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THE NEGOTIATION OF DISCOURSES FOR WOMEN  
WHO HAVE EMIGRATED FROM INDIA TO THE UNITED STATES

by

Suzanne C. Schmidle

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Major: Political Science

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## **Abstract**

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When an individual experiences a change in location and enters an unfamiliar space or place, there is often a period of adjustment that occurs due to differences in the two environments. Some of these differences may be immediately obvious to the individual upon their transition, however many times, the differences are not obvious to the eye or even to the mind. This is due to the role of discursive expectations, which are “taken for granted” truths that are engrained in and disciplined through discourses embedded in areas of society such as culture, ethnicity, and religion. Upon entering the new space or place, individuals may unconsciously become disciplined by these societal discourses and adapt to or resist the new set of expectations. This post-colonial narrative inquiry seeks to illuminate the personal experiences of women as they navigated differing discourses experienced as a result of immigration to the United States.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

When an individual experiences a change in location, situation, or environment and enters an unfamiliar space or place, there is often a period of adjustment that occurs due to differences in the previous environment and the one in which they now find themselves. Some of these differences may be immediately obvious to the individual upon their transition and they will be able to consciously and decisively determine how to manage these changes. Many times, however, the differences between the two locations or situations are not obvious to the eye or even to the mind. This is due to the role of discursive expectations, which often go unnoticed throughout life. These expectations are “taken for granted” truths that are engrained in and disciplined through discourses embedded in different areas of society such as culture, ethnicity, and religion. In actuality, however, culture, ethnicity, and religion not only discipline discourse but are themselves created by discourse. Upon entering the new space or place, individuals may, unbeknownst to them, slowly become disciplined by these societal discourses and, often unconsciously, adapt to or resist the new set of expectations.

For example, the discursive constructions and maintenance of gender are deeply embedded in society and are many times unrecognized and, therefore, unquestioned by individuals within that society. This is because gendered discourse is

a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions - and the punishments that attend

not agreeing to believe in them; the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (Butler, 1990, p. 190)

In other words, the acts and performances that constitute the discourse of gender have been enacted and repeated to such an extent that it has become understood as a “reality” or a “truth” rather than recognized as a discursively constructed set of expectations. This assumption of a concrete and fixed nature of gender, and identity in general, within society has thus created an illusion of necessity and perhaps obligation to act appropriately.

Although discourses are many times unnoticed by the individual, they may become more apparent during a transition. As the expectations of the new space or place are consciously or unconsciously experienced, the individual may begin to confront previous discourses by which s/he was disciplined and how s/he fulfilled or challenged those expectations. This may lead to an intentional or unintentional process of negotiation between both sets of expectations and potentially a questioning of or an alteration to self in an attempt to find her/his place in the new environment. Through the lens of post-colonialism, I seek to illuminate these experiences and conscious or unconscious negotiations of identity perpetuated by a transition, specifically immigration from India to the United States. In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I will situate my research within the field of political science by discussing common levels of analysis and the concepts of culture, community, and civilization found in highly regarded political science works. I will then provide a brief explanation of the theory of post-colonialism, which serves as the theoretical foundation for this research. I will trace its history from humanism through the development of post-structuralism, and finally to the major tenets

of post-colonialism. Finally, I will review some of the current literature in areas that my research addresses and discuss the gap that I seek to fill through this study.

### **Level of Analysis**

Within the field of political science, there are several levels of analysis on which research might focus including a state or country level, a culture or subgroup level, and an individual level. Kenneth Waltz (1954) utilized these three levels of analysis in his book, *Man, the State and War*, in which he looked at the sources of war and peace from each standpoint. Within this research project, my focus lies primarily on the individual level and responds to research conducted at the state-focused and culture-focused levels. It is my belief that analyzing at the level of the state or culture is inefficient as it assumes a commonality within those groups that is not present.

This assumption of a common trait can be seen within Samuel Huntington's (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations*. Within this work, Huntington responded to the idea of a universal civilization by creating a definition for civilization or culture based on shared attributes. He believed that "the concept of a universal civilization helps justify Western cultural dominance of other societies and the needs for those societies to ape Western practices and institutions" (Huntington, 1996, p. 66). However, his recommendation of defining a cultural group or civilization can also be seen as a form of cultural dominance as it is a way of minimizing differences and silencing outliers. For example, just because a group of individuals shares a common language or religion, which are two traits Huntington uses to define a civilization, does not mean that they should be combined together and viewed as one unit.

This creation of a definition supports my second argument against analysis based on culture or state – groups, such as Huntington’s civilizations, are not real but instead are just arbitrary creations of boundaries, demographics, or descriptions. Benedict Anderson (1983) discussed this idea of culture or community in his book, *Imagined Communities*. He addressed the difficulty that is often confronted when trying to define a nation as a stable identity or unit of analysis. In response to this problem, he proposes a definition of a nation as “an imagined political community” and further states that “all communities...are imagined (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). This reimagination of nation allows for an analysis at all levels as long as there is an understanding of the contingency and fluidity of the term. It is this type of thought that makes up the foundation of post-colonial theory.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

**Humanism.** Marilyn Frye (1996) began *The Possibility of Feminist Theory* with the following scenario:

Imagine that a single individual had written up an exhaustive description of a sedated elephant as observed from one spot for one hour and then, with delighted self-satisfaction, had heralded that achievement as a complete, accurate and profound account of The Elephant. (p. 34)

Although this seems like a silly concept, it is a great example of the development of thought within a humanist paradigm, a paradigm to which much of the world ascribes. It relies on the idea that through observation, individuals can learn and know the true essence of something. It then places a label or identity on that item or situation and

disseminates it to the world as fact or truth. Over time, this truth becomes the template through which everything is viewed. St. Pierre (2000) explained,

Humanism is the air we breath, the language we speak, the shape of the homes we live in, the relations we are able to have with others, the politics we practice, the map that locates us on the earth, the futures we can imagine, the limits of our pleasures. (p. 478)

Though we may not realize that there are barriers to these things, humanist thought has placed limits on ways of thinking and behaving. Anything outside of these lines are considered abnormal and are often discouraged or dismissed.

St. Pierre (2000) goes on to explain, however, that these boundaries set up by humanism are often the demise of humanist thought. The simple presence of just one instance, person, or thing that does not fit into the humanist mold, creates cracks in its foundation. In addition, when it becomes understood that the limits and parameters placed on an object or situation are simply the result of language, they become illuminated as simply effects of power. It is this concept of language constructing the world that post-structuralism addresses.

**Post-Structuralism.** Post-structuralism was developed in reaction to humanism's tendency to use language to create barriers and labels. Post-structuralists sought to show that these humanist categories are not Truths and can be altered through language. This focus on language began with postmodernist Ferdinand de Saussure who developed a theory that stated that language was the system of thought on which society was based. It was then addressed by structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss who enhanced this idea further by applying Saussure's views of language to the field of anthropology and explaining

how language was the source of all meaning in the social world. The development of language continued in the works of Levi-Strauss, Barthe, Althusser and other critical theorists and it soon led to the development of the re-deployment of discourse which is at the center of post-structural theory (Crotty, 1998).

Michel Foucault re-theorized the concept of discourse when he began studying the history of language and knowledge to discover how it shaped the social world through the development of norms, binaries, and classes (St. Pierre, 2000). These language-created classifications and social constructs became known as discourse which is “not a language or a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs” (Scott, 1988, p. 35). When applied to categories created by humanism, discourse shows that they are nothing more than words, used to create an illusion of fact or truth based within power relations. Instead, “All categories are unstable, all experiences are constructed, all reality is imagined, all identities are produced, and all knowledge provokes uncertainties, misrecognitions, ignorances, and silences” (Britzman, 1993, p. 22). In other words, there is no “Truth” but only social constructions that have been marketed as truths.

**Post-Colonialism.** This post-structural concept of discourse is the foundation for much of post-colonial theory, which serves as the lens through which I approached this research. Post-colonialism studies the use of language and discourse in relation to the creation and maintenance of culture as a distinct category with universal characteristics. It seeks to dismantle this concept of culture through processes such as deconstruction. Within this research, I will focus specifically on three areas addressed by post-

colonialism – identity, power, and truth. I will discuss the role of discourse within each of these tenets and how post-colonialism attempts to disrupt them.

*Identity.* As discourses are repeated over and over again, they eventually create what are considered to be societal “truths”. St Pierre (2000) explains, “Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (p. 497). Since post-colonial theory believes that meaning is socially constructed, it posits that there is not an absolute truth but, instead, multiple truths. The illusion of Truth, however, is created through our repetition of discursive acts. This is most evident in its impact on the subject itself, which is always already constituted through discourse. Judith Butler (1990) explains, “Where there is an ‘I’ who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that ‘I’ and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will” (p. 225). More simply, we are all by-products of discourse but we are also producers of discourse. How we act and what we say simultaneously represent and create discourse. These discourses are reaffirmed and strengthened through our repetition of them: “We are ‘the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse’, or, ‘a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses’ that manifest through a ‘compulsion to repeat’ or resignify dominant discourses” (Nelson, 1999, p. 338).

Post-colonial theory utilizes this view of discourse and subjectivity by claiming that all identity labels (i.e., culture, religion, tribe) are not true, tangible divisions but instead are the result of discourse and therefore cannot be universally identified. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) explained this process of cultural identity through his use of the term hybridization. Hybridization refers to the idea that unified cultures never actually existed.

Instead, there were individuals who may have had some similarities regarding race, religion, and/or customs who were then placed within a homogenous, unitary group in an attempt to categorize, minimize, and potentially silence the multitude of differences in the world. Therefore, in utilizing this theory, it is impossible to represent a culture as a unified subject as it does not actually exist. Instead, each individual and her/his unique qualities must be recognized even when researching individuals who demographically may appear similar.

This individual uniqueness is imperative to consider when selecting a research methodology. For example, a methodology that seeks to find a shared experience does not give due attention to the distinctiveness and intricacies of each person or story. Instead, it hides or dismisses discrepancies and differences in order to develop a consistent and parsimonious experience. Therefore, a methodology that values individuality and diversity is important when working within a post-colonial framework because it avoids the humanist tendency to diminish individual experience in the attempt to create a unitary and homogenous subject.

**Power.** Another primary tenet of post-colonialism is the assertion that power is only present within a relationship dynamic. Foucault (1978) explained, “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (p. 93). It is simply a result of language within certain situations; it only exists in relation to something else. When working with post-colonial theory, this manifestation of power is generally presented in the form of a binary depicting the relationship between the West and every other country.

Binaries exist in many areas of society and always create a superior group and an inferior group. Some examples of binaries include male/female, straight/gay, developed/developing, etc. It is believed that these divisions perpetuate societal oppression by creating a power dynamic between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Within post-colonialism, there exists a power dynamic created through colonization in which a colonizer/colonized or West/“Other” binary is developed. Within this binary, the West is seen as superior and the “Other” as inferior (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978).

According to post-colonial theory, this binary is constructed within colonial discourse, which is created and maintained by Western language and culture. For example, in his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) explained that Western thought, through text, imagery, and vocabulary, created an identity of the “Orient” that was not necessarily accurate of the “true” or “real” Orient. Instead, it was a form of fiction created by Western elites and disseminated to its people through stories, fictional tales, songs, and simple everyday conversation (Said, 1978). These depictions of the “Orient” were primarily from the viewpoint of the Westerner and the actual voices of the people living in this area were never heard. This was, and continues to be, a form of power in which the West could create and maintain a fictional identity of an area and its people while silencing, and potentially hiding, the actual people themselves.

This misrepresentation or silencing of other cultures, however, is not always a conscious act. When individuals from the West speak about other areas of the world, they are always already constituted by and thinking and communicating within a culture and discourse marked by colonialism. The viewpoint of the colonist is always engrained in them even if it isn’t obvious to them or others because the “power even in casual

conversation to represent what is beyond metropolitan borders derives from the power of an imperial society” (Said, 1994, p.99). In other words, the perception that Western individuals have the right or even the knowledge to discuss other cultures is rooted in the perceived superior position and power created through colonialism.

This position is often discussed in relation to the process of researching cultures other than ones own, especially if that culture is seen as inferior within the global system. The goal of post-colonialism is to give voice to the silenced, however, as a researcher constructed within cultural discourses, the attempt to represent the silenced may in fact actually silence them instead. This becomes even more of a concern in a situation such as mine in which a Western researcher is studying a non-Western culture because there is an already constructed power dynamic and view that cannot be ignored or easily balanced. Gayatri Spivak (1994) refers to this conflict as the paradox of post-colonial theory. How can the researcher give voice to the silenced if attempting to represent them actually silences them even more?

Spivak (1999) explains two types of representation, *vertreten* and *darstellen*, each of which has different goals and processes. The first, *vertreten*, is “representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics” (p. 256). More simply, it is representation as a method of speaking on behalf of another by sharing their stories. *Darstellen*, on the other hand, is “representation as ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy” (Spivak, 1999, p. 256). In other words, it is representation as a simulacrum, essentially a copy of a copy, where there is no attempt to represent a “true” or foundational original. It is in this acknowledgement and utilization of both of these representation methods that the silenced can be heard and power can be equalized.

Another way to escape or equalize the power dynamic created by colonialism is to dismantle the West/"Other" binary in an attempt to show that they are simply divisions created through discourse and are not true realities. Since power is discursive and, therefore, not something that can be possessed, it can also be dismantled through discourse or resistance. As Foucault (1978) reminded us, "Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p. 101). This thwarting can be done through deconstruction.

The belief that discourse creates and shapes reality allows for the belief that we can also *re-shape* reality: "We have constructed the world as it is through language and cultural practice, and we can also deconstruct and reconstruct it" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 483). This is the goal of the process of deconstruction. Deconstruction is a method that involves the breaking apart of ideas and structures to look at each component individually. It then assesses the function of each piece and finds different ways in which they can be utilized. It is

not about tearing down but about rebuilding; it is not about pointing out an error but about looking at how a structure has been constructed, what holds it together, and what it produces. It is not a destructive, negative, or nihilistic practice, but an affirmative one. (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 482)

Therefore, deconstruction can be used within post-colonialism to lessen the impact of the colonial binary and the power relationship it creates.

**Truth.** The last post-colonial tenet utilized within my research is the claim that there is no “Truth” but, instead, are a multiplicity of truths, each specific to each person. This idea of multiple truths is evident within post-colonialism’s focus on individuality and respect of voice as explained above. If homogenous cultures don’t actually exist, as Bhabha (1994) claimed, and each person is unique with her/his own stories, experiences, and perceptions, how can there ever be a universal claim on one Truth? Instead, based on experience and the cultural discourses by which s/he is constructed and disciplined, each person will consciously or unconsciously interpret an event or piece of information in different ways and develop a meaning that is appropriate for her/him in that time and space. Therefore, as post-colonial theory states, attempting to claim or assert one interpretation, translation, or stable “truth” is impossible.

