity and expectations surrounding Indian culture, reflecting the theoretical influences that Kodama et al. (2002) detailed in their research on the development of Asian American college students. Such theoretical influences included cultural and familial values. Furthermore, a significant part of this dissertation study seems to confirm the presence of the deference to authority norm documented by

Kodama et al. (2002), the influence of which seemed to vary among the Asian Indian American participants in this dissertation study.

In comparison to Kodama et al.'s study participants, participants in this dissertation study demonstrated somewhat less influence from the norm of interdependence on their lives, although family still played a prominent role for most participants. They also seemed to exert a larger degree of autonomy in their decision making. The decrease in interdependence between participants and their family members in the context of decision making may highlight some divergence from Kodama et al.'s (2002) Asian American psychosocial development model, signaling that Asian Indian American students seek to balance interdependence/familial influence with some level of autonomy.

What seemed to be a cultural norm instilled in participants by their parents and other family members was an appreciation for or pride in cultural heritage. Parents taught their children to love aspects of Indian culture (e.g., religion, dancing, music). Students seemed open to absorbing these aspects into their own identity. There seemed to be a strong desire from parents (particularly mothers) that children would appreciate and adhere to Indian cultural norms as much as possible.

Participants expounded on experiences with parents about other contexts (e.g., career matters). Most participants' responses seemed to show their families had a dynamic where the father worked a lot, whereas the mother was the primary person to rear children and instill them with knowledge of Indian cultural norms and values. This finding is consistent with the literature on South Asian family dynamics (Jabunathan & Counselman, 2002; Traxler 2009). Parents also may have inspired or influenced

participants on career or major choices. For example, Cinthya and Sima both had a parent who was a doctor and they felt inspired to become a doctor like their parent. In some instances, parents may have influenced participants through discouraging them from certain career paths and pushing them to consider something that would have better job security and pay. For example, Krish's parents denigrated becoming a teacher and wanted him to pick a career path that would pay him better. Another example is Raj, whose father wanted him to choose a major that was practical and technical in nature.

It is likely that since many Indian immigrants found success through their STEM careers as a result of immigrating to the United States, they fostered a norm of encouraging their children to pursue STEM careers (Lee & Zhou, 2014). Additionally, Indian parents pressuring their children to avoid careers that are not as lucrative or have poor job security might stem from an aversion that Indian immigrant parents developed if they left India to find better opportunities due to a lack of good opportunities in their home country. If Indian parents or family members were previously living in poverty or other difficult circumstances, but found economic success in the United States through STEM careers, it is unsurprising that participants' parents might associate STEM with stability and desire for their children to avoid non-STEM careers. However, now that participants' parents have class stability, it is unclear how much discouragement participants would have faced if they decided to pursue a career that is not seen as lucrative.

Being family oriented was also a major value that parents taught participants. Parents, particularly mothers, were eager to instill an appreciation of Indian culture. Multiple participants provided examples of how their family was important to them.

Participants discussed family background when I asked them about their family history. However, participants also talked about family when discussing things related to career or major, and sometimes when discussing things related to Indian performance arts. During the artifact presentation portion of participant interviews, multiple participants shared artifacts related to family. Thus, it is clear that family was an integral part of participants' lives. Additionally, consistent across every participant interviewed in this study is the fact that their parents were influential and supportive about educational endeavors, both during their K–12 years and in college. Participants did not share information about expectations or desires for these values to be taught in their K-12 schools or college.

### **Community and Silent Actors**

Throughout the interviews, participants seemed to minimally discuss the communities that surrounded and influenced them growing up, although this could have been a byproduct of the questions that they were asked to address. When asked, participants had little to say about how their relatives outside of their immediate family influenced their lives. A couple of participants mentioned the religious organizations off campus they were a part of. Little information was shared as to how members of communities outside of campus may have influenced their lives. Perhaps participants who had strong religious identities experienced some influence of religious figures within their temples, churches, and mosques. Religious figures also may have influenced participants who did not identify with religion. Some participants mentioned developing an aversion to religion through their experiences with going to temples and attending religious Sunday schools growing up. Their aversion to religion may be due to unpleasant

experiences involving people they interacted with in their religious communities during their younger years.

Additionally, only a few participants mentioned the presence of diversity in their schools. Participants who had diverse classmates gave very little information regarding how diversity influenced their development or decision making throughout life, even when I probed further to try and ascertain such information. Conversely, multiple participants indicated that their K-12 schools were predominantly White, sometimes to the point where they would be the only person of color in the school. Stronger resonance of individualistic aspects of participants' identities might be a result of participants trying to behave in a way that would have allowed them to fit in at school.

In some cases, "silent actors" within their communities and surroundings could have influenced participants in some way, for instance, the role of the ethnic community in setting cultural norms around pursuing higher education and certain careers (Lee & Zhou, 2015). Recognizing that participants absorbed information about American culture from their schools and peer interactions, it is certainly possible that other actors helped passively facilitate participants understanding of American culture and its norms. Additional silent actors might include tutors at afterschool tutoring services. Participants did not speak to what their interactions with tutors were like during their K-12 years, so it is unclear how they might have influenced participants. Silent actors might also include people from popular media. Considering how connected generation Z second generation Asian Indian Americans are through technology, perhaps participants might have absorbed information, about American cultural habits, mannerisms, and preferences through streamed videos, podcasts, and other media found on the internet.

## **K–12 Education**

Some participants indicated they learned how to modulate between their Indian identity and their American identity through their K–12 experiences, although one participant highlighted that balancing the two participants was sometimes a struggle. Particularly in participants' younger years, one key experience that seemed to come up was that their peers would often scrutinize the food participants brought to school for lunch. Some participants described they would be made fun of for bringing Indian food for lunch, as classmates would find the unfamiliar appearance or smell of the food to be unappealing. Being subjected to this sort of bullying often led participants to ask their parents to pack them something different to take to school for lunch. Participants also indicated they likely picked up American values due to their immersion in American schools. Participants provided little insight on whether or not they faced discrimination after their K–12 years.

At various points throughout their interviews, participants alluded to their immersion in American schools and how by having American peers they may have come to understand American culture, norms, and values. Thus, in some way, it appears participants were aware of how they attained their understanding of American culture and how American culture affected them. Additionally, their actions in college may highlight their understanding of American culture as much as, if not more than, their words. Participants brought up the freedom to act autonomously while they were living on campus away from their primary family home, reflecting how they saw Indian cultural norms influencing their lives when at home while American cultural norms influenced their lives at school (and away from home). This demonstration of autonomy and

asserting individualistic behaviors makes it clear that these participants were acculturated. Some level of acculturation or bicultural identity seemed evident because participants engaged in behavioral freedoms (that they associated with American individualism) while also finding ways to stay connected to Indian culture through participation in Indian cultural student organizations on campus. As I indicated in Chapter 2, *acculturation* is a process whereby racial and ethnic minorities adapt to the culture of their host country (Farver et al., 2002; Ghuman, 1994; Mehta, 1998; Raman & Hardwood, 2008; Sodowsky & Carey, 1988).

### **Going to College**

The most consistent finding across all participants was that they all planned to go to college after high school; no participant had alternative plans. Students and their parents saw high school as a time to prepare for college. As previously indicated, being educated is among the most prevalent values in Indian culture (Asher, 2008; Rahman & Witenstein, 2013). Thus, it is a cultural norm to go to college and even attend graduate or professional school. This strong orientation toward seeking higher education aligns with the success frame (Lee & Zhou, 2014), wherein certain behaviors shaped by social class and ethnicity can end up being seen as normal within a population. Participants nor their families did seem to evaluate why one might *not* want to go to college because they were not exposed to other possibilities, so they simply went to college because they felt as if doing so was part of the natural and normal progression in life. Participants did not express any concerns related to facing financial, academic, or race-related barriers with regard to their college acceptance or attendance.



Echoing Lee and Zhou's (2014) research, there was a clear presence of ethnic capital in participants' families and among their Asian Indian American peers growing up. Multiple participants engaged with Kumon, a tutoring service for preschool through 12th grade students. Some participants indicated they also used SAT preparation services. Most students were involved in multiple high school clubs or organizations. Involvement in clubs and organizations during high school was often done with the express purpose of putting these experiences on their college applications. Participants' families, other relatives, and friends all seemed to expect participants would go to college after high school, with no other alternatives to consider. It is likely that so many members of the Asian Indian American community normalizing and encouraging using supplemental educational resources bolstered participants' likelihood of being admitted to a good college. The common finding of participants expecting to go to college is what allows for me to identify strongly valuing education (including higher education) and using external resources to bolster educational success as ethnic and economic capital.

### **Decisions Around Choosing a Major and Career**

All participants chose to pursue a major and career in STEM. The overwhelming gravitation toward STEM careers by the Asian Indian Americans students in this study is peculiar but not unexpected. As literature indicates, much of the inclination toward STEM careers is driven by a desire for job security, financial wellness, and sometimes prestige (Traxler, 2019). While there is nothing innately wrong with pursuing STEM careers, one issue that seemed to emerge from the data is that participants seemed to make their career decisions based on limited information. Many participants indicated that all they knew about careers was what careers their parents held. As Lee and Zhou's

(2014) success frame suggests, participants seemed to be passively socialized into thinking about their careers and majors in a certain way through interactions with their parents, and possibly, the influence of the greater community. Some participants also indicated when making their decisions about what career or major to choose, they simply did not know about other careers. In other words, there was a significant lack of exploration related to different career options.

The limited exposure and lack of exploration of different career paths might have significantly impeded participants' ability to make fully informed decisions regarding what major or career path could have considered. It is uncertain whether participants would have found other career paths that may have resonated with them more deeply due to the limitations. However, a lesson can be learned from the data regarding career decision-making; Asian Indian Americans should consider finding ways to explore career paths outside of what they are most directly exposed to. In part, schools that these students attend could provide more education around different career paths. Colleges and universities could consider hosting career panels that include professionals of Asian Indian American background.

The limited choices participants may have felt they had regarding their career options might have led to perceptions about some careers being undesirable or unacceptable to choose. Though no participants indicated so outright, some participants might have had concerns about facing disownment or the possibility that their parents might stop paying for their education (Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). In one case, a participant's parents specifically told him that teaching is a stupid career. Such sentiment was shocking to hear, as Indian Americans highly value being educated. It is concerning

that one would consider education to be important to receive, but then denigrate the very profession that allows for people to become educated. The lack of respect toward teaching as a profession may be reflective of the fact that teachers are incredibly underpaid in the United States and elsewhere. Problematizing negative perspectives regarding teaching and other “forbidden” or “frowned upon” professions could ultimately lead to more Asian Indian Americans feeling comfortable with pursuing career paths that might be outside of what Asian Indian Americans may typically choose. The denigration of careers could potentially be addressed by student affairs educators and ethnic studies faculty, as they might teach courses or implement programs to help Asian Indian American students become critical of negative perspectives within Asian Indian American communities. Universities could consider incorporating Asian Indian American studies courses in general education curriculum requirements to better educate the broader student population regarding the Asian Indian American student population.

### **Being Indian, American, and Indian American**

Participants often spoke about Indian cultural heritage, norms, and values in similar ways. Family was the most common theme in participants’ responses related to their Indian identity. They highlighted how family had a prominent influence on multiple other aspects of their lives. Multiple participants identified religion as an important part of Indian identity, as it seems some participants found their cultural identity and their religious identity to be synonymous. Family and religion are all aspects of life commonly known to be integral to Indian culture (Kurian, 2001; Samuel, 2019).

In addition to participants’ understanding of Indian culture, they also demonstrated an understanding of American culture and norms. Examples of identifying

American culture, norms, and values were found in responses about perceptions of American culture and descriptions of behaviors related to living on campus. Many participants talked about how valuing and enacting independence, individualism, and freedom were all traits commonly known to be paramount to American culture, norms, and values. Participants also talked about the freedom and independence they exercised in their decision making when they were on campus. Multiple participants also pointed out they did not have the same level of freedom or independence when they were at home, because they felt they needed to appease their parents' preferences. Participants recognizing the pressure to adhere to expectations their parents defined in their household may be indicative of an implicit understanding of the deference to authority norm, which seems more prevalent in Indian culture than in American culture (Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009).

### ***Indian American Culture: A Culture of Its Own?***

What is Indian American culture? In attempting to answer the research questions posed in this study, I tried to garner an understanding of what one might recognize as Indian American culture based on findings of this study. Simply put, Indian American culture seems to be an integration of different aspects of Indian and American cultural norms. However, the salience of one culture's set of norms versus that of the other may vary per individual. For example, some may be deeply connected to their cultural or religious background and, as a result, these individuals may choose to exhibit norms related to cultural or religious adherence. However, they may also feel comfortable with exhibiting aspects of their American cultural background (e.g., making decisions contrary to parental preference). Indian American culture seems to be semifluid, as a second-

generation Asian Indian American individual may demonstrate stronger connections with a particular part of their dual identity depending on identity or desire to be connected to their Indian cultural heritage. Those who are a part of Indian American culture seem to recognize this fluidity

What is striking about participants' views on being Indian American is that most students seemed to be highly integrated (i.e., participants seemed to be comfortable navigating between their Indian identity and their American identity with relative ease). Participants recognized building a hybrid identity had a lot to do with being born into and brought up in an Indian household, but also with having American values similar to non-Indian American peers. Participants had no apprehension in talking about the fact they embraced their American cultural identity in addition to their Indian cultural side. One particular participant described her American tendencies as being "Whitewashed," which potentially highlights an understanding that individualistic cultural norms may be rooted in the Whiteness and colonialism of Western cultures. Participants did not attribute American tendencies to any other races.

There were times where participants may have found themselves dealing with difficulties in integrating their identities and making decisions. For example, participants often hid dating activities or alcohol consumption because they knew their parents would highly disapprove. Frowning upon alcohol consumption is a socially constructed expectation and is not rooted in most religions, but it appeared to be common among participants' families. The only well-known religions that directly forbid the consumption of alcohol are Buddhism and Islam (Ahmed et al., 2006; Benn 2007). Research on South Asian Americans has consistently indicated behaviors such as hiding and lying can be

common when young South Asians want to prevent their parents from finding out about their participation in certain activities (Brettell & Nibbs, 2009; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009). However, outside of some things participants felt their parents or Indian culture would potentially disapprove of, participants expressed they were comfortable with making decisions that aligned with their own desires, even when such desires did not align with Indian cultural norms. Some participants described their parents recognized they were adults who would ultimately make decisions on their own terms. Different life experiences in uniquely Indian and American contexts can shape the way Asian Indian American college students make decisions.

### **General Decision-Making**

A significant part of why I conducted this dissertation study was to look at how second-generation Asian Indian American students make decisions and how the cultural norms related to Indian, American, and Indian American cultures influence decision making. The reason for this endeavor was because navigating an identity that involves different cultural expectations can be a difficult or complex process for Asian Indian American students (Accapadi, 2012; Traxler, 2009), and cultural norms and values can influence them significantly. Having a dual identity can impact decision making even at a young age. For example, multiple participants brought up how when they were in grade school, their parents would send them to school with Indian food for lunch. However, these students would often experience discrimination and bullying from non-Indian students, who would make fun of their Indian food by referring to it as weird or indicating the smell was unpleasant. To avoid these uncomfortable interactions with their peers, participants made the decision to ask their parents to pack them food that was not

Indian so they could fit in at school. It seems participants ultimately appeased perceptions of their non-Indian peers so they could fit in.