Due to the existence of multiple meanings and perspectives, it is important for post-colonial research to illuminate and give value to the meanings that are present in each person and their stories. Therefore, the methodology used within this research must also have this same value for stories and storytelling. It must be congruent with the understanding that not only is every person and every story unique, but they are also meaningful and contain local and partial truths even if it doesn’t appear as a familiar or comfortable truth to everyone. In addition, the methodology must allow for a telling of stories that recognizes the role and voice of the researcher and allows the participants to share their own meaning and truths.

### **Literature Review**

Within this research, there are several areas of study that are being utilized to develop a picture of the immigration experience for Indian women. For this research, I

am looking at the intersections of gender, culture, identity, discourse, post-colonialism, and, of course, immigration. Prior work in these areas can be found in fields such as political science, psychology, cultural studies, sociology, and others, however much of these writings only focus on one or two areas of interest. My research, therefore, differs from others in that it seeks to look at all of these components and how they interact with each other. In addition, unlike most of the works discussed below, I will use individual stories to provide a snapshot of how these elements come together and impact the lives of female Indian immigrants in the United States.

**Gender and Culture.** Much work has been done on the intersection of gender and culture. Researchers have looked at the ways in which gender is depicted or represented in certain countries. For example, in Salam Al-Mahadin's article, *Jordanian Women in Education*, Al-Mahadin discusses how the history and politics of Jordan have shaped the role and rights of women in that country (Al-Mahadin, 2004). There are other examples like this that are focused on women in other countries such as Chile and India (Purkayastha, Subramaniam, Desai, & Bose, 2003; Richards, 2005). Some of these studies have also contributed the cultural gender expectations to the role of discourse within that culture, as I will also do (Al-Mahadin, 2004; Richards, 2005). While these works address the intersection of gender and culture, they primarily focus on individuals who were born and still live within that culture. It is the additional component of culture transition and identity negotiation that I will include in my study in an attempt to see not only how gender is represented in one culture but also how gender is challenged when entering a new culture maintained by a different discourse.

**Competing Discourse.** Several scholars have also studied the process of navigating competing or changing identities and discourses. Some look at the difficulties in negotiating religious and cultural discourses (Predelli, 2004) while others look at the complications created in navigating two differing and contradictory discourses (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). For example, Karen Pyke and Denise Johnson studied the lives of Korean and Vietnamese American women who must negotiate competing gender roles depending on their location. Although their home may be run in a traditional style concurrent with their ethnicity's culture, at school and/or work, they are faced with western discourses. Therefore, they must maintain an identity that is congruent with both cultures and themselves as well. In both this study and Predelli's study of Muslim women in Norway, however, these women were born and raised within this mixed society. They were not confronted with a change in discourse after already having developed an identity within one culture and discourse. So while these works do reflect a part of what my research will look at, it is the added element of transition into a new culture and a new discourse that my research will address. This component of transition will allow me to see a potential renegotiation of identity later in life rather than just a development of identity in a mixed discursive society.

**Gender and Immigration.** In the field of immigration, there have been several research studies looking at the intersection of gender and immigration. Their focus varies from looking at the patterns and laws pertaining to female immigrants to looking at the psychological state of female immigrants. An example of the first type of research was conducted by Joan Fitzpatrick (1997) who explains that although there are more female immigrants in the United States, immigration policies tend to favor men over women.

She looks at several immigration laws and finds that, primarily due to the work status of male and female immigrants, men are advantaged over women due to their work sector and employment status. This information will be very helpful in informing my discourse analysis and will provide an understanding of the legal framework under which my participants enter the United States.

The second type of research focusing on immigration and gender looks at the emotional and psychological state of immigrant women. For example, in qualitative research conducted with Salvadoran women currently living in Los Angeles, Kristine Zentgraf (2002) found that although immigrant women think more positively about their lives in their new country as compared to men, this is largely dependent upon the role and position they held in their home country. It is this inability to universalize the experiences of all immigrant women that is the foundation for my research. What is missing from this research, and what I aim to include, however, is the awareness or acknowledgement of competing expectations and the process of negotiating differing discourses.

**Post-Colonialism and Immigration.** The theory of post-colonialism is not often found in the study of immigration. Through the use of this analytical lens and qualitative research, my research will provide a new way of looking at the field of immigration. It will remain aware of and continually address ways in which Western influence impacts the research being done and the way immigrant women share their stories. In addition, through open-ended questions and the use of an unstructured interview format, it will allow for the sharing of experiences free from direction or researcher agenda. It is this ability to allow the participants to share their stories and communicate their constructions of meaning that my research will add to the field of immigration research.

## **Conclusion**

The gaps in research as discussed above creates a silence around the experiences of a large number of women who have gone through not only a physical and geographical shift but potentially, an identity shift as well. In the United States alone, there are approximately 20 million female immigrants to which this description could apply and yet despite this large presence, many times, the voices of these women are silenced or unheard. However, not only are they silenced but many times are often misrepresented with the creation of an identity as an “Other.” As Said (1978) explains with his discussion of “the Orient,” these “Other” identities are often developed to show difference and inferiority, over which power can be enacted. Although this identity is not necessarily accurate, it is often assumed to be a Truth by the general population rather than just one way of seeing. Hence, with this research, I hoped to show this same audience that there are alternative ways of seeing people and cultures, and that there is not one stable identity or Truth for any group of people. Therefore, this post-colonial narrative inquiry sought to illuminate the personal experiences of women as they navigated differing discourses experienced as a result of immigration to the United States.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methodology**

In utilizing the theory of post-colonialism, I sought to share the stories and experiences of the women with whom I spoke in an effort to give voice to a population that is not generally heard. Simply applying this theory to my research, however, will not illuminate these experiences enough. It is also imperative that the methodology and methods I use allow for the communication of voices other than that of the researcher while still recognizing the presence of the researcher within the telling. For this reason, I chose to use the methodology of narrative inquiry, relying on unstructured life interviews, journaling, contextualizing analysis, and creative analytic practice. This choice of methodology, methods, analysis/interpretation, and representation allow me as the researcher to address my subjectivities and create an avenue through which new stories can be told. Throughout the following pages, I will explain my selection of participants, research questions, and how my theory of post-colonialism guides my research structure.

### **Participants**

Within this study of immigration, I have chosen to specifically focus on the experiences of women who have emigrated from India and now legally reside in the United States. In accordance with my goal of illuminating unique and independent stories, my research sample size for this project was six female participants who were born in India but now reside in the United States. Because I was not attempting to prove or disprove a theory through these interviews, I believe this sample size provided me with an array of different stories that illuminated the multiplicity of experiences surrounding a similar event.

All participants were located through coordination with the India Association of Memphis and purposeful snowball sampling. Pseudonyms were selected by the researcher and each interview recording and transcription was labeled accordingly and kept in a secure location. Specific criteria for each participant included:

- 1) identify as female
- 2) born in India and lived there for at least 20 consecutive years
- 3) legally resides in the United States
- 4) ability to speak English fluently

The purpose of these criteria was to locate participants who were fully engrained in and developed by the discourses of their home country but have been in the United States long enough to have become immersed in its “culture” and to have experienced the process of negotiation between India and America.

The decision to study women from India was based on several factors. First, many post-colonial theorists and other scholars reference India when discussing the time of colonization and the application of the tenets of post-colonial theory. Therefore, there is a good amount of general research data on this country and its population to which I can refer. In addition to this source is the first-hand information I received while visiting Delhi and Kolkata in May 2011. This time in India provided me with a larger understanding of Indian practices, customs, and people that could not have been learned in a book. The availability of participants in the mid-South United States is also high, as 4.3% of the foreign born population now living in Tennessee are from India, second only to Mexico (MPI Data Hub, 2010). Finally, while Indian culture has characteristics of a patriarchal system, it is not rigid enough that I was unable to speak to the women without

their husbands or fathers being present. This increased access to my participants and helped ensure more uninterrupted and confidential communication.

### **Research Questions**

To explore how these women negotiated differing, and potentially competing, discourses due to a change from Indian society to American society, I focused on four research questions:

- 1) What discourses do immigrant women encounter upon entering the United States?
- 2) How do immigrant women negotiate potentially different discourses between India and the United States?
- 3) How are these discourses manifested the longer the woman has been in the United States?
- 4) How are these negotiations contextualized within the larger discourses and expectations of immigrants in the U.S.?

I sought answers for these research questions in the stories of Indian women regarding their experiences of immigration, I used the methodology of narrative inquiry, which seeks to elicit narratives from the participants through the use of unstructured, life story interviews. I also employed the methodology of discourse analysis through which I examined documents created for and disseminated to immigrants. Within this analysis, I focused on identifying the discursive environment and expectations constructed for immigrant women. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical framework that guided this research and how it impacted my choice of methodology, data collection methods, analysis, and representation. I will then conclude by discussing my

researcher subjectivities and addressing previous research conducted regarding competing discourse, immigration discourse, and gender discourse.

### **Post-Colonialism and Methodology**

Because of the post-colonial tenets of identity, power, and truth and the demands they place on research methodology, the optimal methodological choice for post-colonial research and, specifically, for my research was narrative inquiry. This methodology strives to illuminate the voices of each individual and privileges each story as meaningful and valid. Within this section, I will provide a brief description of the major tenets of narrative inquiry and how this methodology “does itself differently” when used in conjunction with post-colonial theory.

**Traditional Narrative Inquiry.** The primary goal of narrative inquiry is the privileging of individual stories as meaningful. Susan Chase (2005) defined contemporary narrative inquiry as “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). Narrative inquiry is generally used when wanting to understand a situation or experience lived by another person or group. Researchers who use this method believe that every story is important and worthy of being told.

Three primary elements of narrative inquiry will be present within this research. The first element is the use of narrative in representing the information related in a life story, life history, oral history or other type of narrative inquiry. Another feature is the focus on the way in which the story is told and not just on the story itself. Narrative inquiry finds meaning not just through the story itself but also through the words that are

chosen, the emotion that is evoked, and even the words that are not said. The final element is the presence of the researcher's voice – "narrative researchers are likely to use the first person when presenting their work, thereby emphasizing their own narrative action" (Chase, 2005, p. 657). All of these elements come together to support the primary goal of narrative inquiry and this research project – privileging stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As explained by Estrella (2007), a narrative methodology such as narrative inquiry allows for "disruption, of questioning the accepted ways of understanding the world" (p. 379). This is vital for post-colonial research because of its emphasis on the dismantling of dominant Western thought throughout the world. Through reading and interpreting the stories of the women, the reader will be exposed to stories that are not commonly heard and, therefore, to potentially new ways of seeing and understanding people around the world.

**Post-Colonial Narrative Inquiry.** To accurately fulfill this goal of providing a new way of viewing the world, it is important that the post-colonial tenets of identity, power, and truth that will be present in my research also direct the remainder of my research design including the methods of data collection, the selection of participants, the data analysis and representation, and the researcher position. Each of these decisions was made with reference toward these areas of post-colonial theory as well as the focus on narrative inquiry's privileging of stories.

### **Data Collection**

**Discourse Analysis.** My first step in data collection was a discourse analysis, which is "the examination of argumentative structure in documents and other written or

spoken statements as well as the practices through which utterances are made” (Hajer, 2006, p. 66). In accordance with my use of post-colonial theory, which strives to expose the normative and, at times, oppressive presence of Western values, I specifically examined this text for mention of or insinuation of Western ideals and modes of living as superior and necessary for “right” living. I also focused on what was communicated as “necessary” to be a citizen of the United States, including appropriate ways of acting, living, working, thinking, and knowing.

For this project, I analyzed the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ document entitled, “Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants.” I chose to use this guide because I wished to examine the messages that were communicated directly to new immigrants upon their arrival to the United States. This guide is potentially the first exposure immigrants have to discourses regarding America and American life. Therefore, by understanding the discourses that are disseminated through these writings, I was able to observe how my participants approached these discourses, if at all, and the power of the discourses.

In an attempt to identify and uncover these discourses, I used a type of discourse analysis referred to as critical discourse analysis as explained by Teun A. van Dijk (2001). Critical discourse analysis “focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society” (van Dijk, 2001, p. 353). Using this type of analysis, I examined texts for Western discourse structures that may create social oppression by controlling the expectations and requirements of immigrants through the use of laws and norms. More specifically I

looked at ways in which discourses “control mind and action of (less) powerful groups” and the “social consequences of such control” (van Dijk, 2001, p. 355).

Through this analysis, I hoped to provide contextual support for my interviews by developing the framework and context in which my participants’ stories were told. In this light, the overall goal of this discourse analysis was to gain a better understanding of the discursive context and environment that immigrants to the United States are confronted with upon their arrival. I also sought to uncover Western expectations and normative assumptions that are communicated to individuals as they immigrate. Through analyzing this document and the interviews as described below, I was able to illuminate the discourses that were disseminated by the United States through the guide as well as the discourses that were faced and negotiated by the women.

**Narrative Life Story Interviews.** As its name infers, a life story interview seeks to elicit a participant’s life story, which refers to a specific time in a person’s life. However, it is more than simply a telling of a life event but is also “an organization of experience. In relating the elements of experience to each other and to the present telling, the teller asserts their meanings” (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 8). Therefore, the use of life story interviews will provide the opportunity for each participant to tell her story and share her meanings and truths (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

One goal of the life story interview is to allow the participant to tell her story in her own way, free from researcher guidance. This is done through the use of an unstructured interview guide that contains a few general questions that serve to jumpstart the participant’s stories and memories. The freedom provided by this type of interview creates a setting in which she can recover and share her own experience in a way that is

meaningful for her. It allows participants to “sift out the relevant details, remembering that what is essential...is that they help to construct the meaning of their experiences, the meaning of their lives in context” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 81). In order to facilitate this type of storytelling experience, it is imperative that researcher interruption be kept to a minimum, only interjecting to gain clarity or more information on a topic already mentioned by the participant (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Each of these attributes of life story interviews is important when using post-colonial theory. First, this interview format values the importance of difference and individuality and does not diminish the diversity of experience present within every event or situation. Second, the minimized level of researcher guidance and interruption provides amplification for the participant’s voice rather than the researcher’s voice and allows the participant to directly tell her story and speak for herself. In doing this, the power dynamic created through colonial discourse and the Western/“Other” binary is diminished. Finally, life story interviews respect each story and allow for each participant to share her story and illuminate meanings and truths in the most comfortable way.

Each life story interview lasted approximately 1 to 2 hours and took place at a location selected based on convenience to the participant, accessibility to the participant and researcher, level of privacy, and availability. Although I utilized an unstructured interview guide that contained a few lead questions and some potential topics for discussion, the interviews were generally directed based on the subject the participant chose to discuss. For example, if a participant did not mention religion, I did not ask her about it even though it may have been a part of my interview guide. After transcribing

and analyzing each interview, I followed up with participants regarding any additional questions that I had.

In conjunction with the unstructured life interviews, I also utilized methods of personal journaling. The goal of these journals was to be consistently aware of my own subjectivities and biases and ensure that they did not inhibit or block the voices of my participants. I audio-recorded and/or wrote my journal entries prior to entering an interview, after leaving the interview, and immediately before analysis. Within these journals, I addressed my own feelings about the interviews, my hesitations about entering the next stage of research, and my own assumptions that I had prior to and after conducting the research.

### **Analysis/Interpretation**

All interviews were audio recorded, and later transcribed as accurately as possible. I then used contextualizing narrative analysis to analyze and interpret all of the collected data. The purpose of this type of analysis is to show overlap, connections, and tensions within each story. I specifically employed the listening guide method of analysis as described by Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch (2003). This method acknowledges the many aspects and influences of a person's life and the stories they tell. The process involves listening to the interviews or reading the transcriptions multiple times using different contextual frames of thought each time. This allows for a "tuning in or listening to distinct aspects of a person's expression of her or his experience within a particular relational context" (Gilligan et al., p. 379). This is beneficial when using post-colonial theory as it gives the researcher the opportunity to listen for the presence of

multiple truths and meanings in each story. Throughout each listening and reading, I broke the data down into categories that signified recurring themes.

Within this step of the analyzing process, I read through each interview several times, using a different focus on each review. During my first read-through, I focused on myself as the researcher. This consisted of reconnecting with the initial reactions I had when conducting the interviews and being attune to my current reactions as I read through the stories. I made note of all of these responses in journal entries, of which I later used excerpts in my “researcher remarks” section of my representation as described below. During my second read-through, I focused on stories that I felt addressed or were developed by American discourse. In this step, I utilized the discourses I identified within my discourse analysis to help locate elements of what is often communicated as an “American” way of life. My procedure consisted of copying excerpts from each of the interview transcripts and pasting them into another document based on what discourse I identified within that section of data. After I had gone through each transcript, I had quotes from all of the participants that I felt represented each discourse. In my final read-through, I took a wider view and looked for topics, like travel or money, that were repeated within each interview and throughout all of the interviews. Once again, I copied excerpts from each transcript and pasted them into another document based on the topic addressed. After completing this stage of analysis on all of the transcripts, I had stories from each of the women regarding 33 topics.

Next, I employed Coralie McCormack’s (2004) method of “storying stories” to re-story and contextualize the data within a narrative. In congruence with one of the goals within post-colonial theory, this type of analysis privileges individual stories as unique

and meaningful. Utilizing the discourse and topic documents created above, I looked at the most commonly discussed topics and the ways different topics overlapped with each other. For example, many excerpts that had been pasted into the “education” document were also pasted into the “finance” and “meeting people” documents, all of which were commonly discussed by each participant. By making note of these types of overlaps and following the connections from one topic to another, I was able to create a basic outline of my storyline. Once I had determined what topics needed to be discussed based on the frequency with which it was brought up in the interviews, I looked at other areas of interest that could serve as discussion points. For example, a few participants had mentioned that travel and exposure to other cultures in India made it easier for them to adjust in the United States. Therefore, I knew I had to discuss the importance of travel and decided to have one of my characters go on a short trip within the U.S., which one of my participants did regularly. Finally, I arranged my storylines based on the way in which stories were generally told to me during the interviews, with a chronological progression through life interspersed with reminiscences and stories from the past.

### **Representation**

Once my information was analyzed as explained above, the data was represented using a method of creative analytic practice. Creative analytic practice is a form of representation that “seeks to reflect experiences in ways that represent their personal and social meanings” (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 120). It strives to share the meanings within each story as communicated by the participant rather than an interpretation or assumption of those truths. It does not, however, ignore the presence of the researcher. Instead, it “foregrounds the researcher’s experience and interpretation of the project as part of the

representation of the findings” (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 124) This, therefore, is the optimal form of representation for post-colonial works because of its attention to individuality, meanings, and voice, both of the participant and the researcher.

Within creative analytic practice, the participant’s voice is communicated through an artistic and often narrative format such as poetry, letters, screenplays, short stories, etc. Therefore, rather than record the data in a traditional research format, I constructed narratives based on the women’s experiences and stories. These narratives were built around the lives of two composite character, Padma and Abhaya, who I constructed utilizing the characteristics and experiences of my participants. These two characters do not identically resemble any one participant but rather each contains parts of all six of the women I spoke with. In order to do this, I separated my participants’ stories based on the time of their life in which the experiences occurred. I then arranged the stories into two groups based on similarities and differences. For example, a few of my participants spoke about living with their family when they arrived in the United States while others did not. Therefore, I made two different groups based on this difference. I went through all of the stories in this way, slowly building on each group to create two full storylines.

Next, I developed the narrative itself, which consisted of six email conversations (seventeen messages) over a three-month span. Throughout these messages, Padma shared her experiences of immigration ten years ago and provided advice and encouragement to Abhaya who had only been in the U.S. for just over one year. I chose to use this form of representation because many of my participants mentioned experiences in which they reached out to new women who had recently arrived in

America from India. In addition, this type of communication allowed me to show a progression over time, which was the focus of one of my research questions.

In the chapter following this narrative, I also provided two additional methods of analysis. The purpose in placing them in this order was to “entice the audience and encourage them to form their own interpretation of the social world being presented” before evaluating my interpretation (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 126). This relates to post-structural and post-colonial thought, which believes that meaning is created for each individual based on her or his own experiences and situational context. I, therefore, would like the reader to formulate this meaning that is appropriate to them and then access the meaning that I identified. Therefore, in chapter 5, I provided an explicit interpretation of the data, discussing the themes addressed in each of the six conversations. At the end of each of the explicit interpretations, I also provided a section titled, “Researcher Remarks,” which contain my own theory guided notions and subjectivities regarding those themes. As a western researcher using post-colonial theory to study the lives of another group, it is imperative that my potential biases are shared and understood. For this reason, I included these subjectivities in an effort to allow the audience to understand my own feelings on the subjects addressed so that they can better evaluate the extent to which these feelings may have entered my representation.

**Trustworthiness.** As explained above, throughout the process of data collection, I kept personal journals, recording my feedback and feelings about the information being collected. Included in these journals were personal reflections about my position as a Western researcher studying another culture. This was imperative within this post-colonial research as it was necessary to recognize the presence of my own feelings and

address how they impacted my analysis and representation of the data in order not to reinforce the power dynamic created within colonial discourse. In addition to these personal journals, I also kept analytic memos regarding the collection process itself so as to increase rigor and confidence in my use of qualitative research methods.

### **Researcher Position**

**Post-Colonial Paradox of Representation.** In conducting this research, it was imperative that I remain aware of my position as a Western researcher studying other cultures. As discussed above, current Western research regarding individuals in non-Western cultures must strive to renegotiate the power dynamic created by colonialism by allowing the voices of the people themselves to be heard. This can be done in a couple ways. First, it is important that research methodology be open to the voices of the participants while addressing the potential presence of researcher voice. It must aim to share stories and be as upfront about Western bias as possible so as to avoid the taint of assumptions and stereotypes that are embedded in colonial discourse. Secondly, the researcher must be aware of and open about her/his subjectivities and positionality throughout the research process. Therefore, in addition to the subjectivity sections within my analysis, it is also important to share the following subjectivities regarding my experiences with immigration, immigrants, and individuals from other countries.

**Subjectivity and Positionality.** In the process of understanding the experiences of immigrant women, there are many areas in which my own life experiences may play a role in how I view these women and their lives. Even the term “immigrant” carries specific connotations, both positive and negative, which have been developed through cultural assumptions I have encountered. This research, however, addresses more than

just immigration. It will also speak of identities constructed, and possibly re-constructed, by gender, culture, religion, race, and class. My views and feelings associated with each of these areas can also impact both the way I conduct the research and analyze the information. In being aware of these subjectivities, I am acknowledging my own potential biases in an attempt to illuminate how the cultural values I have encountered throughout my life may impact the way I see the world.

First, and most importantly considering my use of post-colonial theory, is my position as a “Western” researcher born and raised in the United States. As explained earlier, this one factor could alter my perception and analysis of the data I collect. Although this cannot be controlled for or completely managed, it is necessary that I am consistently aware of its presence and that I consider its potential influence on my research throughout the process. This will be done through the use of maintaining personal journals noting my reactions and feelings regarding the research process and my participants and their stories.

In addition to my position as a Western researcher, I also need to be aware of how my upbringing may impact my research. I was born in New Jersey where I lived for the first thirteen years of my life before moving with my family to Tennessee. This move changed more areas of my life than just my geographic location. It also altered my religion, economic situation, communication style, gender expectations, and perception of people and the world. I became more aware of these changes as I grew older and over time, I have struggled to negotiate the differing values and expectations between the two cultures; in many cases, they both still have an impact on my thoughts, views, and beliefs. This conflict is evident in several areas associated with my research including

how I view immigration, individuals from other countries, and the process of physical relocation.

The word “immigrant” carries conflicted meanings for me. I grew up going on school field trips to Ellis Island where I learned about people coming to the United States in boats from countries like Norway, Germany, and Ireland. I saw pictures and heard stories of the hardships the immigrants went through on their voyage; how they were seeking better lives for themselves and their families; and how many who came with nothing found opportunity and acceptance in the United States. I learned that my family was among these immigrants and that I owed a debt of gratitude to them for the life I was able to live. We were to respect these ancestors and the work that they did to make this country great.

After living in Tennessee for several years, however, I realized my view of immigrants had changed. I now primarily thought of immigrants as people from South America and Latin America who worked in the United States doing labor jobs for little money. I began to question immediately why they had come and if they were even here legally. I looked at them as an “Other” – as someone below me. There was always political debate surrounding immigrants and the dominant view I encountered was that “they” were taking our jobs and shouldn’t be here. While my views never aligned with that way of thinking, I did begin to look at them with less respect and more caution. I began to see these immigrants as different from the immigrants I was taught about as a child. I still respected my ancestors and the work they did but I had trouble applying that same respect to the new idea of immigrant that I encountered. Throughout my study of political science and international relations, my view of immigrants has begun to shift

again. I try not to apply certain characteristics, expectations, or motives to people who have immigrated to the United States. I find this more difficult to do, however, when hearing or using the word “immigrant” because it is laden with meaning that is hard to dispel.

Also included in my researcher subjectivities is the way in which my upbringing within a Christian missionary framework continues to impact how I view individuals from around the world. In New Jersey, I was raised in a small Methodist church, in which I was active in choir, youth group, and Sunday school. When I was about ten years old, I vividly remember my father and brother going on a mission trip to Belize. At the time, I could not even imagine the type of people they would meet and the horrible situations they would see. When we moved to Tennessee, we became active in a southern Baptist church. This church was very focused on international mission trips and sent teams to Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Afghanistan, and Africa. The reason for spending thousands of dollars and going on these trips was to share our religious views and values with other people. I myself went on a church trip to China where the goal was to share our faith with a small people group in the countryside and pray over their town. While people from other cultures were never purposely described as inferior during these trips, the implication that our way of life was better than theirs was evident in the mission. Although I no longer espouse this idea that American values or beliefs are any more valuable, meaningful, or “true” than any other, it still impacts my way of thinking to a certain extent because it was such a large part of my family’s identity.

My family’s relocation from New Jersey to Tennessee was probably the most difficult time in my life. I had born and raised in the same small town and I had known

most of my friends since they or I was born. Although my family had traveled around the country quite a bit, New Jersey was all I really knew and it was my home. Therefore, at the age of thirteen when we packed up all of our belongings and moved to Tennessee, I was devastated. New Jersey and Tennessee were drastically different from each other. I had to get used to the way people spoke, dressed, and interacted with each other. During my first day of school, I was immediately targeted for my funny way of talking and my boyish look. It took me approximately two years to finally find my place and get used to living in Tennessee but those two years were very difficult. It is with this experience of physical relocation that I enter this research project. I assume that all individuals who make a move like this will struggle to feel comfortable.

As is obvious throughout this statement, my experiences in two different areas of the United States have created many contradicting ideas and beliefs. It is difficult to overtly state exactly how I feel about certain issues or situations because I, myself, am conflicted about many of them. However, regardless of these variances and contradictions, all of these viewpoints come together to create my largest subjectivity – I am an American. Whether I am from the northeast or the mid-south, I am still from the United States and my views are shaped by the values of this country. Although I believe that I have shed many of my expectations regarding gender, religion, or race, I have only done this within a Western culture. As I have traveled to other countries such as India, China, or South Africa, I have realized that I still have assumptions about what is appropriate. In addition, I have expectations for people from other countries that are based on Western principles and discourses. For example, when traveling around South Africa, I was surprised to see how developed the country was and how satisfied the

people are. In the West, the continent of Africa is usually addressed as a whole and images of poverty and desperation are projected onto it. This is not everyone's experience in Africa but many don't realize that until they travel to these places and see for themselves. Even then, it remains difficult to shed those expectations. Although I have been to India and feel like I am familiar with the country and its people, I recognize that I still see everything through my Western lens. That, however, does not discount my words but instead will hopefully uncover how Western values can impact the way we see our world and maybe afford us a new way of seeing it differently.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Discourse Analysis**

#### **Immigration Debate**

The topic of immigration is very prominent within political and social discussions. There are many debates surrounding immigration, such as the affect of immigrants on the economy; ways to manage the current illegal immigrant population; and how, when, and why foreign-born individuals should be granted legal status within the United States (Lee, 2013). Whether you agree or disagree with the multitude of stances that are being taken, it is undeniable that the conversation must occur due to the large number of foreign-born individuals that currently reside in the United States.

Of the almost 314 million individuals living in the United States, roughly 33.6 million, or approximately 10%, were born outside of the U.S.. Of this estimated 33 million, 22.1 million legally reside in the United States, including legal permanent residents (LPRs), naturalized citizens, individuals granted asylum or refuge, temporary workers, and students. This means that roughly 11.5 million individuals, or approximately 3% of the U.S. population, are in the United States as unauthorized, or illegal, immigrants (Hoefler, Rytina & Baker, 2012). Based on these numbers, it is no surprise that a large portion of the immigration debate is centered on the presence and activities of illegal immigrants and their effects on the economy and society as a whole.

The debate surrounding immigration is largely focused on three areas: the effect on the economy, the element of safety, and the immigration process itself. The first debate, the effect of immigrants on the economy, is made up of two very distinct and opposing views. The first argument is that illegal immigrants are hindering American

citizens from locating jobs because they are willing to do the more undesirable, hard labor jobs for less money. This, therefore, decreases the number of jobs available and increases unemployment rates for American citizens. The opposing argument, however, claims that illegal immigrants aid the economy because the jobs that are generally held by these men and women require work that many Americans would not be willing to do, therefore filling a gap and a need.

The second debate regarding immigration revolves around a concern for safety. When an individual arrives in the United States without any documentation, it is impossible to know of any prior criminal activity or convictions. This is a threat not only to public safety but to national security as well. The Obama administration has therefore made multiple attempts to combat this problem including an investigation aimed at identifying and removing those who have past criminal records, have broken immigration laws repeatedly, or may be a threat to national security. This investigation led to the deportation of almost 400,000 immigrants in 2011 (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement). In addition, the Obama administration increased development on the Secure Communities program, which allows the FBI to share fingerprints with the Department of Homeland Security in order to track possible immigrants who have a criminal record.