### ***Matters of Racism and Discrimination***

Though I specifically asked about experiences with discrimination during college, participants expressed that they experienced little discrimination during their K-12 and college years beyond the example described above related to food. This was particularly surprising, since participants have been alive since the terrorist attacks on 9/11. South Asians in the United States as a whole experienced an increase in hate crimes toward their communities after that day (Ruzicka, 2011; Soin 2015). At most, some participants in this study highlighted their experience with bullying due to bringing Indian food to school. However, beyond experiences with being made fun of due to the lunches through brought to school, participants did not share accounts regarding discrimination based on their phenotypic expression, even when asked.

Anti-Asian sentiment has grown over the past four years due to the harmful rhetoric of Donald Trump. The Indian American community in the United States has experienced an increase in hate crimes as a result. Still, the amount of racism Asian Indian Americans face is less than other racial or ethnic groups (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019). Participants' discussion of racism toward those of other racial or ethnic backgrounds was minimal. However, it is important to note that this study was not designed to evaluate participants understanding of social justice. Still, the lack of discussion regarding discrimination might signify a lack of social justice awareness among the participants in this study, an additional reason may have been that few had

been exposed to Asian American Studies or Ethnic Studies curriculum during their college years.

Other ethnic minority students across campuses in the United States, such as Black and Hispanic students, experience significant racism (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2019, Griffin et al., 2016). Thus, Black and Hispanic student experiences may be highly different than those of Asian Indian American students. Participants in this study seemed to demonstrate little understanding of what other minoritized students' experiences may be like—a phenomenon that may be driven by the model minority perception. If participants spent a significant part of their lives being treated in overall positive ways due to the model minority myth, they may have been shielded from the same kind or level of discrimination Black and Hispanic students face. Thus, many participants from this study may be experiencing an “ignorance is bliss” mentality, known as a naïve consciousness (George Mwangi et al., 2019). As a result, it could be possible that participants might not realize they are experiencing racism when it does happen if it is very subtle or because it may happen to them less frequently relative to other communities of color.

As hate crimes rise in the United States, it would be prudent for Asian Indian Americans to develop critical consciousness regarding kinds of discrimination they and people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds may end up facing. Doing so may also lead to a better sense of social justice related to other racial, ethnic, or religious communities. Research seems to highlight that more recent immigrants may be less aware of the kinds of experiences that other people of color have with discrimination. For example, Griffin et al. (2016) and George Mwangi (2019) point out how recent Black immigrants may not



be aware of how frequently or how prominently Black Americans experience racism. Considering the limited experience with racism from the Asian Indian American students in this study, participants may have experienced a form of privilege similar to that of White privilege throughout their lives, but such privilege could be easily disrupted by more direct encounters with racism. As a result, they did not seem to think deeply about discrimination that many Asian Indian Americans face, nor might they realize how much discrimination people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds may face. As mentioned earlier, the Asian Indian American population could benefit from being educated by student affairs educators or ethnic studies faculty about racism and discrimination to bolster critical perspective development regarding such matters.

### **Family Influence on Decision Making**

Family was a major aspect of participants' lives that influenced decision making. Some participants highlighted how their family members' (usually their parents') career paths inspired or influenced how they made decisions about their own career paths. For example, multiple participants felt inspired to pursue a career in medicine because at least one parent was a doctor. However, a couple of participants also mentioned their lack of knowing what other career paths they could pursue may have also steered them to more familiar career paths that their families taught them about. Another example of how family influenced participants was participants' connection to their Indian heritage. Many participants' parents taught them about things commonly associated with Indian culture, such as Bollywood movies and music, classical Indian dancing, Indian food, and religion. Students learned about American culture primarily outside of their family environment

and home by attending American schools and interacting with non-Indian American peers.

Exposure to both Indian and American culture norms may have helped some female participants minimize the impact of sexism that is heavily rooted in Indian culture. For example, Sima discussed how she wanted to become a surgeon. However, her parents encouraged her to choose a profession that would be more flexible and accommodating toward women who may want to have a family. Traditionally, Indian culture viewed women as the primary caregivers for families (Dasgupta, 1998). If possible, many Indian mothers in India and the United States did not seek employment so they could focus on raising children and taking care of the household while men provide for their families financially (Ruzicka, 2011). However, Sima resolved to continue pursuing her interest in becoming a surgeon one day, thus transgressing an unfortunately persistent sexist cultural norm. Sima may have drawn on her understanding of American norms to assert a choice that might be considered contrary to Indian culture. Minimization of the effect of sexist perspectives on Sima's and possibly other female participants' career choices might have been buffered by her family's socioeconomic class level (Lapour & Heppner, 2009).

Decision making played out in different ways. Some participants cherished their Indian heritage so much they got involved in campus organizations that would help them stay connected to their cultural roots. Most of these organizations were related to performance arts. Commonly discussed by participants was the Indian acapella team on campus, Indian dance teams, or the executive board that planned a major national dance competition hosted on campus. Some participants were involved in more than one of these organizations. In addition to wanting to find ways to stay in touch with their Indian

cultural roots, they also chose to participate in these organizations because they wanted to connect with other students who shared the same identity. From what participants shared with me during their interviews, it is clear that having a sense of community with likeminded and like-background folks was an important driver in their decision-making process as it pertains to deciding to get involved on campus.

Though this study aimed to garner an understanding as to how second-generation Asian Indian American college students make major life choices, it became evident quickly during the interviews that the most important life choice participants have made is where to go to college. Thus, deriving an understanding regarding the mechanism for how major life choices occur within the Asian Indian American population was hard to do because participants had made few major life decisions to date. Hypothetically, if participants are faced with choices in the future that are far more substantive, there are a few possibilities as to how they may experience the decision-making process. First, if a student is not as well integrated as they seem to be in this study, they may experience significant acculturative stress when trying to make their decision; the result may be that they could choose their parents' preferences over their own. Second, if participants are pseudo-integrated in their acculturation style, they may assert autonomy to choose what they prefer in some instances and choose what their parents want for them in other situations. Finally, if a participant's acculturation style is such that they are fully assimilated, they may almost completely ignore their parents' preferences and Indian cultural norms.

For those who experience conflict in their decision-making processes in the future, they may experience internal conflicts that could be spiritual or cognitive in

nature, perhaps similar to what my friend experienced during our undergraduate years. This phenomenon can happen when a person feels that they are unable to be true to themselves in their decision-making process due to being unable to fully reconcile their preferences with those of others. Baxter Magolda (2004) describes this phase of one's development as the crossroads phase. In this phase, an individual may feel their own preferences are in conflict with external influences during their decision-making process. However, participants can still continue on with their development to a point where they may become fully self-authored.

However, in the case of Asian Indian Americans, self-authorship may be more reflective of proficiency in the integration style of acculturation. In other words, participants may make choices that keep them connected to both their Indian and American cultural identities without stress or concern. However, based on the information participants shared with me, it is unclear what would happen if their choices did not align to minimize inter- or intra-cultural conflicts. It is possible that if participants make choices that do not connect sufficiently with Indian and American cultural norms, or if participants are not sufficiently acculturated, they could experience anger from their parents or other members of their communities. This could lead to exacerbated acculturative stress and significant mental health issues (Tummala-Narra & Deshpande, 2018). What seems to be a lack of participants experiencing decision making conflicts could be due to a sampling issue. Future studies on the Asian Indian American population could include participants who specifically have experienced significant acculturative stress due to difficulty reconciling or integrating different cultural norms and expectations into their whole identity. Not all Asian Indian American individuals may

acculturate evenly or at a similar rate. Thus, they may need assistance in doing so. Proper integration of dual cultural identities could be something student affairs educators or mental health counselors could help facilitate.

### **Participants and Artifacts**

It was my hope participants' choices about what artifact to present would provide insight to something related to their identity and their decision-making process. What I ultimately found was that there were three major themed categories participants artifacts fit into: (a) culturally oriented, (b) individualistically oriented, and (c) split choice.

In the culturally oriented artifacts category were items related to participants' families. These items included photographs of family members and greeting cards. Other culturally oriented artifacts included a Hindu deity figurine and traditional Indian sweets. Individualistically oriented artifacts included a dress that was handmade by a participant, journals, and a football. The split choice category included only one participant's artifact, but they felt both artifacts they showed me were important to present. One artifact was more geared toward participants' individualistic interest and the other was geared toward Indian culture. Related to the former category was a car key for a car the participant fixed. The artifact representing the latter category was a ring his grandfather gave him to remind him of his cultural heritage.

Participants who showed me an artifact that fit in the culturally oriented artifact category may exemplify a stronger connection to their Indian identity over their American identity. For example, Anita talked about her connection to Bollywood music and dancing and Jainism. Her connection to Indian culture seemed deep and, accordingly, the artifact she shared—a photograph of her family—was, according to her, a

representation of her Indian roots and values taught in Indian culture. Other participants who chose culturally oriented artifacts shared a similar sentiment about how their artifact represented their connection to Indian culture and values (e.g., family). Thus, family and other aspects of Indian culture might have been influential in how participants in this particular category may have thought about American, Indian, and Indian American cultural norms.

In contrast, participants in the individualistically oriented artifacts category may have shown a stronger connection to their American cultural background by choosing items that exemplified something unique about themselves not tied to Indian culture. Some artifacts were explicit in their divergence from Indian culture, such as an American football or a stock market journal. These artifacts were shown to me by participants who openly discussed their Americanized identity. To understand something as Americanized, one likely recognizes something is specifically associated with American culture and its norms. Thus, if participants chose an individualistically oriented artifact, there is a strong possibility that those participants were influenced by uniquely American aspects of life, such as American schools, peers, or media. Ultimately, the preference for more Americanized norms might have led these students to choose the artifacts they showed me during their interviews.

One participant showed me two artifacts, which is why I gave him his own category, split choice artifact. One artifact related to the participant's American identity and the other related to his Indian identity. That particular participant may have had a strong understanding of norms and values from both cultures and thus, he may have exhibited a preference for both equally. His interview responses demonstrated a

connection to his family, religion, and individualistic endeavors. Therefore, there could be a broad range of aspects of life that have influenced the way he thought about American, Indian, and Indian American cultural norms. Ultimately, these norms may have led him to make a dualistic choice about the artifacts he wanted to show me.

Artifacts shared during the final interview for each participant served the intended purpose of the exercise. In the previous chapter, I indicated what artifacts participants shared with me in an effort to engage in triangulation. I also hoped participants' artifacts and explanations they gave about their artifacts might provide insight that would help answer the research questions posed in this study. Many of the interview responses seemed to highlight a mix of interest in staying connected with one's cultural heritage, but also, participants' stories and responses seemed to show a strong interest in acting autonomously or individualistically. In fact, autonomy seems to be a major theme emergent from the data. Their explanations for why they chose their artifacts also showed me what guided their decision making. Ultimately, the aim of this study was to use the emergent data to develop a theory about the population of interest grounded in the data.

What participants' choices of artifacts seem to show is that there can be variation in identity salience. Perhaps the variation reflects what it means to be Asian Indian American to participants. Multiple participants chose to show photographs of their family members, sometimes in contexts that specifically connected to "Indianness" (e.g., being in India or wearing Indian clothing). Those who showed me other culturally oriented artifacts also demonstrated a strong connection to their Indian culture. Other participants showed me artifacts that more closely reflected a stronger connection with aspects of American culture. Being Asian Indian American could "mean" being able to choose what

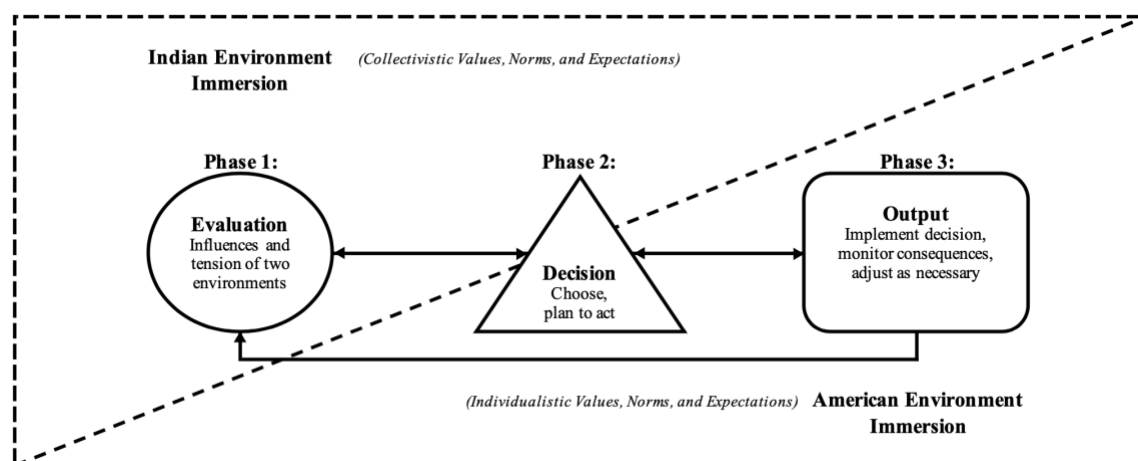
aspects of either culture resonates with oneself, how much each aspect is salient within them, and acting accordingly to that composition.

### Emergent Grounded Theory

A major aspect of the grounded theory methodology is that the researcher conducting the study develops a theory based on the emergent study data to explain participant or system findings and processes (Bowen, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Tie et al., 2019). In Figure 1, I provided a visual model that I have named the integration–autonomy choice model. After Figure 1, I provide a detailed explanation about the different components of the model and how the model functions. The integration–autonomy choice model provides information about how different aspects of students’ lives are most salient, how these aspects influence the way they think about American and Indian cultural norms, and how these norms may influence the way students make decisions related to college and other areas of life.

**Figure 1**

*Integration–Autonomy Choice Model*





## **Environment Immersion**

The integration–autonomy choice model highlights that a second-generation Asian Indian American person spends their life steeped in two environments. The first major environment they are immersed in is their home environment, where the individual is largely instilled with norms and expectations unique to collectivistic cultures (i.e., Indian culture). Examples of norms and expectations identified in this study are religious adherence, celebration of Indian performance art and holidays, avoidance of behaviors one’s parents may disapprove of (i.e., deference to authority), family orientation, finding ways to stay connected to one’s cultural heritage, and pursuing postsecondary education. For example, Anita talked about how her mom taught her how to do Bollywood dancing and instilled her with her passion for Jainism. Her mom also enforced a “no English” policy at home, so she was required to speak her native language only.

Indian norms and expectations are primarily instilled by parents and sometimes by other family members. However, students are also instilled with cultural norms and expectations typically associated with American and other Western cultures through attending American schools and interacting with American peers. As strongly indicated by participants in this study, American cultural norms seem to pertain to individualistic and independent choices and assertion of autonomy in ways that advance the growth, desires, and happiness of students. For example, multiple participants brought up how they enjoyed the independence and freedom to make choices to their liking when asked about what their favorite part of college life was. Many of the aforementioned norms are consistent with what literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicated are typical of Asian and American cultural norms (Kodama et al., 2002).

## **Phase 1: Evaluation**

When making a decision, participants in my study may have engaged in *evaluation* (i.e., they evaluated what they desired or hoped to accomplish by choices they made). Such choices usually seemed to be driven by two factors, a desire to (a) stay connected to cultural heritage and (b) have the freedom to make choices that resonated with their individualistic identities and interests.