Another common debate regarding immigration pertains to the immigration process itself. Many say that the process of filing for immigration status is too difficult and the waiting period too long. Some people believe that streamlining the process would lead to lower illegal immigration numbers as more individuals would be willing to file for legal status and wait for approval. This would also attract more skilled workers who

would like to work in the United States but have been daunted by the application process. It is believed that “reforming the cumbersome visa and citizenship process for immigrants – particularly skilled foreign workers in high-demand STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields – is a priority to ensure that the country retains its competitiveness in the global economy” (Lee, 2013).

When you look at these three debates it is not difficult to see that the goal is to keep out illegal immigrants and allow in legal immigrants. The question becomes, is this simply due to the need to abide by the law or is there something else behind these debates? The first two areas of debate generally focus specifically on illegal immigrants rather than the entire immigrant population. Of course, in most situations, individuals who have a criminal record would not be granted legal immigration status so this threat is minimized when referring to legal immigrants. However, in regards to the employment debate, most legal immigrants hold jobs in the United States but it is rarely argued that they are hurting the economy by taking jobs from American citizens.

In regards to the safety debate, the legal status of the immigrant obviously takes a back seat to the issue of protecting American citizens, as it should. The focus, therefore, is not about making these individuals legal but instead about keeping them from entering the United States completely. The employment debate, however, is not so clear-cut. Illegal immigrants who are in the United States simply to earn money and take care of their families pose no physical threat to American citizens. And yet rather than focus on how to make these individuals legal, many people focus on how to remove them from the United States and how to keep others like them from coming in. While many argue that this is because illegal immigrants are bad for the economy, the Immigration Policy Center

claims that the U.S. economy would lose over \$550 billion in economic activity if illegal immigrants were removed (Immigration Policy Center). Therefore, based on the absence of physical danger posed by illegal immigrants and the benefits that they have on the U.S. economy, the question regarding why individuals want to remove them from the country must be asked.

When you take the third debate into consideration, the issue becomes even more confusing. While individuals argue for the removal of certain immigrants from the United States despite their benefit to the economy, there is also an argument that the immigration application process needs to be easier to allow immigrants into the United States legally. However, if it was simply a matter of legality, there would be a stronger movement toward making current illegal immigrants legal rather than working to have them removed. So why is there a need to remove one form of economy-benefitting immigrant from the United States while allowing others in? It could be deduced that this is because many legal immigrants hold higher-level and more respected jobs in fields such as business, science, and math. So while all immigrants, legal or illegal, may benefit the U.S. economy, only legal immigrants are wanted in the United States because of their educational or professional offerings, hence the reason they were admitted legal status.

When analyzing this using a post-colonial lens, the reason for this discrepancy lies within the discourses found throughout American society. Discourse is a language-created classification and social construct, which is “not a language or a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs” (Scott, 1988, p. 35). For example, the discourse of gender is made up of a history of statements, assumptions, and beliefs about what it means to be a man or

woman. Over time, these assumptions began to shape the parameters of gender and created a framework in which each person must fit to be an “acceptable” man or woman. Within post-colonial theory as used in this research, the discourse revolves around what it means to be an individual living in America. There is a framework, or discourse, of what it means to be an “acceptable” American citizen or resident. This discourse guides the creation of immigration laws and the development of immigration policies and, ultimately, determines who is allowed to enter the United States and how they should behave once they arrive. In the following discourse analysis, I will focus on identifying these discourses within a welcome packet created by the Department of Homeland Security.

### **Analysis of “Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants”**

**Introduction.** In 2007, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) arm of the Department of Homeland Security published an information packet titled, “Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants”. This document is now available in English and thirteen additional languages including Urdu, Somali, Haitian Creole, Arabic, French, Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, and Russian. The goal of this guide is to provide information that helps new immigrants adjust to life in the United States and to find what they “need for everyday life” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 1). This information is communicated within the seven chapters of the guide, placed in the following order: About this Guide, Your Rights and Responsibilities as a Permanent Resident, Getting Settled in the United States, Education and Childcare, Emergencies and Safety, Learning about the United States, and Becoming a U.S. Citizen.

Since this guide is only 114 pages in length and contains “basic information that will help [immigrants] settle in the United States,” it is understandable to assume that the guide will only provide information that is imperative for new immigrants to know. Therefore, this guide is a representation of what the U.S. government deems as the most important elements of America and citizenship. For this reason, I believe it is important to analyze the information it presents and the image and expectations it creates of America and its citizens. In the following discourse analysis, I will address some of these topics that are discussed throughout the guide and the societal discourses it perpetuates and disseminates to new immigrants.

**The Image of an American.** As you read through the USCIS’ guide for new immigrants, you slowly develop an image of what it means to live in America and be American. Within the guide there exists this single, ideal American citizen identity as well as a single “law-abiding America” in which everyone is wealthy, healthy, and educated (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 17). While the characteristics that make up these images are not outwardly stated as American, it is not difficult to see that they are presenting the expectations of America and Americans. It appears that by creating and communicating this image to new immigrants, they are trying to mold them into what it is believed all Americans should be. This is done through the creation of discourses regarding behavior, involvement, education, finance, and employment.

***Behavior Discourse: Americans are upstanding, moral citizens who are trustworthy and loyal to their family, their community, and their country.*** Within this guide, there are several references to how somebody living in the U.S. should behave. For example, there is a list of crimes, including murder, terrorist activities, sexual assault, and

illegal trafficking, that could lead to “serious problems” if committed. While these are understandable expectations for any individual, the guide also addresses the importance of being “a person of good moral character” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 97). Although this term is very fluid and may be different for each individual person, the guide provides a list of “behaviors that might show a lack of good moral character” including, “drunk driving or being drunk most of the time;” “illegal gambling;” “prostitution;” “lying to gain immigration benefits;” “failing to pay court-ordered child support;” “committing terrorist acts;” and “persecuting someone because of race, religion, national origin, political opinion, or social group” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 97). Since these seven items made the list, it is understandable to assume that these are considered to be the worse offenses to moral character.

***Involvement Discourse: Americans are active and social in their community.*** In addition to providing information about how to behave, this guide also communicates activities or involvement opportunities that they believe new immigrants should take advantage of. In most cases, this revolves around a “community” that appears to be the source for assistance, information, relationships, and education. These communities, however, are not created by the individual but instead are already formed with “your own community” being determined by where you live, your religious affiliation, or your school district (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 2). In a section regarding community, it states, “getting involved in your community will help you feel at home here” and then lists several communities in which you can become active including your place of worship, neighborhood association, community organization, and language class.

In providing these community recommendations, the guide is stating what types of activities and associations are important for individuals to engage with during their free time. For example, the recommendation of joining groups at a place of worship communicates that it is important to be involved with some form of religion. In reality, however, many native-born American citizens do not have a place of worship nor do they become involved with these forms of community at all. This involvement, however, is not communicated simply as a suggestion but a necessity as the guide later states, “one important responsibility is to get involved in your own community” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 75). Therefore, if you want to “feel at home” in America and be a proper American citizen, you must participate in a community that has already been determined for you.

***Education Discourse: Americans’ education options and opportunities are based on their financial status, religion, and age.*** When reading this guide, there is no doubt of the importance of education in the United States. At the beginning of the section regarding education, it states, “to make sure all children are prepared to succeed, the U.S. provides free public education”. It then provides information regarding different types of education, how to enroll your child in school, and answers to commonly asked questions. In explaining the differences between public and private school, the guide primarily discusses cost and religion. It explains, “public schools are free and do not offer religious instruction” while private schools require a fee and are often run by religious groups. Not only does this communicate an inaccurate view of public school, as it is paid for by taxes and religious beliefs such as creationism are taught in public schools, but it also infers that schools are based on religion.

After discussing childhood education, or the twelve years for which “most American children are in school”, the next two sections address colleges and universities and adult education. It is explained that college is for “young adults” who have completed high school and adult education is either for individuals who did not complete high school and need a GED or adults who want to learn certain skills generally taught at community colleges. This delineation seems to state that you can only attend college while you are a “young adult” fresh out of high school and if you are an older adult, you have to settle for more job-related learning. Therefore, this guide communicates that the appropriate learning structure in America is to complete twelve years of childhood education and then go directly to college and then to the workplace. Once you reach a certain age where you are no longer a “young adult” or if you did not complete the first education step, then there are classes you can take to learn skills that can help you in your job.

***Finance Discourse: Americans must have a house, insurance, education, and healthcare even if they can't afford it.*** In almost every section of this guide, there is a reference to financial status, needs, or use. It communicates that everyone should spend money in certain ways, own certain items, or go in debt for certain reasons. For example, when discussing living options, it states, “In the United States, most people spend about 25 percent of their income on housing” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 20). Although this may be statistically true, what is the purpose of communicating this information? If a family makes \$100,000 a year and they only spend \$10,000 a year on their home, are they not living in an American way? Later in this same section it also claims the individuals “need to buy homeowner’s insurance” (Welcome to the United

States, 2007, p. 25). For many people, including those born in the United States, homeowner's insurance is a luxury, not a necessity but in making this statement, it appears that everyone must and does have it. This is also the case in the discussion of health insurance, which is necessary because "medical care is expensive" (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 44). Nowhere, however, does it discuss the cost of health insurance but instead claims it as a necessity.

In addition to the information regarding how to spend your money, there is also a lot of information regarding what to do if you don't have money. In a section ironically titled "Taking Care of Your Money," there is a box of text that addresses credit cards which "allow you to make purchases and pay for them later" (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 31) and discusses credit cards in connection with credit ratings and the ability to buy a house or car. This infers that credit cards, and therefore debt, are needed if you ever want to own a home or vehicle. It also addresses debt as acceptable or common when taking out loans for college or university. There are also other situations in which accruing financial debt is acceptable, such as taking out a loan for college or for a house. Debt, however, is not the only option when you do not have money for certain needs. The guide also explains that financial assistance is available for things such as healthcare, groceries, education, and childcare.

***Employment Discourse: Americans work for benefits and money.*** Permanent residents of the United States have the right to "live and work permanently anywhere in the U.S." and the guide provides a list of ways to find a job (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 8). It also explains the need for a resume, how to fill out an application, and what to expect during a job interview. In this section, it also provides a list of

questions you “may want to ask” the employer during your interview. These questions include, “What are the hours of work?,” “How much does the job pay?,” “How many vacation days are there?,” “How many sick days are there?,” and “What benefits come with the job?” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 35). This list places an importance on certain elements of the job that might not be important for many people and stresses that the work is about what they get out of it rather than what they will put into it. It also assumes a certain level of employment where paid vacation and health benefits are standard.

After the section on finding a job, the focus shifts to financial elements such as pay schedules, paying taxes, and direct deposit. There is also discussion about factors more specific to immigrants like discrimination protection and speaking English. Although it recommends learning to speak English “as soon as possible” because it will “help you in your job, your community, and your daily life,” it also explains that it cannot be deemed as necessary for you to speak English at work unless the employer can show that it is required for your job to be done correctly. If this cannot be done, the employer could be breaking federal law by requiring English.

**The Image of America.** In addition to creating an image of what it means to be American, this guide also portrays an image of America as a country. The section titled, “Learning About the United States,” provides a brief history of the United States, the way in which it is governed, and the role and responsibilities of its citizens. In these pages, you develop a picture of an America in which everyone is equal, free, and politically engaged and of which you should feel privileged for being granted admission. Interspersed, however, within the guide is another picture of an America that is not safe

for or fair to immigrants. Through these three discourses, you are left with a confusing and unbalanced image of the United States and its people.

***Freedom Discourse: Americans determine the rights of individuals and respect those rights and each other.*** According to the guide, the American “government is based on several important values: freedom, opportunity, equality, and justice. Americans share these values, and these values give us a common civic identity” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 74). This one quote depicts America as a country in which the government and every American has a single, positive view of each individual and treats everyone with respect, granting them each the same rights and privileges. It is more than just this one sentence, however, that creates this image. It also states, “government and laws are organized so that citizens from different backgrounds and with different beliefs all have the same rights” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 74) and that “all people are born with the same rights” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 77). Although it is not stated specifically what rights it is believed that all citizens have regardless of their background, there is a section explaining the first ten amendments of the Bill of Rights.

When discussing these individual rights, there is an idea that they are not only respected by all citizens, but also determined by citizens and, therefore, accepted and never questioned or debated. Several times throughout this section of the guide, it is stated that citizens “play a very important role in governing the country” and that they “shape their government and its policies” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 73-74). In combining this message that citizens determine policies and rights with the message that all Americans share the same values of equality and justice, it creates an image that all Americans understand and respect each other. This, however, is not accurate. For

example, in the explanation regarding the freedom of religion amendment, it states, “People can choose to worship – or not worship – as they please” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 80). This statement makes it appear that nobody will question or judge another person’s religious beliefs or choices. As can be seen by the bombing of mosques and other acts of religious violence in the United States, this is not accurate.

***Privilege Discourse: America is a unique and progressive country, where anyone should feel privileged to live.*** The America presented in this guide looks like an amazing place where everyone would want to live. This appears to be the belief of the USCIS, and the writers of this guide as well, who believe that it is a “‘privilege’ and not a ‘right’” to be a citizen of the United States. As can be seen above, America offers freedoms, rights, and equality that cannot be attained anywhere else so, therefore, everyone should want to leave their country and come to this great land. For example, in discussing the early settlers of the United States, it states that they “were often fleeing unfair treatment, especially religious persecution, in their home countries” and that they “were seeking freedom and new opportunities” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 75). The guide, however, then continues to claim that this is still the reason that many individuals come to the U.S. today. Although this may be the case in some situations, there are also immigrants that come from countries that have the same rights, if not more, than the United States. For those people, should they still feel privileged to have left their own country and come to America?

This guide also sets America apart as a country that is completely different from all others. In fact, it was written due to the assumption that America is so different that people will need help learning the ways and adjusting to life in America, as is stated

outright at the beginning of the guide – “Adjusting to your new life in the United States of America will take time” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 1). This may be true in some cases; however, some of the topics that are discussed seem to assume that people are coming from a country with less structure, fewer people, and no opportunities. For example, a common topic throughout the guide is the process of meeting people and getting involved. Often times, many of the recommendations are not necessarily unique to the United States but are common to most people and societies. In making these types of recommendations, it makes the assumption that America is better than or more developed and progressive than other countries.

***Safety Discourse: America is full of dangers, especially for individuals from other countries.*** Despite the idealist, utopian image created in much of this guide, there is also another smaller image of a dangerous and crime-ridden country. The first reference to this can oddly enough be found in the list of citizen rights. Most of the list includes rights such as owning property, attending school, and applying for a driver’s license. The last item on this list, however, is the right to “purchase or own a firearm” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 8). The inclusion of this right infers that it is often considered a necessity or, at the least, is recommended due to possible danger. These possible dangers can be found interspersed throughout the guide and include crimes such as identity theft, robbery, fraud, school violence, and even hitchhiking.