It is likely that when many people think about aspects of life that contribute to the understanding of Indian culture and American culture, family and home life will come to mind as the primary influencers of Indian cultural understanding (Kanagala, 2011, Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011 Traxler, 2009). The findings of this study seem to exemplify that when evaluating what may influence understanding of American culture, it seems most people will likely infer that attending American schools and interaction with non-Indian American peers is the primary venue where Asian Indian American students learn about American culture. However, it seems students use the two different cultures to evaluate and understand each. Contrasting American culture with Indian culture may help Asian Indian Americans evaluate American culture and Indian culture from opposing points of view. For example, when Anita talked to her parents about applying to colleges both in and outside of Maryland, her parents expressed dismay: “Oh, you’re a girl, you can’t do that.” Anita explained to her parents that women going out of state for college is normal in the United States. Thus, Anita likely used her Indian perspective to understand her parents’ perspective on a traditionally Indian expectation of women (i.e., not going far from home) and then used her American perspective to recognize a possibility acceptable in American culture (i.e., going to college out of state).

The phenomenon of evaluating an outcome from two different perspectives could be seen as a modified form of *social perspective taking*. Social perspective taking can be summarized as being able to view something from someone else's perspective (Johnson, 2015). Social perspective taking can lead an individual to have a bolstered intercultural competence (Johnson, 2015). In the case of participants in this study, participants might have demonstrated an increase in intercultural competence due to their dual identities, since they had lenses from which they could view different aspects of life and different decisions. Asian Indian American students could use their American perspective to evaluate and understand Indian cultural norms and vice versa.

The level of influence each aspect of identity has on decision making may be dependent on context or level of salience of each cultural identity (i.e., Indian vs. American) in the individual student. At home or when around other family members, participants seemed more likely to exhibit behaviors related to their cultural background. This might include participation in religious practices, performance arts (e.g., traditional Indian singing or dancing), or a general deference to parents' desires (e.g., Anita not speaking English at home because her mother did not allow it). Participants were able to use their dual cultural background to more consciously evaluate each culture's more unique features and understand how the different aspects of each culture may fit into their lives or influence their behavior and choices. Contextual influence may result in more decisions that strongly exemplify Indian cultural identity when at home or with others who are also Indian American.

On campus, participants' evaluation may have directed them to consider enacting more American behaviors and characteristics, specifically a greater assertion of

individualistic interests and preferences. Examples of such behavior might have included involvement in organizations on campus parents might have frowned upon (e.g., Jay's volunteer work as a football team manager) or social behaviors (e.g., alcohol consumption, dating, socializing at late hours of the night on or off campus). Additionally, if participants were highly comfortable in their Indian identity or if they were spending time with Indian peers, they may have wanted to express the Indian aspects of their identity more openly. The opposite could be true if they were not as comfortable with expressing aspects of their Indian identity, or if they were surrounded by non-Indian peers.

In future years, participants may find themselves trying to make a decision where their personal desires are in conflict with those of their parents or other important people in their lives, such as those who are part of the Asian Indian American immigrant community. Baxter Magolda (2004) refers to such an experience as *crossroads*. Crossroads is described as participants experiencing conflict between personal desires and external influences (Baxter Magolda, 2004). The tension generated by such conflict is the impetus for participants furthering their development in a way that will lead them to eventually make decisions on their own terms. Crossroads experiences may occur in the evaluation phase of the integration-autonomy choice model.

It is unclear if evaluation is done consciously or subconsciously. When asked about who they consulted when making important life decisions, participants overwhelmingly pointed to their parents or family in general. A few participants indicated they consulted friends. However, some participants also seemed to factor in their own desired outcomes when evaluating what decisions to make and recognized they

had American tendencies. The degree of subconsciousness or consciousness in the overtness of the evaluation process might vary based on how important a decision is. Students may not feel any need to consult with others about day-to-day or low-level decisions. However, for more substantive decisions, students likely will consult their families or others with whom they have close relationships, such as close friends.

## **Phase 2: Decision**

Subsequent to the evaluation phase of the integration–autonomy choice model is the *decision* phase, where the student uses all that they have considered during the evaluation phase to make a final determination as to what they will ultimately choose to do. The decision phase is short in length since most of the effort in considering the right decision is done during the evaluation phase. Once a student has decided what they wish to do, they may make considerations as to what they need to do to implement an outcome. For example, Cinthya may have evaluated how she could stay connected to her faith while on campus. Presumably after making her considerations, she decided to join Cru. The decision phase may require making considerations about how to implement a decision based on context. Students may consider the effect of a decision on themselves, those in their immediate environment, and the impact on family if family is not a part of the immediate environment at the time of the decision. Considering impact on family may include whether or not negative blowback from their family is worth the risk of the decision.

## **Phase 3: Outcome**

The *outcome* phase occurs when students act on their decision. Desires may lead to the outcome phase being manifested in the form of joining cultural heritage campus

clubs and organizations (e.g., performing arts or religious organizations). Other outcomes may include engaging in social behaviors that primarily align with interests or desires. An outcome may be one that parents or people of the Indian community may be pleased with, but an outcome can also include something they might frown upon (e.g., alcohol consumption, dating, socializing at times or locations parents might be uncomfortable with).

Choices may be welcomed by family members and other like-identity peers depending on the outcome and context. However, a decision may lead to divergence from Indian cultural preferences, such as if an Asian Indian American student's career aspirations differ from what one's parents prefer. An example of preference divergence is Anita wanting to become a surgeon as opposed to her parents wanting her to choose another career path they believed would be more friendly or flexible for those who want to start a family. Other examples of preference divergence include Krish choosing to attend UMD when his parents preferred that he would choose another of his parents' liking, or how Jay chose to volunteer as a manager for the UMD football team against his parents' will.

Making independent choices against the norm or preference of a culture or other people can be characterized as student asserting autonomy. The integration–autonomy choice model operates as a feedback loop mechanism. Depending on the outcome or consequences of the decisions an Asian Indian American student chooses to enact, they may choose to re-evaluate their behavior or choice and make a different decision in the future or adjust their decision for a different outcome.

## **Implications for Research**

Further research on the second-generation Asian Indian American student population is greatly needed to help better understand this population. Asian Indian American students do not receive much attention from higher education researchers. Part of the lack of interest in studying the Asian Indian American population is fueled by the model minority myth (Farver et al., 2002; Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011) that drives higher education scholars to think Asian Indian American students are not in need of studying. This dissertation study provides multiple avenues that future researchers can pursue with regard to this population.

Perhaps future studies can examine how religion effects the development of Asian Indian American students. Scholars could also examine Asian Indian American students' participation in specific academic cocurricular programs, similar to the UMD Integrated Life Sciences (ILS) program a few students in this study were a part of. Researchers could conduct an ethnography on Asian Indian American students who are involved in Indian performing arts organizations on campus. Results of such a study could be highly interesting and insightful in helping researchers understand how these students connect with their cultural roots.

The bulk of research on South Asian—or more specifically, Asian Indian American—students is about undergraduates. However, many Asian Indian American students pursue graduate studies (DeSilver, 2014). The pursuit of graduate studies can be an entirely new area of study related to the Asian Indian American student population. It would be interesting to learn about how aspects of Asian Indian American identity affect the experiences these students have in graduate school, decisions they make while in

graduate school, and how their outcomes in graduate school are influenced by Asian Indian American cultural norms and concepts such as the success frame.