In addition to dangers posed to all U.S. citizens, there is also mention of additional dangers for immigrants, specifically stating, “some criminals take advantage of immigrants because they think you will not report the crime to the police” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 67). Most of the crimes, in addition to the types listed above,

revolve around fraud including fake government websites, dishonest immigration consultants, and acts of discrimination. The recommended actions when involved in a crime are to call 911 or your local police station. It is also recommended that you find ways to reduce crime through activities such as participating in a Neighborhood Watch. This type of involvement is very important because “When you help others be safe, you help your community and nation” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 69).

**The Image of an Immigrant.** The last image that is created within the USCIS’ *Guide for New Immigrants* is that of the guide’s audience – the immigrant. The guide does not generally provide multiple recommendations or explanations to accommodate people from varying countries but instead assumes that all readers of this guide are coming to the United States with the same experiences and situations. It is through the choice of topics addressed within the guide as well as the way in which it was written, that this picture of a single, universal immigrant emerges.

***Support Discourse: Immigrants have family and friends to help them when they first arrive.*** As discussed above, this guide often speaks of the importance of community. Often times, however, it assumes that the immigrant comes to the United States with a community of family and friends already in place. For example, when discussing finding a place to live, it states, “Many people stay with friends or family members when they first arrive” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 20). This reference to friends and families is also recommended when looking for real estate agents, the social security office, jobs, childcare, and emergency contacts. While it is not uncommon for immigrants to choose to live in locations where they already have family, it is not appropriate, or

often helpful, to recommend that individuals rely on that resource. For many immigrants, they are arriving in a new country without a community or support structure.

***Familiarity Discourse: Immigrants don't know much about the United States, including the language, and need to learn in order to feel at home.*** The first sentence of the guide states, "As a permanent resident, you should *begin* [emphasis added] to learn about this country, its people, and its system of government" (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 2). This sentence implies that individuals who immigrate to the United States have never learned about America, its people, language, or culture. This assumption of a lack of knowledge is repeated often throughout the guide, stating the need to learn the language and the history of the U.S. in order to adjust or succeed. It is not only a recommendation, however, but a responsibility as well. It is communicated that in addition to the responsibility of getting involved in the community, "You should also learn about the American way of life and our history and government" (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 75). Even assuming that there is a single "American way of life," why is it important for immigrants to learn?

***Financial Need Discourse: Immigrants do not have much money and, therefore, will need financial assistance, for much of which they are not eligible.*** As discussed in the finance discourse above, there is no doubt about the importance of money in America. The financial image that is created about the immigrant, however, is that they generally do not have enough to meet everyday needs. This is communicated through the consistent reference to financial assistance and free services that are available to immigrants. For example, in providing references for legal assistance, they only give contact information for organizations that are free or "charge or accept only very small

fees” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 15). This is also the case with immigration law services, education, and childcare. In fact, when discussing childcare options, it tells, not recommends, individuals to “check to see if you are eligible for federal or state childcare assistance,” presumably assuming that they most likely would be (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 63). It then goes in to explain that there is assistance available for low-income parents or those in job training or education programs.

In addition to these financial assistance options, the guide also provides information regarding healthcare programs and other federal benefit programs. In the healthcare section, there are explanations regarding both Medicaid and Medicare programs as well as a contact number and website address to contact the Social Security Administration for more information. Ironically, however, individuals must live in the U.S. for five years or longer to be eligible for Medicaid or have worked in the U.S. for ten years to be eligible for Medicare. Considering this guide is geared toward new immigrants recently arriving in the United States, this does not seem like a beneficial recommendation since new immigrants would not be eligible anyway. In addition to health assistance programs, there is also information regarding programs such as the Food Stamp Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Yet again, however, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, these programs are not available to immigrants who have been in the United States for less than five years (Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2012). This, therefore, just points out that although assistance is needed, immigrants must wait five years to actually get it.

## Conclusion

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' *Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants* provides information regarding many different topics that they consider important to life in America. Within the discussion of these topics, the guide explains to the immigrant what they should think about, how they should behave, and where they should spend their time and money. Some of this is done in a very overt manner, simply stating that it is important to learn English or get a drivers license. Other messages, however, are more covert. For example, the guide mentions that it is important to keep diplomas in a safe place along with their green card and other forms of identification. This simple comment puts a high level of importance on the need to be educated, placing it on the same level as proof of citizenship.

The guide disseminates these types of messages through discourses that portray a certain type of person, an ideal American. Not only does the guide create a universal American, however, but it also creates a universal immigrant. Although the guide addressed many different topics, they all seemed to be directed to one stable audience. In this way, it assumed that all immigrants, regardless of the country from which they immigrated or their reason for immigration, would need to make the same changes to adjust to the United States. In essence, they created one universal identity known as "immigrant" to which they spoke.

Within these American and immigrant identities, all individual differences including sex, culture, race, and religion are ignored. For example, there were very few references to sex or gender throughout the guide. In fact, the only mention of sex that I located was in reference to registering with the Selective Services where it states that you

must register if “you are a male between ages 18 and 26” (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 8). In addition, there is a small inset box that discusses domestic abuse and the Violence Against Women Act, however in describing this act, it refers to abuse against “spouses”, not just wives (Welcome to the United States, 2007, p. 15). Throughout the rest of the guide, however, there was not any information directed toward one sex or another.

This type of universalization is a very humanist act. Through the creation of the category of immigrant, the guide minimizes difference and silences diversity in an attempt to “study the outside, observe it, know it, make predictions about what the outside will do, and try to control it” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 500). In other words, the all-inclusive category of “immigrant” creates a population that can be controlled and shaped by the guide’s suggestions. If the focus shifted to the multiplicity and individuality found within the immigrant population, the ability to communicate with it and control it would disappear.

## Chapter 4

### Creative Analytic Practice

In order to best capture the stories and experiences of the women I interviewed, I chose to use a form of creative analytic practice (CAP) to represent my data. This method allows the data to speak through a narrative with which the audience can connect and create their own reactions and responses. For this research, I created two composite characters that each represented different traits and experiences of my six participants. The characters, Padma and Abhaya, do not fully represent any one of my participants but instead comprise of a little bit of each woman during different times in their lives. The narrative is organized as a series of emails between the two women through which they develop a type of mentor/mentee relationship in which Padma shares her experiences and recommendations with Abhaya in the hopes of helping her adjust to life in the United States. Although the conversation is continuous throughout the entire narrative, I have broken it into six sections that represent major themes, which I will address in my explicit interpretation in chapter 4. The blue text in the narratives below is extracted directly from the transcripts of my interviews with the participants. These conversations represent their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own words.

Padma and Abhaya each represent a specific stage in the process of immigration and the experiences and feelings that occur in each period. Padma moved to the United States approximately 10 years ago to continue her education at an American university. She is 33 years old and is now married, with children and is very active in the Indian community in her city. Padma is 5'5" tall, weighs approximately 160 lbs., and has shoulder-length dark brown hair with bangs that stop at the top of her thin eyebrows. Her

wide-set brown eyes and thin nose set just above her wide mouth that shows straight, pearly white teeth when she smiles. Abhaya is 22 years old and moved to the United States just over a year ago. Her first year in America was spent living with her aunt and uncle in their home but she moved out a few months ago and is now living independently for the first time in her life. Abhaya is 5'10" and 140 lbs. and often wears her long, dark hair in a low ponytail. She has amber-colored eyes, a wide nose, and a thin mouth that turns slightly upward, giving the impression that she is always smiling.

### **Conversation One**

**From:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**To:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**Date:** March 22, 2012, 9:56 AM

**Subject:** Hello

Abhaya,

Hi, this is Padma Malhotra. I was speaking with your aunt last week and she had mentioned that you were having some trouble getting adjusted since moving out a couple months ago. I told her that I would be more than happy to help you any way I could. I know it's not easy. It's not easy for anyone. You know, it takes time and you have to give yourself some time. I came to the United States almost ten years ago for school and I know I struggled for a while. I think the challenge is mainly in the initial years, one or two years. After that, you start to pick things up and you will know what's going on. Of course, you will make mistakes sometime and people might laugh at you but over that time period, you will learn. Just keep a positive approach and be optimistic. It will get

better. I would love to talk with you sometime and share some of my experiences. I know I have probably put the past on many things now that I'm living comfortably but I might still have some advice or encouragement that could be helpful. Also, next weekend we are having a Holi celebration where we'll of course have a bonfire and throw the colored powder. I look forward to hearing from you and hope to see you there! This is my primary email address or you can call me at 555-3822.

Best,

Padma

**From:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**To:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**Date:** March 26, 2012, 10:23 PM

**Subject:** Re: Hello

Padma,

Thank you so much for your message. My aunt had told me that you might be contacting me soon. I am slowly starting to adjust but it is definitely taking some time. As you probably know, I have been living with my aunt and uncle for the past year and I have just moved out onto my own. I think living with them has been a huge factor in transitioning to the U.S. because in a way, it wasn't too different here because I was living with family and it almost felt like I was living with my parents. But now I am completely independent, paying my own bills and this and that. It is exciting but it also feels like I am starting over again and that the real transition is now beginning. It is good to hear that things get better after a year or two though! I would love to hear some of your

stories and I'd appreciate all the advice I can get. Thank you so much for the invitation to the Holi celebration but, unfortunately, I will be out of town next weekend.

Cheers,

Abhaya

### **Conversation Two**

**From:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**To:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**Date:** March 28, 2012, 11:13 AM

**Subject:** India Association

Abhaya,

I am sure you are excited to be living on your own now but I definitely understand that it could also be difficult. When I came to the U.S., I got connected with the Indian Student Association at the university and spent a lot of my time with people from that organization. In fact, [they sent a van to pick me up from the airport and set up my housing. They rent about ten apartments in an apartment complex and most of the Indians stayed in that one particular apartment complex. So I think I never really felt like I was away from home or away from family either.](#) When I moved out of that apartment though, I think it helped that I found a way to stay connected with the Indian community and I still try to do that. I think [it's human nature to be bent towards your own community. You fit in well with your own culture.](#) The India association here in town is a great way to do that. It's interesting because through the association, [you get to interact with people from every Indian culture, every state, every religion.](#) I couldn't even get that

in India! My dad came about four years ago here and he was amazed. He said, oh my god, you get to interact with all these people and everybody is celebrating their festivals and keeping their culture alive. I told him that that's the beauty of coming to the U.S. We get to interact with everybody and see all aspects of Indian culture. I would definitely recommend getting involved in the association or finding another Indian community that you can become active in. Having that group of people helped me a lot in my transition to the U.S. I can probably put you in touch with some people around your age if you are interested. We are going to miss you at Holi next weekend. Where are you going?

Best,

Padma

**From:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**To:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**Date:** March 30, 2012, 6:17 PM

**Subject:** Re: Indian Association

Padma,

Sorry for the delay in responding to your last message. I have spent the week looking for a new job. I am leaving tomorrow to go Chicago for the weekend. My aim is to go to all fifty states and I haven't been to Illinois yet! The India association sounds great! I hope this doesn't make me sound bad but I am purposely trying to not get too much into the Indian community. My thinking is that I'm going to try and meet as many non-Indians as possible and hang out with them because, if I wanted to just do the same thing as usual, then I would've stayed in India. So while I'm here I want to try and amass different

cultural experience and friendships and stuff like that. I have my nights with Indian friends but I also want to make it a point to have nights with my non-Indian friends. I hope that doesn't sound snobbish but I want to grow in a certain way and I feel like that would be restricted if I spent all of my time with Indian people. But it is difficult to meet people and make friends. Right now, I feel like it is just work, work, work, work, work and everybody is so busy in their own work, entangled in their own routine. There is no time. At the beginning, that wasn't a big deal because I was just trying to get adjusted and was not not at all thinking about socializing. Adjusting to the environment and the system was hard enough. But now that I'm on my own, I think it's important to start meeting some people. Maybe I'll meet some new people once I find a new job. Well, I have to start packing for my trip. I probably won't be on the computer at all this weekend but I will talk to you next week. Enjoy Holi!!

Cheers,

Abhaya

### **Conversation Three**

**From:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**To:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**Date:** April 3, 2012, 3:21 PM

**Subject:** Initial Adjustment

Abhaya,

If it hadn't been for school, I don't know if I would've focused on making friends right away either although looking back, I think meeting people was very important for making

me feel comfortable. But just getting used to things like the language took a lot of energy. I mean, even though I spoke English when I came here, the language barrier was still hard. It seems that the way we learned English was very different. I remember when everyone kept saying Z, Z, Z and it took me a while to realize they were talking about zed. Plus, the southern accents make it even more difficult. On the phone, sometimes I still don't know what they're saying. I think the food was the hardest thing for me though. When I came here, I was a vegetarian and I didn't eat cheese. Do you know how hard that is? The day I came here, my plane landed and I was super hungry so I went to a burger place in the airport because it was close to my gate. I was like, can I have the burger, minus the burger, minus the meat and the cheese. And the teller was like, so you want lettuce and tomato? In a bun? I was like, yeah, that's right, that's what I want. She looked at me like I was pretty crazy. I knew right then that it was going to take a while to get used to the food here. I'm glad I brought the rice, pots, and pressure cooker to the U.S. with me so I could at least make good food at home. I don't think it's snobby to want to have new experiences and meet new people. Plus, you will be able to share your Indian culture with them, which will be nice. We have a youth committee at the Indian association and I'm finding that the American kids are really up to shape. They love Indian culture. They love the food. They love the clothing. I am quite impressed with the way they think. So, I think it is nice to see interaction between the two cultures. I hope you had fun on your trip! Can't wait to hear all about it.

Best,

Padma

**From:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**To:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**Date:** April 8, 2012, 8:36 PM

**Subject:** Re: Initial Adjustment

Padma,

I had an odd experience when I landed at the airport too! I wanted to get a bottle of water so I went to one of the stores at the airport and I asked them for a bottle of water. The cashier gave me a bottle and said it cost one thirty nine. And I was like, one thirty nine? I didn't know it was \$1.39 so I was like one hundred and thirty nine?!?! I'm not paying \$139! So then I asked if they had regular water and how much it was. She said a dollar and I was like okay, perfect. So, I gave her a dollar and took my cup of water. It wasn't until the next day I realized that one thirty nine wasn't really \$139 and was just \$1.39. So that was funny. I haven't had any problems with the food. I like Taco Bell or Kentucky Fried Chicken because they're easy and cheap. And I've always loved junk food in India. Frozen pizzas were always my favorite so I felt quite at home. I still haven't been able to get a taste for Dr. Pepper though so I'm still working on that. Unfortunately, I haven't seen much interaction between Indian kids and American kids. When I hang out with American people, I feel like the self-proclaimed brown person. I'm like, the police are gonna come here and be like, what are you, you're brown, you need to get out of here. I just don't see other people from the Indian community doing those things. I make it a point to do it regardless. My trip was great! It was what I had pictured America to be like before I came here. It's funny because I just expected that U.S. is U.S. and it would all be like Chicago or Florida or New York anywhere you go. That's what we always saw on tv

and movies so that's what I pictured. I like traveling around though and seeing as much as I can. [My dad loves traveling and when we were kids we used to take a vacation every winter and just go to different places so I still grab any opportunities to travel.](#) But now it's back to the real world and finding a job. How was Holi?

Cheers,

Abhaya

**From:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**To:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**Date:** April 11, 2012, 7:33 AM

**Subject:** Job Search

Abhaya,

I'm glad you had fun on your trip! [My dad was in the army so we traveled a lot too. I think traveling creates a lot of open-mindedness and makes it easier to blend into any community very well, whether it's within India or somewhere else. If you never travel outside, you just don't see things from a different perspective. But I think it's a real challenge for the people who are not used to traveling or are not used to other cultures to adjust.](#) Holi was a beautiful function! I'm sorry you had to miss it. I love all of the festivals because it's so nice to [interact with all these people and learn about their culture.](#) Like, I would have never had the chance to interact with the Muslim community before but because of the festivals, I have learned a lot about Muslim culture. Your aunt had mentioned that you were working for some apartments. Why are you looking for another job?

Best,

Padma

**Conversation Four**

**From:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**To:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**Date:** April 16, 2012, 11:12 PM

**Subject:** Re: Job Search

Padma,

I am working right now at an apartment complex but I'm not sure it's a good situation. I share an apartment with the manager of the complex in exchange for cleaning the empty apartments. But the place is a mess and sometimes there are bugs crawling from the roof. And with the exception of helping my mom clean the house, I have never done this kind of work and I don't enjoy it. Plus, I have been working there for three months and they just gave me my first paycheck of \$100. I have a place to stay though for free and this money covers my food but it is still hard. Anyway, I told a friend about my job and they told me that I wasn't getting paid enough and that it was wrong. So he is going to help me find a job. I have been thinking about just going back to India though because I have started missing my family and home. Sometimes I really just want to be there with them. Right now I'm like an outside spectator, like the cool aunt who comes every two years, but I would like to be a part of that. So that's my main pull in going back. It's a very tough decision. Any advice?

Abhaya

**From:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**To:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**Date:** April 20, 2012, 8:25 AM

**Subject:** Going Back to India

Abhaya,

I definitely agree that you need to find a different job because you should be making a lot more than \$100 for three months, even including your apartment. I am so sorry you are struggling. That is a very tough decision that I think many people have had to make, including me. If somebody asked me, do you want to go back to India and live, I would say that I want to because I miss my parents and my friends. But the thing is, I don't think that you can have a better system than America anywhere. There is more opportunity of course here in the U.S. In my situation though, going back would mean going through that same struggle and pain because India has changed a lot over the years. I don't think I'm ready for that. I have gotten used to a certain lifestyle and everything. It's almost like a culture shock going back because you expect it to be the way you left it, but it's not. The daily environment is so different. You don't go to a bank in the U.S. and have problems but there you go to a bank and you could spend all day there. So to me it's an easier life here that I have become adjusted to. Even going back for vacation, I have difficulties. I am actually headed there in about two weeks to visit my family. I am staying for a few weeks so it should be fun but interesting. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you.

Best,

Padma

**From:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**To:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**Date:** April 24, 2012, 7:21 PM

**Subject:** Re: Going Back to India

Padma,

I definitely agree that there are opportunities here but I think there are pretty good career opportunities in India too. I probably could have had a good career there as well. One thing I will miss though is my independence. It's nice to be able to date people of whatever culture I want and to date them without the intention to marry. So although I think my professional life could be just as good in India, I don't know if I am willing to give up my personal independence. I don't want to live with my parents or in-laws for the rest of my life. But I really miss my life there and I don't really have that many friends here. This is so difficult.

Abhaya

**From:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**To:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**Date:** April 27, 2012, 9:03 PM

**Subject:** University

Abhaya,

I understand exactly what you are saying. In the case of work opportunities, keep in mind that the competition is not as much here because there isn't 1.2 billion people vying for jobs. As far as your dating life, I can definitely relate. I am from North India and my husband is from South India, which, of course, my parents were not happy about. They would say, oh, you can't find a better person than anybody else? It was hard for them to accept because marrying a south Indian, you know. But we met at the university and dated for like four years and I said, it's high time, we've got to get married now. And after my parents met him, they were okay. Have you thought about going back to school for another degree? I think I made many more friends while I was still in school as compared to after starting to work. Plus, I think it's important to be well-educated because when you have an education, you talk something intelligent rather than stupid things. And now is the time to do it because after you have kids, you cannot go back and study. Another good way to meet people and interact with them is at church. Often times, religious places also serve as community centers. In fact, half of the people go there just to socialize, not to be a horribly great religious person. You might want to give it a try.

Best,

Padma

### **Conversation Five**

**From:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**To:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**Date:** May 2, 2012, 8:17 PM

**Subject:** Re: University

Padma,

I have given some thought to going back to school. All my parents' generation are PhDs so I don't know if I could get away with just one degree. I actually applied to a very good school in Singapore because it was closer to home and a little less different than some other places. I was so sure I was gonna get in that I did not even look at anything else in the United States and I procrastinated on my GRE. And then they made their decision and I did not get an acceptance. So I had to make other plans and decided to come here instead. Now I don't know if I could afford to go back to school and I think I would have to go back to India for a little while to change my visa. I might try and take my GRE though and start looking into deadlines, school rankings, and test score requirements. Also assistantships and stuff like that. It's an option but I didn't necessarily enjoy university in India. I'm not really much of a religious person but I will think about church.

Cheers,

Abhaya

**From:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**To:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**Date:** May 6, 2012, 3:21 PM

**Subject:** Finances

Abhaya,

The education system is very different in the United States than it is in India. It's not as authoritative. I remember when I was in school in India, the teachers avoided the students

because they don't want anything to do with the students and the students avoid the teachers. Everyone was just trying to get out of the class. In the U.S. though, it is much more open. The teachers are much more accessible. It is very surprising because they have office hours and you can go talk to them about anything and, and they want to talk to you. The mentorship that the teachers provide is very helpful, whereas in India, you'd be lucky to find a teacher who will take any interest in you. I think you should look into scholarships for international students. I got 100% tuition waiver and everything at my university. I know managing finances are hard here. I think one of the reasons it's a big shock moving from India to the U.S. is because of the currency and how expensive everything seems. After a year or two, I finally broke down and got a credit card because everyone kept saying, what, you don't have a credit card? You have been here like over a year. It was embarrassing so I got one. Plus, I know you had mentioned wanting a car at some point and a credit card will help because you will have credit built up. Be ready when you start driving though because it's not like it is in India. I remember when my cousin picked me up from the airport late at night and on the way to her home, she stopped at a red light. It was really late, there was nobody there, and I was like, why are you stopping, there is nobody here? And she was like, it's a red light. I was like, but there's nobody here! It was such a stark contrast to how things work in India. I am sure you will do fine though.

Best,

Padma

**From:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**To:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**Date:** May 10, 2012, 9:23 PM

**Subject:** Re: Finances

Padma,

I have difficulty with this whole notion of having your whole life on a credit card. I am so used to the whole savings concept in India and feel like all your money should be in the bank or invested. In my family, credit cards are almost considered to be like the matrix, they will suck you in. Nowadays it seems that debit cards and credit cards are more fashionable though. And everyone keeps telling me that you have to have a credit card so you can have a credit history so later on when you want to buy a house or want to buy a car, you can. They also keep telling me that I need to get a drivers license too. I think I will do okay on the test because traffic in my home city is very, very regimented. You know, people follow rules and people do stop at red lights, at least most of the time. Maybe not at like eleven o'clock at night though. Stop signs didn't really mean anything in India though. I remember when I came here and I was trying to find a building in the city and when I stopped to ask someone, they told me to go up the road from the four way stop, take a left, and then from the three way stop, take a right. And I'm like, what the heck on earth is a four way stop and a three way stop? So that took me a while to kind of get used to but now I have it down so I should be good for the driving test. If I don't hear from you before you leave for India, have a great time!

## Conversation Six

**From:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**To:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**Date:** June 3, 2012, 3:53 AM

**Subject:** Back to the USA

Abhaya,

I just got back from India yesterday and as you can probably tell from the time, my schedule is not quite back to normal yet. I had a great time visiting with my family and seeing the city again. It's odd because it seems that the shopkeepers figured out that we're not from there. My mom always wanted to go to with me because they kept trying to cheat us. I thought I would be fine since I can speak the local language but still they know. I guess they can tell from the way you walk, the way you speak. It's hard to get used to bartering again though. I think that if I had never left India, I would be a much harder bargainer. You know, just being over here, you kind of expect that the things go right because they're supposed to. Like, you don't think that you have to fight and keep going back for your driver's license five times because you're just going to get it because you passed the test. You don't feel like you have to kind of schmooze with the person and all that. I think that kind of makes you softer. Things have changed so much though since I was last there. America is outsourcing so India is growing and things are building more. All this money came in and now I see swanky malls and shops. And of course people are different. You don't know your childhood friends anymore because by the time you see them, they're all grown up and it takes time to remember them. And the people are much

more advanced. They have ringtones and cell phones that we haven't even seen. I mean, it's much more advanced and stuff like that. It kind of feels like people and things have moved forward but I haven't. With being here, I'm in my own bubble and whatever experiences I've had, that's well and good but people in India have moved forward and I'm sort of still stuck in the back over here. The progress is good but it also is going really fast and it's hard to keep up because we live here. But that feeling only lasts for a split second and then you start doing what everybody else is doing. It made me realize though that there is a possibility that I could integrate back well. Because my main concern has been that I'm an expat now and so how am I going to integrate back into that culture. You know, the whole culture shock and all that. But the extended period of staying there made me realize that it is possible. But of course my kids are settled here and they're not gonna want to go there. Anyway, it was good to be there but it's also good to be back. How has everything been with you?

Best,

Padma

**From:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**To:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**Date:** June 6, 2012, 7:59 PM

**Subject:** Re: Back to the USA

Padma,

I am glad to hear you had a good time in India. Things here have been great! A friend of mine found a job for me at the company he works for. I started there last week and it has

been great because I have met a lot of other people who work there and we have had a great time hanging out and going to movies and things like that. Also, I have gotten to know my friend a lot better and we have started dating. He is not Indian so I'm not sure how my parents will react but I really like him. I don't really know what to expect out of this relationship though because all I know is what I've seen in India where the [men go to work, come back home and that's it. Like, my dad will not even pick up a glass of water.](#) But I feel like this is going to be different. I feel like I am starting to find my place and my community here and it's wonderful!

Cheers,

Abhaya

**From:** [padma@imail.com](mailto:padma@imail.com)

**To:** [abhaya@imail.com](mailto:abhaya@imail.com)

**Date:** June 8, 2012, 2:42 PM

**Subject:** Back to the USA

Abhaya,

I am so excited to hear that you are doing so well! Congratulations on the job and the new relationship. I had the same experience in my childhood home as well. I think [Indian men are probably taught that we are the sex that we are and that they just need to focus on work only and not the house. My husband will sit there reading his book or on the internet and I'll be working in the kitchen and it doesn't even come to his mind that he should help his wife. If I tell him, he would help me but not on his own. I think all of these Indian men, they've been brought up that way by their moms. Spoiled. I think it's a](#)

cultural thing but it feels like maybe now the world is changing. My father does everything now. He cooks and cleans and mops. You know, he's sixty-five years old and does a lot of work. I am sure your relationship will be great! Isn't amazing how much can change in three months? I am so happy for you!!!

Best,

Padma

## Chapter 5

### Interpretation

In the following pages, I will address some common themes that I found in my data and represented in the creative analytic practice narrative found in chapter 3.

Although I cannot completely remove myself as the researcher from my interpretations, I strived to present the data in the way in which it was presented to me. Following each interpretation, there is a paragraph in which I as the researcher discuss my reactions to the information. I do this with the intent of communicating my own subjectivities so the audience may recognize any researcher bias that may have altered my interpretations of the data itself.

#### Conversation One

**Explicit Interpretation.** This introductory conversation between Padma and Abhaya lays out the immigration history and current situation of each woman. Padma reaches out to Abhaya in an effort to help her adjust to an independent life in America by sharing her own experiences. Based on my interviews, this type of mentorship is not uncommon as women involved in the Indian community often reach out to new immigrants and try to ease the transition through advice and experiences. As family or friends come to America, they rely on each other for moral support and encouragement.

A common theme that runs throughout all of the interviews I conducted is the process of adjusting or acclimating to life in the United States. As can be seen in several of the conversations, there are many factors that contribute to the ability to adjust to the new country. In conversation 1, it can be seen that the largest consideration for adjustment is time – the longer a woman is in the United States, the more comfortable she

becomes in her surroundings. Many of my participants stated a timeline of approximately one to two years before they felt at ease in and knowledgeable about America and its people. At some point, this ease seems to create a type of archive of past memories as the women “put the past on” elements of their life in India and the process of immigration.

This one to two year timeline, however, does not necessarily begin when the women arrive in the United States. Although a few of the women commented on the positive aspects of having family already living nearby in America, the presence of family also creates a buffer to the American culture. Often, the family household maintains many Indian traditions despite its location in the U.S. While this creates the possibility of slowly easing into American society, it could also hinder or delay the need to adjust, as is the situation for Abhaya. The year she spent living with her aunt and uncle mirrored her family structure and life in India so closely that she did not feel like there was much difference to being in the U.S. It was only after moving out and becoming independent, that she had to fully confront American society and learn how to navigate in that world. This is when her struggles truly began.

In speaking of these adjustment struggles, many of the women were very positive and optimistic despite the difficult experiences of which they were speaking. For example, in explaining that people might laugh at you in the beginning, one participant stated that the laughing was not in a mean way and was helpful in the learning process. With the exception of a conversation about the loss of a loved one, the women were very lighthearted despite the hardships they were discussing. There did not appear to be much sadness or emotion behind their stories. In fact, it was common for them to laugh

throughout their stories of struggle and their process of adjustment. This optimism is also seen as a factor in adjustment and is given as advice to new immigrants.

**Researcher Reactions.** I was very surprised to find that the immigration experiences of my participants were not necessarily a big part of who they are. In some situations, they remembered it being difficult in general but could not remember what they specifically struggled with. When developing this research project, I had assumed that moving to America would be the largest, most defining moment in their lives that had altered not only their physical location but even their identities and notions of self. I, therefore, was not expecting the women to be as unemotional and almost disconnected with their stories. This is not to say that it wasn't emotional at the time but the longer they have been in the United States, the less emphasis they seem to put on those experiences as a catalyst.

### **Conversation Two**

**Explicit Interpretation.** The second conversation between Padma and Abhaya addresses the Indian community in the United States and its role in the life of women from India. As can be seen in this discussion, the importance of having an Indian community varies drastically woman to woman. For some, this community was a large factor in adjusting to life in the United States and is the focus of much of their social life. This is the situation for Padma who immediately connected with an Indian group upon her arrival in the United States and has sought to maintain that connection throughout her time here. She assumes, as did several of my participants, that it is "human nature" to surround yourself with those who are like you.