Research on the success frame and ethnic capital (Lee & Zhou, 2014) can be expanded upon in the future to more deeply examine the second-generation Asian Indian American student population's experiences and outcomes in college and beyond. Based on findings of this study, the success frame seems to apply in the Asian Indian American community. Participants' families put tremendous value on pursuing higher education and they did everything they could to promote their child's success in getting into good colleges. Multiple students in this study indicated using Kumon tutoring services to support them in their K–12 academic success. Some participants also used SAT preparation courses. Studying effects of how ethnic capital and the success frame influence the development and success of Asian Indian American students in college could provide insight on how to promote the success and development of other students from immigrant families of different backgrounds.

Developing and growing as a second-generation Asian Indian American can be challenging (Choudhury et al., 2009; Tummala-Nara & Deshpande, 2018). But being a second-generation Asian Indian American with an LGBTQ or nonbinary gender identity can complicate development and decision making even further. South Asian cultures are notoriously homophobic (Choudhury et al., 2009; Tummala-Nara & Deshpande, 2018). Being subjected to homophobia can be detrimental to psychological wellbeing (Choudhury et al., 2009; Tummala-Nara & Deshpande, 2018). Psychosocial development as a second-generation Asian Indian American may unfold differently than a cis-gender straight Asian Indian American peer's might. As more Asian Indian American



individuals feel comfortable coming out, there will be more reason to study this subset of people in the Asian Indian American student population. Increased research on LGBTQ Asian Indian American students can help higher education professionals understand how to best support these students in achieving success and wellbeing in college and life.

Beyond the influence of educational environments themselves, it may be timely for scholars to consider conducting research on second-generation Asian Indian American students, specifically observing their development and decision making during the time of the Trump presidency. The anti-immigrant sentiment has been strong over the past 4 years in the United States. Hate crimes against Indian American communities and other racial and ethnic minority groups have increased markedly over the past 4 years (Tessler et al., 2020). Since vitriol toward immigrant communities has been obvious in the media because of the harmful rhetoric of Donald Trump and his administration, the perpetuated negative sentiment may have had influence on second-generation Asian Indian American students' lives.

Lastly, in comparison to previous research on the second-generation Asian Indian American student population, it seems participants in this study were largely willing to exert their autonomy to behave in ways they preferred, often even when facing scrutiny from those closest to them. Much of the research related to Asian Americans and South Asian Americans seems to indicate this might not have been a common phenomenon with Asian Indian American students in the past (Bhat, 2005; Ruzicka, 2011, Traxler, 2009). After analyzing all of the data for this study, I realized there could be a significant generational difference in experiences among second-generation Asian Indian American students. Specifically, a millennial (born in or between 1981 and 1996) second-

generation Asian Indian American individual such as myself may have had different life and educational experiences than generation Z (born in 1997 or onward) second-generation Asian Indian American students. Generation Z grew up with technology (e.g., the internet, smart phones, social media) as an integral part of their lives. Many millennials may not have had these major technological advances until later in life. It is hard to know how being immersed in life with such technologies readily available may influence millennial second-generation Asian Indian Americans in comparison to generation Z second-generation Asian Indian Americans.

Another difference between generation Z and millennial second-generation Asian Indian American life experiences that could have contributed to their acculturative differences is spread of culture and parenting. In the past two decades, the prevalence and even preference for western values and norms has increased in India. Bollywood movies now include much more English and adult themes than they once did. India also has more access to American television shows and movies as well. Thus, if Indian parents immigrated from India already having been exposed to different American or western values and expectations through media, they may have been primed for what they might expect when they have children. If Indian parents have become more accepting of behaviors that are typically attributed to western culture, then perhaps participants did not experience as much acculturative friction. Helicopter parenting only seemed to be an issue among two participants, whose parents tracked them using the GPS on their smartphones. The lack of widespread helicopter parenting might signify their parents may be ok with their children asserting more individuality and autonomy. Additionally, Asian parenting styles tend to be described as somewhat emotionally reserved (Kodama et al.,

2002). If participants' parents had a warmer emotional approach to raising their children, their children might be more proficient in managing their own emotions, making it easier to deal with acculturative stress. If Asian American immigrant parents tend to be reserved in their emotions (Kodama et al., 2002), the possible warmer parenting might be a characteristic that is shared with people from non-Asian backgrounds or a byproduct of generational shifts.

Notably, generation Z second-generation Asian Indian Americans in this study may have had more “models” to emulate when they were growing up due to millennial second-generation Asian Indian Americans providing representation through being in different professions, the media, and even government. Though many seem to be concentrated in the STEM professions (Kodama et al., 2002; Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Poon, 2014; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009), millennial second-generation Asian Indian Americans are a part of many different professions. Today there are many television shows and movies on TV and streaming platforms that include or are about second-generation Asian Indian Americans (e.g., Kal Penn, Tiya Sircar, Mindy Kaling, Aziz Asari). There are also high-profile Indian American members of congress (e.g. Pramila Jayapal, Rohit Khanna). The Surgeon General of the United States during the Obama Administration was Vivek Murthy, an Indian American who has assumed the role again during the current Biden administration. Furthermore, Kamala Harris, the new Vice President of the United States, is half Indian American.

Though generation Z Asian Indian Americans have many individuals to look up to as role models for what an acculturated Asian Indian American may look like, millennial second-generation Asian Indian Americans did not have such role models.

This may account for the discrepancy in what previous literature has indicated about Asian Indian American students' acculturative stress (Miville & Constantine, 2007; Patel, 2010). If generation Z Asian Indian Americans grew up knowing about or seeing acculturated millennial Asian Indian Americans in different venues and professions, younger Asian Indian Americans may not have faced the same challenges in integrating their dual identities. Generation Z Asian Indian Americans being able to model behavior after those who have already successfully acculturated in different ways might allow younger Asian Indian Americans to acculturate with less stress. Therefore, research on generational differences between second-generation Asian Indian American individuals might shed light on what might be different about the development and decision-making processes of these individuals and how different aspects of their lives influence the way they perceive their two prevalent cultural identities.

Furthermore, Indian culture in India may have changed significantly over the past few decades. With the advent of the internet and greater spread of knowledge on Western culture to Eastern countries, India has seen an increase in the inclusion of common Western cultural behaviors in Bollywood movies. Some parts of Bollywood movies are even spoken in English. This phenomenon was previously extremely uncommon. Thus, it is possible parents' conception and instillation of Indian culture might be different in recent years than it was decades ago. More recent immigrant parents may not have the same standards for how they would want their children to behave in comparison to immigrant parents multiple decades ago. This could potentially translate into a difference in how their second-generation children acculturate. However, it is unknown if this difference may be what accounts for differences between this study's findings versus

previous research on second-generation Asian Indian American students, as there is essentially no research on the matter beyond this study. Thus, sociologists, psychologists, and immigration scholars should consider conducting research on the aforementioned chronologically driven changes.

### **Implications for Student Affairs Practice**

What students talk about in a study can shed light on their experience in significant ways. However, what students do not talk about can be just as illuminating. When asked about college resources use, all participants at most talked about going to a professor or teaching assistant's office hours. Most students seemed to study alone and only rarely indicated they used tutoring services on campus or any other resource that could help them succeed academically. Furthermore, students never spoke about usage of student affairs services (e.g., academic advisors, career services). This finding is not entirely surprising. Traxler (2009) previously indicated South Asian American students do not engage with such services often. This study did not specifically investigate why this was the case for the participants in this study, as it was not a purpose of this research. However, it is interesting that Traxler's study conducted in 2009 and this study conducted in 2020 both show that 11 years later, Asian Indian American students still do not seem inclined to use major campus resources.

Future studies, assessments, and program evaluations should consider what could be done to encourage more participation from second-generation Asian Indian American students. Such participation could be instrumental in improving academic and career outcomes for students. Traxler (2009) provided important insight into how Asian Indian American students did not find services to be useful or fruitful due to the lack of cultural

understanding by student affairs administrators. However, if this dissertation study accurately exemplifies a decrease in friction between Asian Indian American students Indian and American identities, perhaps different student affairs services may be more attractive for these students to use because cultural sensitivity might not be quite as important.