This community of similar people, however, seems to change upon arrival to the United States. For example, one participant explained that she is Punjabi and while in India, her community and social circle primarily consisted other Punjabi individuals. Now in the U.S., however, her community has grown to include all Indians. One participant even mentioned that she sought out individuals like herself and therefore became friends with a Pakistani person. So although it is important for some immigrants to maintain a connection with their culture and their community, the parameters of this community and culture have become altered. This is at least partially due to an increased opportunity to interact with individuals from different parts of India, something that is uncommon in India. Another aspect, however, is the need to reach out to anything remotely similar in a sea of people that is so different.

As can be seen in this conversation, it is not important to all immigrant women to connect with people from their home country. In fact, some individuals purposely choose not to do this all. This seems to be determined by the reason for immigrating and the goals created prior to or shortly after arriving in the U.S. For Abhaya, she moved to America to have new experiences and to meet new people. She did not want her time in America to be like the one she could have had in India. Instead, she chose to take advantage of this new opportunity to experience different cultures and people. This decision, however, seems to make her slightly uncomfortable when conversing with other Indian women. She is often worried that this view may be offensive to some people or seen as a belittling of Indian culture and people.

Finding a community or group of people, no matter what ethnicity, however, was not the most important activity upon arriving to the United States. It was first necessary

to adjust to certain elements of American life, specifically what was often referred to by participants as the American system. Becoming comfortable with the everyday processes like food, finances, and driving was often initially seen as the key to adjustment. For those looking back on the process, however, meeting people and developing a community was what actually made them feel more comfortable and at ease in American than anything else. Therefore, advice given to new immigrants often revolves around meeting people more than learning the American system.

**Researcher Reactions.** I have always assumed that people within certain minority cultures tend to interact primarily within that group. This is supported, or possibly perpetuated, to a certain extent by the existence of urban neighborhoods like Chinatown and Little Italy, which are generally inhabited by people within the culture for which the neighborhood is named. My assumption was also supported during my process of finding participants for this research study. Once I located my first participant, she was able to connect me with other participants because her social group consisted mainly of Indian women. For these reasons, I was not expecting to hear stories about women who purposely sought out friends outside of the Indian culture.

### **Conversation Three**

**Explicit Interpretation.** In conversation 3, we start to hear some of the stories about adjusting to the United States. Both Padma and Abhaya share experiences of misunderstanding they had with Americans. The topics of misunderstanding, food and language, are both common themes threaded throughout most of the interviews. Although all of my participants spoke English upon their arrival, they still experienced some difficulties regarding language. In some situations, like Abhaya's, it was not the words or

accents themselves but rather the phrasing and ways of communication. She understood the words that were being said but did not understand the shorthand way of speaking that the teller was using. Padma also had trouble in this way but her difficulties resulted from the way in which she learned English using British words and phrases. Finally, there was also a language barrier because of their location in the southern United States in which there is a specific type of accent. Much of the exposure to American culture that they received came from television shows like Friends and Seinfeld, which are set in the northeast United States. Therefore, this southern accent they encountered was not similar to anything they had previously heard.

Food and cooking were also mentioned often throughout my interviews. For some people, Indian food was a large part of their lives and it was very difficult to adjust to American food, if they ever did. One woman was so worried about the food situation that she filled the one suitcase she brought from India with pots, pans, rice, and a pressure cooker. She continues to cook primarily Indian food in her home because her family has to have “rice and curry or...some stir fries or Indian...chicken” in their diet. For others, America offers all of the types of food that they wanted and expected, generally unhealthy food.

Another theme addressed in conversation three is the interaction between Indian culture and American culture. In the process of learning about and adjusting to American culture, there is also a need for Americans to learn about and adjust to Indian culture. Padma has experienced this reciprocal understanding in her conversations with American people who enjoy Indian food, clothing, and culture. While Abhaya does not discount the interaction between cultures, she remarks that she does not see that within social

groupings. In her experience, there are very few Indian people who spend social time within American groups. While each of the women are addressing the interaction between cultures, it appears that Padma is praising Americans for taking an interest while Abhaya is focusing more on the lack of interest in interaction taken by Indian people. She sees herself as the sole “brown person” spending time within American groups.

The final topic we see in conversation three is the effect of prior cultural experiences on the ability to adjust after immigration. Both Padma and Abhaya see travel as a way of experiencing new cultures, opening the mind, and getting a better idea of what the world is really like. As Abhaya comments, she had a preconception of what the United States was going to be like and it wasn't until she visited different parts of the country that she realized that there is more to it than what she had seen on television. Padma agrees with Abhaya and considers her prior travel experiences to have been an asset in her ability to adjust to American culture.

**Researcher Reactions.** The comments that were made regarding interaction between cultures were very accurate in my experience. I myself love Indian food, the bright colors of saris, and Indian festivities, however, I do not believe I have not been in a social group made up primarily of Indian individuals and nor have I had an Indian person approach my social circle. So while there is definitely an appreciation of Indian culture, I feel like for many people this interest only reaches to a certain point, not affecting social groups. My thought is that Indian individuals might not engage with Americans as much during their free time because they generally interact with Americans all day at work or school or in the stores, and so they, therefore, focus their personal life on people from their own culture. If I were living in India, I believe I would seek out American

friendships as well to create that comfort that I am unable to get in the other areas of my life.

I have been guilty of universalizing entire cultures or countries and assuming that they were exactly what I saw in movies or books. It is interesting to hear that other cultures do the same with America. A few of my participants noted how surprised they were when they arrived in the southern United States and did not see the skyscrapers and bustle like that of New York City. Two participants actually commented on how quiet American was, which was unexpected based on their prior experience. Although I did not expect them to universalize America, a couple of my participants assumed that I universalized India. They specifically mentioned that India was not what I probably thought it was, with cows in the street. They remarked on how large some cities were and how “Americanized” and structured they were. It was only when I mentioned that I have visited India that they would remark that I knew what it was really like then.

#### **Conversation Four**

**Explicit Interpretation.** In conversation 4, we start to see the real struggle for Abhaya. Her living and work situation are not ideal and she is starting to miss her family and home. Each of my participants struggled with this type of situation at some point and most of them still struggle with it several years later. The longer they are in the U.S., however, the more difficult it is to return to India. They have now become so acclimated to American life that they would experience culture shock by returning to their own country.

Some of my participants chose to stay in America because they were living a life here that they did not feel they could have in India. For others, they had built a family in

America and they did not want to uproot their children. For those who were single and in the early stages of their career, however, this decision seemed to be a little bit more difficult. On one hand, they missed their families, whom they had never lived apart from, and they felt that India offered the same professional opportunities that they had in America. Their personal life and freedom, on the other hand, was much better in the U.S. This topic was the one of very few mentions of differences based on sex within my interviews. In India, a woman is generally allowed to date somebody only within their own caste or religion and they date with the sole purpose of marriage. Then when she does get married, it is customary for her to move into her in-laws' house unless she and her husband live in another town. If she never gets married, she will remain in her own family's house. Therefore, many women never live alone with their husbands but instead move directly from their parents' house to their in-laws' house. For this reason, many single Indian women choose to stay in America because of the personal independence it affords them.

It is at this point in the conversation that Padma begins to stress the importance of meeting people. In her experience, school was a great place to find friends and a partner but she also recommends church as a meeting place. This was the most common reference to church in my interviews, although some participants did not mention church or religion at all. Religion was usually spoken about as though it was an ethnicity or race rather than a spiritual belief. Although they attended church, it was generally for social reasons rather than spiritual ones. Church was the hub for Indian organizations, community outreach, and social networking.

**Researcher Reactions.** Although I really enjoyed my time in India and I thought it was a beautiful country, I would not expect individuals to want to leave America and go back to India. I was also shocked to hear that for some people India offers the same opportunities as the U.S. Having been born and raised in America where you are taught that America is the land of opportunity, I assumed that once an individual gets to the U.S., they would never leave if they didn't have to. In this way, I suppose I see India as behind America in many ways. Despite this, I was amazed by the dating and marriage situation in India. Most people have heard of arranged marriages, dowries, and other Indian marriage customs but I had assumed they were all a part of the past. I guess I see India as more progressive *socially* than it actually is and less progressive *structurally* than it really is.

Another assumption I have of India is that it is a very religious country so I was surprised that religion was not a part of each of these women's lives. In a few of the interviews, I wanted to bring up the topic since it hadn't been mentioned but I did not want to lead the participant to an area that was of no importance to them. I also tend to connect religion and spirituality because of my own experiences; however, I now realize that these are not the same to many people. My research experience supported the position of religious organizations as community centers, as religious centers were the center for much of the snowball sampling used in my participant search.

### **Conversation Five**

**Explicit Interpretation.** Conversation 5 focuses on two areas that were mentioned by all of my participants – education and finances. We find that education is important to both Padma and Abhaya but that it is also very connected to a person's

financial situation. Padma was able to attend university in the U.S. because she received a full tuition waiver. Although Abhaya and her family value education, she is worried that she will not be able to secure the funding to attend. She is also hesitant about school because not only will she have to get a new visa and take the GRE but she also did not enjoy school in India and doesn't want to have another bad experience. Abhaya, however, explains that universities in America are very different than those in India. Education and university is one of the main areas of difference between America and India that my participants discussed. Many of the universities in India are very good and very competitive but they have a different structure. In addition to the authoritative structure, Indian universities do not offer learning in areas of study outside of the major. For example, a business student is not required to take a class in psychology or science because their entire curriculum is focused on business classes only.

This conversation also addresses two processes that were often referred to as necessary for adjusting to the "American system." Although they did not initially understand or agree with the idea of living on credit, it was only a matter of time before most of my participants had a credit card. They explained that Americans would remark on the fact that they didn't have a credit card and would try to convince them that they were necessary for building credit. Getting a drivers license was also an important part of being in America. Although they drove in India, for some, driving was very different in America. This, however, was not the case for everyone.

**Researcher Reactions.** Although I do not consider India to be at all an uneducated country, I was surprised to hear how competitive the universities are. For several of my participants, it was easier for them to get into school in America than it was

in India or even Singapore. I was also amazed to hear that anyone from India would be worried about driving in the United States. When I was in India, the roads were very hectic and the traffic was horrible, with people weaving in and out and getting into the wrong lanes. I would think driving in the U.S. would be simple after driving there. I do not often remember, however, that there is also a written test that can be intimidating.

### **Conversation Six**

**Explicit Interpretation.** The roles of Padma and Abhaya begin to change in conversation 6. Padma has just returned from a three-week trip to India and she is sharing her experiences with Abhaya. She explains that it was difficult for her to be in India because she felt very disconnected and out-of-touch with her home country. She seems sad that she has missed everything that has happened in India over the past ten years and she now feels like an outsider who is stuck in the past. Although she is happy that India is progressing, she wishes that she could have been a part of it and starts to think of what her life might have been like if she had never left. She now realizes that she could return to India and adjust back to that life pretty easily but she is choosing to stay in America because of her children.

Abhaya, on the other hand, has begun to feel at home in America. She has found a job that she likes as well as friends and even a boyfriend. Although she is starting to feel more comfortable, she is still hesitant about parts of her life in America, specifically her relationship. Her reference for relationships up to this point in her life are all based on Indian culture in which the woman takes care of the house while the men go off to work. She does not look negatively on this necessarily but is not sure how to negotiate a relationship with an American man because she does not know if that relational situation

is common in America as well. While Padma has had similar experiences with her own Indian husband and believes it is cultural, she seems optimistic that the things are changing.

This conversation marks one of only two times in which the topic of gender roles within India was discussed. The different gender roles were generally seen within the household responsibilities as seen in the story above. Outside of the house, many participants felt that men and women had the same opportunities. Regarding the process of immigration, none of the participants seemed to focus on their immigration experiences as being different or unique because of their sex. In fact, one participant commented that the process of immigration was just difficult regardless of your sex.

In all of the stories of immigration told by my participants, finding a community of people, whether Indian, American, or any other culture, seemed to be the final step of adjustment. Although Padma's stories and experiences were helpful to Abhaya, she needed to have her own experiences and create her own community. As Padma's story shows, they will both probably always think about returning to India no matter how comfortable they become in America. But it seems like home can be wherever they decide to make it.

**Researcher Reactions.** The relationship between husband and wife in Indian culture did not necessarily surprise me. I was more interested in the fact that my participants addressed it. One participant commented that it was just the way the boys were raised to think and, therefore, they don't realize alternatives. However, the women were also raised in these same homes and same situations and yet they realize alternatives. In choosing what country to focus my research on, I wanted to be sure that I

did not pick a culture that was too patriarchal for the women to speak freely. Although I felt that Indian women felt that freedom to speak openly, I did not expect them to address their husbands or family situations, especially in a negative way.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

Much of the literature regarding immigration and transition focuses on the element of culture change and the process of adapting to a new culture. These cultures are generally categorized based on the country in which a person lives. For example, the Indian population lives within Indian culture while the America population lives within American culture. But what happens when an Indian woman who has lived in India since her birth moves to America? Is she still a part of Indian culture or does she become a part of American culture? Or is this determined by how much she adopts elements that are considered American? And going one step further, if she behaves in a way that is completely congruent with American culture, is she less Indian or less a part of Indian culture despite her place of birth? It is questions like these that make it difficult, if not impossible, to research immigration by focusing solely on a change of culture.

By applying a post-colonial lens to my research of immigration, I sought to escape the inconsistencies and disparities addressed in the questions above. As Bhabha (1994) explains, culture is simply a socially constructed category designed to create a homogenous identity that can then be deemed as an “Other.” In reality, there is not one Indian or American culture in which every person encompasses the characteristics attributed to it. With this understanding, I was able to look at the process of immigration on a discursive level, identifying what discourses or expectations created this fictitious culture and how they were communicated to immigrants. In addition, this knowledge allowed me to see how my participants enabled or rejected the dominant discourses attributed to each “culture.”

## **Connection to Post-Colonialism**

**Identity.** Each of my participants was born in India and lived there for at least the first 20 years of her life. Within that time, they were taught about what it meant to be a woman in India. These lessons, however, were not necessarily spoken to them, but instead were often communicated simply through the behaviors and activities of those around them. In time, these messages, or discourses, created what appeared to be real cultures and identities. They defined the parameters for an Indian identity, religious identity, and gendered identity. In essence, they defined what it meant to be an appropriate Indian woman, an identity that every female in India should adhere to or strive for.

Some of the discourses that appear to shape the identity of an Indian woman were present in the interviews I conducted. The first discursive element I identified is in regards to the role of a woman in an Indian household. Several of my participants spoke about the division of responsibilities within the typical household. Through stories about the process of dating, marriage, and daily life in India, there appeared to be expectations that women had to uphold if they wished to be regarded as a proper Indian woman. These included not only taking care of her husband but also his in-laws, including managing all aspects of cooking, cleaning, and children. If a woman and her husband did not move into his parents' house, it was immediately assumed that there was something wrong with the woman and she was judged very negatively within the community. In order to avoid this judgment, most women followed this custom and, therefore, enabled this discursive expectation.

Another discourse found in my interviews is the expectation that individuals should interact primarily with people in their religion or caste only. One participant explained that the dating pool was a lot smaller in India because you were limited only to those individuals that were a part of your community. To step outside of this group and date or marry a man from another area was not generally seen as acceptable and could lead to family disapproval. This can be seen in the story of a woman from northern India who brought a man from southern India home to meet her parents. They were not very happy with the situation and urged her to find someone better, someone from their own area. In this situation, however, the discourse was not perpetuated as the northern woman married the southern man regardless of her parents' disapproval.

The final identity discourse pertains to the expectations of Indian women in the United States. In almost every interview I conducted, the women remarked that it was "normal" or "human nature" to congregate primarily with other Indian people. In speaking about locations to meet other people, most of them referenced churches or Indian associations, places that are generally congregated by Indian people only. Even for the one participant who gravitated more toward an American social group, she still remarked that this was not common, as she was the only "brown person" in her group. This, therefore, communicates that to be a proper Indian in America, you must maintain relationships and connections with other Indian people and the Indian community.

Even if they remained within an Indian community, however, many of the women began to shed some of these discourse governing Indian identity and took on discourses pertaining to American identity. For example, although relying on credit was not generally supported in India, after a year or two in America, most of the women got

credit cards. In most cases, these small changes eventually created a situation in which the women were more comfortable in the United States than they were in India. Their lives had started to become so constituted by American discourses that returning to a place governed by Indian discourses was uncomfortable.

**Power.** Post-colonial theory utilizes the concept of post-structural power in which power is the result of a situation or relationship where a binary is created, placing one side as higher and the other as lower (Foucault, 1978). The binary generally addressed within a post-colonial framework is a cultural binary. For example, within my research, the assumed binary would be American/Indian with American culture being superior to Indian culture. Utilizing post-colonial theory, my goal was to deconstruct this binary and erase not only the idea of a superior and inferior culture, but the idea of culture itself. Through showing multiple experiences and feelings I also sought to dismantle this binary by highlighting areas of resistance by women who are generally considered inferior in the power relationship. Through these efforts, I hoped to reshape reality through the deconstruction of the post-colonial binary.

The foundation of the American/Indian binary addressed in this research rests on the idea that there is an inherent American culture and an inherent Indian culture. In addition, it also must show that these cultures are very different from each other, making one better than the other. One way to dismantle this binary, therefore, is to show that there is not one Indian or American culture to which all people in that country adhere. Another way is to show that there are not many differences between the two “cultures” and that any differences that may appear does not make one better than the other.

Through the stories shared in this research, I sought to use both of these methods of dismantling.

Using the first method, I illuminated stories that showed a multiplicity within what is generally seen as Indian culture. For example, as Padma explained, many Indian households require their meals to contain a lot of spices, rice, and curry. This would generally be considered a part of Indian culture. However, we also see that Abhaya's diet relied on a lot of junk food including frozen pizza. This would definitely not be considered a part of Indian culture. In fact, it would probably be considered more a part of American culture. However this is not something that Abhaya picked up when she came to the United States. Instead, this was part of her life in India. Therefore, this one small act breaks an assumption generally held of a particular culture.

Another way I sought to dismantle the cultural binary was to show similarities between "American culture" and "Indian culture." This is one reason I chose to use creative analytic practice to represent my data. Although most of the language was pulled directly from my interview transcripts, I believe anyone, regardless of their ethnicity, could connect with these two characters. Everyone understands the struggles associated with finding a job or missing a family member; these struggles are universal and break any cultural barriers. In addition, many of their descriptions of India sound similar to America. For example, they speak of the importance of an education and the process of finding funding, taking tests, and researching school rankings. And although there are some differences in the school system, as explained by Padma, the universities in India are just as competitive, if not more so, than those in the United States.

The final way in which I tried to break the American/Indian binary is by addressing assumptions often made of India. Although much of this was based on my own assumptions or thoughts, I also relied on what my participants believed Americans assumed of Indian life. For example, one participant explained that India wasn't what people thought it was, with cows roaming the streets. Because of this assumption that she voiced, I chose to share a story that that was told during an interview which showed the streets of India to be regimented with people obeying traffic laws. Through reading that one story, it is possible that someone could develop a better, more accurate, idea of India.

I also relied on the women themselves to help dismantle the cultural binary by rejecting the power relationship. By refusing to be seen as or treated as inferior, they made an act of resistance against the power struggle inherent in the binary. This can be seen in the positive reactions to individuals treating them differently. For example, in speaking about the way some people look at her when she is wearing her Indian dress, one participant remarked that they are probably just admiring it. She did not give these individuals the power to make her feel uncomfortable or self-conscious with their stares. Another act of resistance is the learning opportunities some of the women took from being laughed at because of the way they spoke. Instead of being ashamed that they said the wrong word, they saw it as a chance to learn more about the English language. Responses such as these take the power away from those who may be judging and places it in the hands of these women.

**Truth.** The final post-colonial tenet of truth is the foundation for many aspects of this research. Through the use of two composite characters and two storylines, I sought to show that there was not one "Truth" regarding immigration. Each story that was told was

meaningful for that woman at that time in her life. Although the women each had different experiences with immigration, there was not one right experience that made the others wrong. Nor was one experience truer than any other. Based on their lives in India, their family structure, their education, and other elements of their life, they each approached immigration with a unique perspective that was meaningful for them.

This can be seen in the conversations regarding travel experiences and how they helped prepare some of the women for immigration. One participant explained that she played volleyball in college and they traveled all over India for matches. Through these trips, she was able to see and experience different people, locations, and customs. This exposure to a group other than her own made her a more open-minded and flexible individual who could adjust well in multiple scenarios. For this reason, she was better able to adjust to America because she had already been required to adjust while in India. For women without these types of experiences, adjusting to America was a little more difficult because they were primarily used to their own city and people and had never had to transition or adjust in the past.

The concept of multiple truths does not simply address just the different truths help by more than one person but also the presence of multiple truths within one person's life. This could be seen in some of the interviews in which the women spoke of their feelings five to ten years ago and their feelings now. For example, one woman explained that she has always experienced stares when she would wear her Indian garments to the store. When she first arrived in the United States, she felt like people were judging her or making fun of her. That was the meaning she attached to the stares at that time. However, as she got older and was in America longer, she started to believe that people were

admiring her. This new meaning that she attaches to the same stares does not make her past meaning any less valuable. Her position and her confidence changed over time, as did her truth.

### **Connection to Research Questions**

With this research, I sought to answer four questions regarding the process of immigration. For the first three questions, I relied on my narrative life story interviews to provide insight on the experiences of immigration and the negotiation of discourse. For the fourth question, I utilized discourse analysis to help develop the immigration context in which my participants enter in the United States. As explained above, I then applied a post-colonial lens to all of this data so as to better understand how these stories trouble notions of culture, race, gender, and religion. In the following paragraphs, I will address each of my four research questions and then answers I was able to illuminate through this research process.

**Research Question 1. What discourses do immigrant women encounter upon entering the United States?** During one stage of my analysis, I read through the transcripts of my life story interviews, listening for the presence of dominant discourses that were repeated throughout the women's stories. Some of the discourses I identified appeared to be products of their time in India, however, there were other discourses that seemed to be encountered when they arrived in the United States. One of these discourses, as discussed earlier, is in regards to finances. When the women arrived in the United States, they quickly received the message that there were certain things that were needed to be comfortable in the U.S. and in order to purchase these things, a credit card was necessary.

Another discourse appeared to be that Americans do not think well of India. Although none of participants shared stories regarding hearing people speak negatively of India, several of them mentioned that India is not what Americans think it is. In addition, there was also the discourse that America is the land of opportunity. Even when individuals were not happy in America, did not enjoy their job, or did not have a thriving social life, they continued to believe that America was the best place to be. This, however, did not mean that they didn't think about returning to India or didn't think that India had opportunities as well. Instead, they felt that America provided opportunity in multiple areas of their life, whether they had experienced that or not.

**Research Question 2. How do immigrant women negotiate potentially different discourses between India and the United States?** Although there were definitely differences between India and the United States that my participants took note of when they arrived, there also appeared to be differences that were concealed and communicated through discourse. The women negotiated these discourses unknowingly simply through the process of adjustment. For example, there is a community discourse in which it is important to surround yourself with a group of people who look like you. One of my participants felt the power of this discourse but rejected it completely. This rejection, however, did create a feeling of guilt because she knew she was acting in a way that wasn't generally seen as appropriate. For the other women, however, they gravitated toward people who were similar to them. But this did not just include other individuals from India. Their community also included people from countries such as Pakistan, China, and parts of Africa. This community was in response to the message they received that, in America, their community was not determined by their home country, religion,

race, or even region of the world from which they came. Instead, they were part of the group entitled “immigrant.” And, unknowingly, they began to live within this group and consider it to be their community.

**Research Question 3. How are these discourses manifested the longer the woman has been in the United States?** The most common comment I heard from my participants was that it takes time to adjust to life in the United States. This period of adjustment, however, changed more than just their comfort with driving, speaking English, or going to the grocery store. Although they were not aware of it, their perspective and way of life also changed dramatically. Over time, they became acclimated to certain behaviors and comforts afforded to them in the U.S. This was most obvious in their stories regarding their trips back to India. Several participants mentioned that they experienced culture shock upon returning to their home in India. They struggled with everyday activities and noticed many elements of Indian life that they had never taken note of before. For example, one participant explained that when she visited her parents in India, she had difficulty sleeping because it was so loud outside. While living there, she had never noticed all the dogs barking, horns honking, or people talking. However, after becoming acclimated to the quietness of her U.S. neighborhood, she could not manage to sleep in the place she had always called home.

**Research Question 4. How are these negotiations contextualized within the larger discourses and expectations of immigrants in the U.S.?** Within this research project, I utilized the methods of discourse analysis and narrative inquiry. The purpose in using these methods together was to understand the discourses that are communicated to immigrants and then identify the discourses that were actually confronted by the

participants. Through my discourse analysis of the USCIS' *Guide for New Immigrants* I was able to develop an idea of the messages that are communicated to new immigrants about life in the United States. I identified eleven discourses that created an image of America, an American citizen, and an immigrant. These discourses, however, were those dispersed by the Department of Homeland Security, not necessarily those experienced by immigrants. I did not necessarily have an expectation regarding how many of those discourses located during the analysis would be present in my participant's stories, however I assumed there would be some connections. After analyzing my narrative unstructured interviews, I did indeed find that there was some overlap between the data collected using each of the methods.

One example of this overlap can be found in the "employment discourse" in which I explained that the guide creates an image of employment simply as a way to make money and receive benefits. In an interview with one of my participants, we were discussing her work in India and her work in the United States. While talking about India, she explained how much she loved her job there and how it was very rewarding for her. When we then began talking about her work in America, however, she spoke about how it was just simply a paycheck and that her passion was for her hobbies. Her work in these two countries was in the same field but her outlook on work changed after spending time in the United States.

Another discourse regarding what it means to be American is the "finance discourse," in which the importance of having money for a house, car, and education are communicated. Money was a common topic within most of my interviews. Several of my participants got credit cards so they could be able to buy a car or a house. In addition, the

cost of an education was spoken about often, either in reference to receiving financial assistance for school or needing to borrow money for tuition. Money was often equated with level of comfort and as more money was earned, life in the United States became more comfortable.

My discourse analysis also addressed three discourses created to develop an image of an immigrant. After speaking with these six women, I found some inaccuracies within these discourses. For example, the “support discourse” communicates that immigrants have family and friends to help them when they arrive in the U.S. While some of my participants did have family in the United States, this did not necessarily mean that they could rely on those family members for support. The second discourse, the “familiarity discourse,” asserts that immigrants are unfamiliar with the United States and have a lot to learn to feel at home. While there is no doubt that there is a period of adjustment and learning for new immigrants, in the case of these women, they were knowledgeable about the United States. For instance, they all spoke English while living in India and most of them had done research regarding the area to which they were moving. In addition, although television is not necessarily a completely accurate picture of life in the United States, it does provide some exposure to elements of American life. The final discourse regarding the image of an immigrant revolves around money and financial need – immigrants don’t have much money and therefore need financial assistance. Although it is true that most of my participants did not come to the United States with a lot of money, the majority of them already had jobs or university acceptances secured.

## **Final Remarks**

Throughout this research project, I have met some amazing women and learned so much not just about Indian women but also about American women, because these women are both. To simply label them as Indian women, immigrants, or American women, however, is not enough. They are each unique and wonderful women with beautiful and interesting experiences and stories. To minimize those experiences or to shuffle them in with other women's experiences in order to dole out singular advice or prescribe one universal policy would do a harsh disservice. It is important to remember that even the words "immigrant" or "woman" or "man" are just words that mask individuality in an attempt to universalize and control. The beauty comes when you look beyond the labels and connect with the individual.

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## Appendix A

### Unstructured Interview Guide

#### Lead off questions:

Tell me about your immigration experience.

Tell me about your experiences upon arriving in the United States.

Tell me about how your life in the U.S. was different than your life in India.

Tell me about how you view your role as a woman in India? In the United States? As an Indian woman in the United States?

#### Probing:

Why/how did you make the decision to come to the U.S.?

- work
- family
- school
- children
- why Memphis

What was the immigration process like?

- time frame
- application process
- waiting period

What were you most surprised by after arriving in the U.S.?

- people
- communication
- pace

How is your life in the U.S. different than your time in India?

- responsibilities
- family dynamic
- religion
- entertainment

What were the first things you did after arriving in the U.S.?

- meet people
- find job

What were your experiences with Americans like?

- communication
- reactions
- respect

## **Appendix B**

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study about immigration from India to the United States because of your relocation to the United States from India. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 6 or 8 people to do so.

#### **WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?**

The person in charge of this study is Suzanne Schmidle of University of Memphis Department of Political Science. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Nicole Detraz. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

By doing this study, we hope to better understand the experiences of women who have immigrated to the United States from India.

#### **ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You could be excluded from this research if you did not live in India for at least 25 years. It is also important that you speak English fluently and can communicate your thoughts and feelings well.

#### **WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

The research procedures will be conducted at a location convenient to you and the interviewer. Each interview will take about 1 – 2 hours. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2 – 3 hours over the next 2 months.

#### **WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?**

As a participant in this study, you will participate in one interview lasting approximately 1 – 2 hours each. During these interviews, you will be asked questions regarding your life in India, the process of immigration to the United States, and your experiences since arriving in the United States.

#### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?**

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

#### **WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study.

**DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

**IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?**

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

**WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?**

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

**WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?**

We will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. All interview recordings and transcriptions will be kept in a secure location and any identifying information will be removed.

We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Also, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Memphis.

**CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?**

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of scientific reasons.

**WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Suzanne Schmidle at 901-262-2455 or scschmdl@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-3074. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

**WHAT HAPPENS TO MY PRIVACY IF I AM INTERVIEWED?**

All identifying information will be kept separate from your interview recordings and transcriptions. Pseudonyms will be used in all written documents and to label all materials.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date