As mentioned previously, Asian Indian Americans may not be as aware of concerns regarding social justice in the United States. This may be due to the fact that Asian Indian Americans may experience relatively less direct racism due to a buffering effect from the model minority myth, although certainly Asian Indian Americans do experience negative racialization and stereotypes. To help Asian Indian Americans think more critically about matters of race inside and outside the Asian American community, institutions implementing curricular requirements to include critical race studies or Asian American studies coursework would be prudent. Such courses can help Asian Indian Americans become aware of issues within Asian cultures, or how to respond or cope when encountering racism.

Student affairs practice is often devoid of an understanding of how different functional areas affect or influence experiences of Asian Indian American students. This lack of understanding is often due to a lack of desire to learn about or understand the experience of Asian Indian American students because of the model minority myth (Farver et al., 2002; Kodama et al., 2002; Ruzicka, 2011). If Asian Indian American students are perceived to be high achieving and successful on their own, there may be less interest in this population. However, Asian Indian American students also experience stress and difficulties. For example, one participant indicated using therapy due to

challenges she was facing. Understanding the struggles of a second-generation Asian Indian American student might help student affairs practitioners with tailoring services to better serve these students.

Furthermore, it seems academic programs, such as ILS, are something that Asian Indian American students are interested in being a part of. It would be prudent to conduct research on the experience of Asian Indian American students in such programs. Student affairs practitioners could use the insight garnered from research to improve the experiences that Asian Indian American and other students have through participation in these programs.

Finally, another important aspect of student affairs practice that research on Asian Indian American students can help student affairs practitioners understand is Asian Indian American students' inclination in joining South Asian performing arts organizations on campus. While there is plenty of research on the impact of student involvement on college student development, the amount of research on how Indian American organizations or South Asian organizations in general may impact the identity development and overall development and success of Asian Indian American college students is minimal.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to provide a discussion about findings of this study and to relay an emergent theory related to this study's research questions and the literature currently available as it pertains to the second-generation Asian Indian American college student experience. Specifically, this study aimed to understand what key aspects of life influences second-generation Asian Indian American college students'

thought processes on American, Indian, and Indian American culture. Furthermore, I aimed to understand how norms of these cultures influence the college experience and the process when making major life decisions. Through this study, I have provided insight to answer these questions. I have also garnered information not only about how students make major life decisions based on cultural norms, but also about how they make any decision.

This chapter also provided information on future research related to this population and how the researchers and scholars can use the findings in this dissertation study to positively influence future student affairs. The second-generation Asian Indian American population comprises a significant portion of the college-going population in the United States. Asian Indian American students are taught from a young age to value education and as a result, it seems these students typically do not consider any alternatives to pursuing a higher education.

This study contributes to the broader body of literature regarding the Asian Indian American student population in a way that differs from what is largely available. Most of the literature that covers the second-generation Asian Indian American student population does not disaggregate Asian Indian American students from other South Asian American students (e.g., Rahman & Witenstein; 2013; Ruzicka, 2011; Traxler, 2009).

Disaggregation is important because there is significant diversity of backgrounds and experiences within the South Asian American population in the United States. For example, Asian Indian American students may not have the same life experiences and might not face adversity in the same ways that Pakistani American students might. Thus, to understand differences between different ethnic sub-groups (e.g., Indian, Pakistani,



Bangladeshi, etc.) within a larger racial group (i.e., South Asian), it is critical that disaggregated research should be done on each unique sub-group.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader body of literature related to second-generation immigrant experiences in higher education. There is significant literature in existence regarding second-generation immigrants from other racial backgrounds. However, much of this research does not include Asian Indian American students. This dissertation study helps connect the Asian Indian American student population experience to current literature by highlighting experiences that participants had, which were similar to other second-generation immigrant students. For example, research on second-generation Black immigrants highlights that their parents' understanding of their cultural identities comes from their native country's socially constructed ideas of ethnicity or race (Belay, 2018; Fries-Britt et al., 2014). Similarly, the Asian Indian American participants in this study pointed to how their parents raised them the way they were taught to do so in India. Literature on immigrant assimilation also highlights how ethnic communities (which includes one's home environment) are where immigrants and their children feel bound to customs, food, and expectations of their ethnic culture (Belay, 2018; Logan et al., 2002). Participants in this dissertation study discussed the same elements as part of what they experienced at home.

Conversely, findings in this study also showed how second-generation Asian Indian Americans' experiences might differ from that of Black second-generation immigrant individuals. For example, Black second-generation individuals seem to experience discrimination in school similar to Black students whose ancestries in the United States date back much further (Cokley et al., 2016). However, Asian Indian

American students in this study did not seem to experience discrimination as much or as similarly as Black students who were second generation or otherwise. This might partly be due to buffering from the model minority perception, which is sometimes used by privileged people of non-Asian backgrounds (mostly White people) to denigrate Black people (Poon et al., 2016). Social class may also provide for buffering as well (Lapour & Heppner, 2009). Some literature on Black immigrants suggests that ethnic identity might also act as a buffer to protect against the harmful effects of experiencing racism (Coutinho & Blustein, 2004; Haynie, 2002). However, though it is certainly possible, it is not clear based on the findings in this study if Asian Indian American college students experience the same buffering effect from having a strong ethnic identity.

As mentioned previously, Asian Indian Americans tend to be studied less due to the model minority myth and other factors. This study will allow for scholars and professionals in higher education to properly compare the differences in experiences between Asian Indian American students and those of other second-generation immigrant backgrounds. This dissertation study specifically focuses on generation Z Asian Indian American population, which is particularly unique since most studies on Asian Indian Americans has been on millennials of this population until very recently. This research can serve as a foundation for research on Asian Indian Americans and other generation Z second-generation population that can be done in the future.

Participants in this study exhibited proficiency in balancing Indian and American identities and norms associated with each culture. They understood what norms were distinct to each culture and were largely able to appreciate aspects of both cultures. Findings that emerged in this study suggest all participants were highly autonomous in

their decision making. This finding suggests these students were likely well integrated in their acculturation process (Farver et al., 2002; Rudmin, 2003). The emergent theory I developed to answer this study's research questions—which I have deemed the integration–autonomy choice model—provides an explanation or guide to understand how the decision-making process works among the population of interest in this study.

Ultimately, this study shows that the experience of Generation Z second-generation Asian Indian American students may have advanced in comparison to millennial second-generation Asian Indian American individuals. Students in this study seemed to exhibit far less markers of acculturative stress, which suggests that they were far more integrated at their age than millennials of the same background were at the same age. Generation Z second-generation Asian Indian American students enjoy their connection to Indian cultural heritage through the celebration of different holidays, dance styles, food, and more. They also enjoy individualistic aspects of American culture and are comfortable with make decisions autonomously, even when some of those decisions may violate Indian cultural norms. Having a bicultural identity seemed to help participants in this study expand their understanding of how different aspects of their lives influenced the way they viewed and enacted cultural norms and made decisions in life.

## Appendix A

### **IRB Proposal Email and Social Media Advertisement**

Are you a currently enrolled undergraduate University of Maryland student with U.S. Citizenship who identifies as Indian (Asian) American? If so, please participate in this study!

*“Doing the Indian Thing: The Influence of Contrasting Cultural Norms on the Decision Making and Development of Second-Generation Asian Indian American College Students”*

In an attempt to better understand the experience of Indian (Asian) American college students, this study will consist of interviews with individuals who fit the following criteria (REQUIRED):

- Must be between 18 and 23 years old
- Enrolled as a fulltime student at the University of Maryland
- You identify as Indian and American
- Your parents immigrated to the United States from India and you were born and raised in the United States

By participating in this study, you commit to two 60-minute interviews via an online platform, such as FaceTime, Skype, Google Hangout, Zoom, or by phone. You will be emailed a \$30 Amazon gift card after participating in the second interview as a thank you for your participation in this study.

To participate, please email Roshan Parikh, a doctoral student at the University of Maryland, at [rmparikh@umd.edu](mailto:rmparikh@umd.edu). This project is supervised by Dr. Julie Park who can also be contacted with any questions at [parkjj@umd.edu](mailto:parkjj@umd.edu).

Please note: This research study has been approved according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. This study is completely voluntary, and the data collected will only be utilized for research purposes and no identifiable information will be disclosed. There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project. In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others.

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Inventory for Interview One**

1. What's your major?
2. Do you live on campus?
3. Tell me about what your favorite part of college life is.
  - a. Tell me a story about your favorite experience in college thus far.
4. What are your career aspirations? What do you want to do after college?
5. Could you give me a brief family history, particularly as you were growing up?
  - a. Can you tell me about what your relationship with your mother is like?
    - i. Can you tell me about your mother's occupation?
  - b. Can you tell me about what your relationship with your father is like?
    - i. Can you tell me about your father's occupation?
  - c. Can you tell me about what your relationship with your sibling(s) is like?
  - d. Can you tell me about what your relationship with your grandparent(s) is like?
  - e. Can you tell me about what your relationship with your cousins is like?
  - f. Can you tell me about what your relationship with your aunts and uncles are like?
6. What did you want to be when you were growing up?
7. Can you tell me about how your family may have shaped your education aspirations?
8. What are some other ways that your family influence your life?

- a. How has your relationship with your family and the way they influence your life changed over time?
  - b. Are there things you find helpful or unhelpful about your family?
- 9. Can you tell me about what school was like for you during K-12?
  - a. Did you face any challenges in your educational journey during your K-12 years?
    - i. If so, can you describe this/these challenges?
  - b. What resources did you use back in K-12 to help you succeed educationally?
- 10. Were you involved in any organizations growing up (e.g., social? Religious? political?) If so, can you tell me about them?
- 11. Tell me about who you socialized with the most when you were growing up.
  - a. Who did you spend most of your time with in school?
  - b. Who did you spend most of your time with outside of school?
  - c. Can you tell me about how you spend time with your family after school and on weekends?
- 12. Who do you study/do homework with?
- 13. Are you involved in any clubs or organizations on campus?
- 14. Tell me about what a typical weekend looks like for you.
- 15. What resources on or off campus, if any, do you use to help you succeed in college?
- 16. When you were in high school, what did you plan to do after you graduated?
  - a. Did you or your family consider alternatives to college?

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Inventory for Interview Two**

1. Can you tell me about what your cultural identity is/how you would describe it to someone?
2. Tell me about what you feel are the most important aspects of your identity.
3. What does it mean to you to be “Indian”?
4. What does it mean to you to be “American”?
5. Tell me about who (if at all) in your life influences your cultural identity?
  - a. How do they influence you?
6. Do you feel like you have faced any difficulties with bringing any parts of your identities together? If so, can you give me an example(s)?
7. Tell me how you do to keep in touch with/exemplify your cultural heritage.
  - a. Are you involved with any clubs or organizations on or off campus that help you stay in touch with your cultural heritage?
8. Are there any parts of your identity that you feel you have a preference over?
  - a. If yes, what part(s) and why?
9. How has religion influenced your life?
  - a. Did you attend any religious schools or language schools growing up?
10. Were/are you involved with any kind of performing arts organizations?
11. Who do you talk to when making important decisions in your life?
12. What would you say has been the most important decision you have ever made in your life?

13. Have you ever experienced a time when you felt Indian and American culture clashed in your life?
- a. If so, can you tell me more about it?
14. Have you experience a time where you felt your gender influenced a decision you made?
- a. If so, can you tell me more about it?
  - b. Do you feel your gender has affect your educational aspirations in any way?
15. Have you experienced a time where you wanted or tried to make a decision where what you wanted and what your parents wanted conflicted?
- a. If so, can you tell me more about it? What was the conflict about and what was the outcome? How did you come to this decision?
16. Have you experienced a time where a time where you chose to appease your parents' desire over your own?
- a. If so, can you tell me tell me more about the choice(s) you had to make and what the outcome was?
17. As part of this interview, I asked that you share with me an artifact (such as a photograph, object, poem, etc.) that is meaningful to you related to an aspect of your identity that you cherish. Can you tell me about what artifact you chose and why?
- a. What part of your identity does this artifact resonate with?
  - b. Do you think the artifact you chose would be different if you were not Indian?



- i. If yes/no, Why?
- c. Do you think the artifact you chose would be different if you were not American?
  - i. If yes/no, Why?



**Institutional Review Board**

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**Appendix D**

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE**

<b>Project Title</b>	<i>Doing the Indian Thing: The Influence of Contrasting Cultural Norms on the Decision Making and Development of Second-Generation Asian Indian American College Students</i>
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	<i>This research is being conducted by <b>Roshan Parikh</b> at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a second-generation Asian Indian American undergraduate student who was born and raised in the US and your parents immigrated here from India. Thus, you fit the criteria for the individuals who are a part of the population I am trying to study. The purpose of this research project is to better understand your experiences as an Asian Indian American college student and the influence being Asian Indian American has on decision-making.</i>
<b>Procedures</b>	<p><i>If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct two semi-structured interviews that will take approximately 60 minutes each to complete. The interviews will take place virtually via Facetime, Google Hangouts, Zoom, Skype, or by phone. The interview will be audio recorded. You may decline to be audio recorded or choose to stop the audio recording at any time during the interview. You may also choose to skip questions during the interview or end the interview at any time. Participants will receive a \$30 Amazon gift card after participating in the second interview.</i></p> <p><i>The following is an example question that is representative of the types of questions or subject matter that the participant will be asked about: What does it mean to you to be “Indian”?</i></p>
<b>Potential Risks and Discomforts</b>	<i>We anticipate little to no risk for anyone participating in this study. You may experience some discomfort in sharing personal stories during the interview.</i>

	<i>However, you may choose to skip questions or stop participating at any time with no penalty.</i>
<b>Potential Benefits</b>	<i>While this research is not designed to benefit you personally, we hope that, in the future, you and other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the Asian Indian American college student experience.</i>
<b>Confidentiality</b>	<p><i>Any names or institutional identifiers that appear in the transcripts of your audio recording will be replaced with pseudonyms within your transcripts. The principle investigator will be the only person to have access to a key with identifying information that corresponds to the pseudonyms. Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing all data files in a password-protected folder that is only accessible by the principle investigator. All audio-recorded files will be deleted permanently within one year of transcription.</i></p> <p><i>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p>
<b>Right to Withdraw and Questions</b>	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may skip questions you do not wish to answer or you may choose to stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Roshan M. Parikh</b>  University of Maryland, 3214 Benjamin Building  3942 Campus Dr., College Park, MD 20742  <a href="mailto:rmparikh@umd.edu">rmparikh@umd.edu</a> // 1-860-857-4683</p>
<b>Participant Rights</b>	<i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury,</i>

	<p><i>please contact:</i>  University of Maryland College Park  Institutional Review Board Office  1204 Marie Mount Hall  College Park, Maryland, 20742  E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a>  Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>				
<b>Statement of Consent</b>	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>				
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td><b>NAME OF PARTICIPANT</b></td><td><b>DATE</b></td></tr> <tr> <td>[Please Print]</td><td></td></tr> </table>	<b>NAME OF PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>DATE</b>	[Please Print]	
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<b>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>DATE</b>				
<b>Consent for Audio Recording</b>	<p>If you agree to have your interview audio-recorded, please sign your name below.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><b>Signature</b></td><td><b>Date</b></td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td></td></tr> </table>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>		
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